RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

## GCSE

## ICT A

## Examiners' Reports

## June 2011

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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## Chief Examiner's Report

The Full Course (Specification 1994) is comprised of four units: 2357, 2358, 2359 and 2360. The Short Course (1094) consists of Units 2357 and 2358.

Units 2358 and 2360 are internally assessed coursework. Units 2357 and 2359 are externally assessed written papers.

Centres are reminded that this is a legacy specification and the final opportunity for assessment and aggregation is January 2012. No assessment or aggregation will be available after the January 2012 examination series.

## 2357/01 Paper 1 (Foundation)

## General Comments

The paper achieved the intended differentiation and was well weighted providing a good mixture of accessible and challenging questions which lead to a good distribution of marks.

There did not seem to be any time problems for any candidates.

## Comments on Individual Questions

1 Candidates did well on this question and most gained half marks or more.
2 Candidates answered this question well.
3 Candidates did well on this question.
4 (a) This question was answered well with most candidates scoring at least two marks.
(b) Candidates had good ideas for improving the document and many candidates scored high marks on this question.
(c) Candidates needed to state common tool names to score the marks. No marks could be awarded for a repeat of copy and paste which was given in the question.

5 Candidates answered this question well.
6 (a) Most candidates answered this question well showing a good understanding of the structure of database tables. Common incorrect answers were 7 (the number of columns) and 120 (the number of items of data).
(b) (i) This question was not well answered. Candidates needed to explain how to sort the table using the stated fields.
(ii) Many candidates gave correct answers but just as many gave incorrect answers.
(c) Candidates found it difficult to present the answer in a suitable form. The most common mistake was to leave out either the descriptive field (height etc.) or the equals sign. Further, "weight" $=<70 \mathrm{~kg}$ was a common error.
(d) Many candidates achieved at least one mark for identifying the key field. A significant few managed to get the other mark, usually for unique or its equivalents.
(e) (i) Many candidates wrote that verification means that data has to be correct - not that data has to be entered correctly. Those candidates who produced the best answers wrote in terms of the "entered data matching the original data".
(ii) The common answer along the lines of "checking that data is correct" gained no credit.

Candidates needed to give a suitable method of verification.
(iii) This question was not well answered. Responses along the lines of "reasonable" gave some candidates the mark, but there were not many other correct alternatives given.
(iv) Not many candidates scored both marks by naming and then describing a check. However, many scored one mark.

7 (a) This question was not well answered. While dot matrix printers are not common in homes today, they are still used in many work places and candidates should be aware of their uses and the reasons why they are still used.
(b) Many candidates scored just one mark, often for "cheaper to buy". A common error was to respond with "print in colour" which was given in the question.
(c) Many candidates gained the mark, often for "fast printing" or "high quality".

8 Candidates found it difficult to score all the marks. Most achieved three for the spreadsheet, graph and either legend or title, or put in order. Many candidates interpreted the question as being about the presentation of the slides, and wrote at length about software such as PowerPoint, whereas the question was about the "preparation of the data".

9 This question was mainly well answered with most candidates achieving at least two of the marks, usually for writing answers related to "safer" and "not being realistic". However, one word answers were not given credit.

## 2357/02 Paper 1 (Higher)

## General Comments

The question paper performed as expected with good discrimination across the ability range. The majority candidates could access all the questions and there were fewer candidates leaving questions blank. Candidates had sufficient time to answer the questions.

## Comments on Individual Questions

1 (a) This question was not well answered. Many candidates attempted to set up complex queries when all that was required was to explain how to sort the table using the stated fields.
(b) Some very good, complete answers were seen from candidates. Others found it difficult to present their answer in a suitable form. The most common mistake was to leave out either the descriptive field (height etc.) or the equals sign. Further, "weight"=<70kg was a common error.
(c) This question was quite well answered by the majority of candidates who could identify the correct field and give a good reason. Some candidates chose the wrong field and thus failed to score both marks.
(d) (i) Many candidates stated that verification means that data has to be correct not that data has to be entered correctly. A significant number of candidates are still confusing verification with validation.
(ii) This question was answered quite well with most candidates choosing a suitable method of verification.
(iii) This question was answered quite well.
(iv) Many candidates managed to explain a suitable validation even though they were unable to properly name it. Centres should ensure that candidates can name and describe checks that are suitable for the data being entered.

2 (a) This question was not well answered. While dot matrix printers are not common in homes today, they are still used in many work places and candidates should be aware of these uses and the reasons why they are still used.
(b) This question was correctly answered by most candidates, although some stated "for colour printing" which is given in the question.
(c) Most common answers were for faster printing or for higher quality printing.

3 Many candidates found it difficult to score more than half of the available marks. Most candidates scored three for spreadsheet, graph and either legend or title, or put in order. Many candidates interpreted the question as being about the presentation of the slides for an audience, and wrote at length about software such as PowerPoint, whereas the question was about the "preparation of the data".

4 This question was well answered by the majority of candidates, although some repetition of the disadvantages was common.

5 This question was well answered by most candidates.
6 Most candidates concentrated their answers on the generic advantages of the use of email neglecting the use of fax in their answers. Candidates who referred to both the use of email and of fax scored the higher marks.

7 This question was well answered by most candidates although quite a few candidates failed to score many marks because they focussed on the employer and not the employee.

8 The question was marked as a Level of Response question. Most candidates failed to distinguish between generic advantages/disadvantages of networking and those associated with the use of networking in homes. Those candidates that did make this distinction and discussed the use of networks in homes scored the higher marks.

9 This question was not well answered by most candidates as most failed to address the use of the spreadsheet for data modelling but rather described how the data could be displayed.

## 2358 Coursework Projects 1a/1b

## Project 1a

Candidates are required to meet all the criteria in a given mark range.
For marks above 10 candidates must produce a significant piece of work. This means that a booklet or website of 8 pages, or a presentation of 8 slides is required as a minimum.

It is important for centres to realise the importance of the use of non-IT sources. Candidates failed to get the lowest ranges of marks by not including information from non-IT sources and at least one IT source in their final document. Collecting leaflets, booklets or magazines is insufficient; information from them, whether it be text, images or numbers, must be incorporated into their final product. All non-IT sources must be hard copy. The use of the candidates' own knowledge, memory or 'my teacher' is not considered to be using non-IT sources.

It is not acceptable to show an image or some text and then give the name of the book or magazine it came from. The evidence should be in the form of the original but where this is not possible, such as using books, candidates must include photocopies. A number of candidates showed images in their write up claiming them as being from a non-IT source instead of showing the original or photocopy. This should also have been clearly indicative of its origin. Two pages from the same magazine, for example, only counts as one source, not two.

The requirement for the inclusion of numbers is also mandatory at low mark levels. Candidates could not base their use of number on graphs if they did not show the table of numbers which their graph was based on. Some Centres had candidates who copied and pasted graphs which were really images from their sources. Any confusion would easily have been removed if the original numbers had been included and the method of graph production demonstrated.

The easiest approach would have been to use a table of numbers (as requested in the Teacher's Guide at 8-10 mark level) in the final document and also showing in their write up where these numbers came from.

## Examples of misconceptions:

For any marks at all to be awarded, candidates should have provided evidence that they had collected, and then incorporated into their final products, information from non-IT sources. It was not sufficient to just collect information from non-IT sources. Candidates should have taken this information and incorporated it into their work, i.e. the final product. This was equally valid for IT sources.

It is not sufficient for candidates to have looked at the Internet or CD ROMs, or in magazines, books and newspapers for 'research' purposes. Many candidates thought that the point of collecting non-IT sources was to provide ideas for layout and presentation; however it is not, it is so the information collected can be used.

For marks above 2 to be awarded there must be evidence of numbers (plural) in the candidate's work. This was a major failing amongst many candidates. As has been stated in many previous reports, the rationale behind the use of text, images and number is that in any given document the formatting of each of these is done differently. There is a requirement that candidates are aware that numbers are formatted differently to the other two forms of information. One example is the use of currency, where each one would have a currency symbol in front of it and each number would have the decimal point in line with its predecessor etc. An awareness by the
candidates of the need for the different formatting requirements of numbers was all that was required. Numbers are those which can, or have been, mathematically manipulated. Where data such as dates, times or prices are used they cannot have dashes, slashes or the word to (as in opening times) as this makes them text as does the use of numbers in sentences. Graphs can be construed as images unless the manner in which they were produced was documented fully. The source of the numbers must be documented. They cannot just be invented by the candidate.

For marks above 4 to be awarded, candidates should have made a statement about the purpose of the work. Centres seemed to struggle with the concept of purpose. As it mentions in the Teacher's Guide, the purpose must include identification of an audience and a description of the information to be communicated as well as the reason for undertaking the work. The reasons were often omitted by candidates. Some Centres still seemed to think that it was acceptable to get the candidates to produce a booklet on their favourite football team, music artists or other pastime without giving thought as to why this might be needed.

For marks of 7 or higher, candidates must relate the development of the work to this audience. As it says in the Teacher's Guide, development must be evidenced by at least printouts of three different stages of the development. Where candidates were producing a significant piece of work there obviously needed to be more stages of development. The audience should have been referred to at each stage of development. The purpose of the work is the reason for producing the documents and should not be construed as the task itself. The statements regarding developments cannot be replaced by an evaluation of the final product.
The inclusion of a purpose is a requirement of even the lower mark ranges and failure to provide a reasonable purpose could have led to a large reduction in marks. Most candidates who were successful concentrated on identifying an audience, usually a specific age group; the purpose of the work being to attract that type of audience. A number of candidates specified an audience which was far too wide ranging to be categorised when describing the development. Phrases such as 'the picture/work was eye-catching or professional looking' would really apply to the vast majority of publications and so cannot count in this context. In addition, just writing that they have made changes as they felt it would suit their audience was not enough. Candidates needed to say why they feel it would suit their audience.

Some Centres mistakenly think that the reference in the specification and in the Teacher's Guide to a 'piece of work' includes their documentation. This is not so; checking the work and showing consistency apply to the product, not to the candidate's write up.

For marks above 10, candidates should have produced a significant piece of work. A significant piece of work is deemed to be one of at least 8 sides of A4 or even A5. The 8 sides is the actual product and this does not include accompanying documentation. A number of Centres ignored this.

For marks above 13, information from a minimum of 2 different IT sources should have been included in the booklet or presentation. The internet is considered to be only one IT source. Candidates should have incorporated a minimum of the four pieces of information (one from each source) into their final booklet/presentation and at least one piece should have been numeric, at least one should have been text and at least one should have been an image. In addition searching using multiple criteria requires the use of Boolean operands or the use of Advanced Search features. The resulting information found should have been included in their final product. If the second source was clipart, the source should have been clearly shown. Many candidates just showed images and claimed they came from clipart. To avoid any confusion, candidates should have provided evidence that the work did not come from the internet. When using software packages that have clipart built in, it is important to show that the clipart did not come from the internet by making sure, for example, when using Microsoft Word, for example, the source 'All collections' was not selected as by default this option searches the internet.

Again, the single biggest shortcoming in the work seen was the inability of candidates to meet the hyperlinks/refined search criterion, required for marks above 16. It cannot be achieved by candidates simply following a number of hyperlinks. Candidates should have related their choice of which hyperlinks to follow to their purpose and audience. Many candidates did not refer to their audience when considering which hyperlinks to follow or indeed which information to use as a result of following the hyperlinks. This led to a reduction in marks. A number of hyperlinks should have been followed and the resulting information should have been used in their final product.

For marks in the top mark range, candidates should have provided evidence of having used a proof reader as well as a spell checker. A proof reader must be a suitable adult who must be identified. They should then have annotated a version of the booklet or presentation indicating errors in spelling, grammar and factual information and signed that they had done so. It was not sufficient for the proof reader to just sign the work and say they found no errors. The candidate should then have produced a final version of the booklet or presentation with these errors removed.

## Additional skills:

The notes for guidance in the specification clearly indicate that these must be achieved by the candidate by referring to their own work and not by quoting unrelated examples.
Health and safety, for example, must be referred to by the candidate with reference to their own work rather than just commenting on perceived good practice. Candidates confused errors with problems. An error is accompanied by error messages and these should have been evidenced.

## Project 1b

It is a requirement of the specification that in order for a candidate to be awarded a mark within a given mark range they should have matched all the criteria within that mark range.

## Comments on Individual Strands

## Data Handling

For marks of 8 and above, candidates should have produced a manually completed data capture form. This was confused by some Centres as being equivalent to the data entry form as used in packages like Microsoft Access, for example. This is not the case. A data capture form is a grid like table with field names as headings and data copied manually from the collected sources for 14 to 16 upwards or just completed with known data for 8-13 marks. Candidates who showed screen dumps of data being entered into data entry forms on the computer did not fulfil this requirement.

For 14 to 16 marks, to be awarded candidates should have provided evidence of using a range of sources. This should have included evidence of the actual magazines or web sites. Printouts should have shown the data that had been transferred to the data capture form. They should have also give reasons for selecting the data for inclusion in the database. The Teacher's Guide for the specification explains in detail what is required. Reasons for choosing fields cannot be based on the proposition that these were what were required by a 'user'. It can be a list of possible questions (queries) which the database is required to answer which the candidate uses to deduce the fields required to answer such questions. It could be a survey of a number of possible users as to what fields would be needed and then deducing from the response what fields are required.

For marks above 16, candidates should have used Boolean operands in their searches. The criterion refers to complex searches (plural) and so requires an absolute minimum of two complex searches. A minimum of two different Boolean operands should have been used. Some Centres were still confused over the requirements for validation. Proof that validation had worked was required. This is done by producing screen dumps showing error messages being produced as a result of the candidates setting up their own routines (plural - one is insufficient). The requirement is for candidates to use routines. Just ticking a compulsory field option or 'must be answered' option is not writing a routine. Defining range checks, however, is equivalent to writing a routine. The entry of text into a numeric field does not count; neither does designing field types which limit data entry such as drop down lists. The criterion requires the candidates to have written their own validation routines.

Many candidates often failed to include a description of the task they were undertaking. For marks above 19, candidates should have described their choice of software in terms of the features required to solve the problem and compared it with an alternative piece of software. Many candidates lost marks because they gave a list of features which were not required by the solution or failed to give a list of features required by the solution or, indeed, gave a list of features required by the solution but were equally available in the package they are rejecting. If candidates had not specified a task, they were unable to relate their choice to the task. It is apparent that many candidates had little experience of using alternative data handling packages to the one they used to create their database.

For marks in the highest ranges, candidates were expected to give reasons why they had chosen the fields included in their database but left out others. Some of the reasons given were rather trivial, often stating what information the field contained rather than the reason why it was needed. They also needed to give reasons for their choice of field types and explain their choice of field lengths. A number of Centres thought that it was sufficient for candidates to list these rather than give reasons for their choice. This is not acceptable.

For the highest mark range of all, the required output should have been stated. This should have been in terms of the format of the output as well. As one of the criteria is to comment on how easy it was to produce tables and graphs candidates should have obviously stipulated these as being part of the required output and then produced this output. This should have been done at the outset not as an afterthought somewhere towards the end of the work. This should usually have been the output from a list of queries which the candidate surmised they would have used to test their database. Candidates should have related all the reasons for the choice of all the various features listed in the 26 to 28 mark range to this required output.

It is to be remembered by Centres that only the most gifted of students should have been awarded marks in this range as it is intended to be a true discriminator for grade $A / A^{*}$ candidates.

## Modelling

Predictions are required at every mark range above 7. Some Centres take the meaning of simple to be just indicating a general increase or decrease in variables. Even at low levels candidates should have quantified these changes to a degree. For marks above 19, candidates should have made more complex predictions (the word simple is not used in the teachers' guide at these mark ranges). The requirement for 'Use the software to provide the answers required to solve the problem' is that predictions are made.

Centres were still using writing frames as prompt sheets for candidates and worksheets with very prescriptive instructions. As it said earlier in this report, GCSE candidates must work independently, a structure which involves worksheets which clearly define each step in the process and dictate to the candidate what they should not have been used. Often this led to
candidates being unable to truly explore the model. Candidates were required to compare the model with a real life situation in order to secure credit for having met the validity criteria. Candidates who just wrote about what their model was made up of and wrote that they had met their original aim do not meet this requirement. Some candidates failed to design a complex model but were still awarded marks above 19. It was not sufficient to make a design and then go on to create a complex model; the original design should have been complex. A number of Centres failed to understand the requirement for justifying the choice of software. Candidates should have defined their problem, then produced a list of software features required to solve the problem, followed by a description of their choice of software and how well it met the required features. The description of how they created their spreadsheet should have contained a number of screenshots illustrating how these features were used and must also shown a number of steps in its creation not just wrote about the finished model.

## Measuring

Few centres submitted work for this strand. They should remember that this strand required the same level of detail in the documentation as any other strand. The candidates' reports should still have matched the specification criteria in order to obtain marks. Centres are reminded that 18 hours should have been spent on the teaching of and production of project 1 b .

## Control

This strand still caused some centres some problems. The advice in the teacher's guide clearly identifies the need for equipment to be set up by an individual, not a team, including the setting up of two different types of sensor - not contact switches. These should all have been connected by the candidate to a computer through some form of interface. The system created had to be physical. Simulations or mimics are not acceptable for marks above 19. The device created had to be of their own design not one that has come in kit form which tells the candidate what to do. The creation of this system had to be evidenced and photographs of the stages of creation were the best way of doing this. Candidates must realise that they had to annotate their programs showing how they had used precision and what would have happened if they had not. Evaluations which referred to their use of precision are not the same thing. Finally, feedback is defined as the output of system affecting the input of a system. It is not considered to be the reaction to inputs.

## 2359/01 Paper 3 (Foundation)

## General Comments

The majority of candidates attempted all of the questions on the paper.

## Comments on Individual Questions

1 This question was generally well done though some selected either Fixed hard disc or MICR. Very few selected Graph plotter or Microphone.

2 This was well answered by most candidates. The statement about the microwave oven was the one most common error.

3 There were many fully correct answers. There was sometimes confusion between the use of bar code readers and graphics tablets.

4 Few candidates gained all three marks, but most gained at least one mark (usually for "paying a bill using home banking")

5 This was usually answered well though Option 3 was sometimes incorrect.
6 Most candidates picked up some marks on this question. The most common errors were that a LAN needs a satellite link and that a WAN covers a small area.

7 Most candidates correctly identified that Double Entry was Verification but other parts were not answered so well.

8 The most common features given were Animation, Video and Music. There were many responses that gave things like text colour or boldness which did not gain any marks.

9 Few candidates gained all four marks, many believing that encryption stops viruses and hacking.

10 Icons and Windows were the most frequent correct responses but a lot of candidates thought that a GUI was something to do with 3-D drawing.

11 Most marks were gained for re-training and more opportunities in IT. A large number of candidates referred to unemployment which was already given in the question.

12 While some candidates knew some of the principles of the Data Protection Act many gave passwords and using firewalls as their answers.

13 Some candidates could describe parallel and direct changeover but did not know the correct terms to use.

14 The majority of candidates were unable to identify stages in the development of an expert system. It was often confused with system development.

15 (a) Most candidates were able to gain some marks usually related to the saving in travelling costs or the convenience of the delivery service.

15 (b) Some candidates continued describing advantages relevant to part (a) and not relating to advantages for the supermarket. Most marks were gained for reduced labour costs.

## 2359/02 Paper 3 (Higher)

## General Comments

The majority of candidates attempted all of the questions.

## Comments on Individual Questions

1 Most candidates answered this question well.
2 Many candidates responded with references to graphics and aspects such as colour and layout.

3 This was generally well answered with most candidates gaining the 2 marks available.
4 This was generally poorly answered. Candidates who did gain marks usually did so for stating that data should be kept up to date and accurate. Many answers referred to how data should be kept secure and gave descriptions thereof.

5 This question required knowledge of implementation strategies and was not well answered. A number of candidates either knew the names of the various methods of implementation but were unable to describe them or knew the details of the various methods but not their names. Many candidates incorrectly gave answers such as analysis, design, testing and evaluation.
$6 \quad$ This question was not well answered. Many candidates answered the question as if it was about how to use an expert system rather than how to design/create one. The majority of candidates tended to gain only 1 mark for testing. Many responses followed the systems analysis route of analysis, design, testing and implementation.

7 (a) Candidates answered this question quite well.
(b) Candidates did not answer this question very well. Candidates often made points which related to Q.7a. Quite a number of candidates wrote about fewer queues in shops and the shops being less crowded.

8 Candidates needed to describe both batch and online processing, giving examples where each would be used in banking.

Some marks were picked up with basic references to cheques being processed at the end of the day and online banking.

9 Candidates needed to compare the effectiveness of different validation checks to gain marks in this question.

Many candidates had problems describing validation checks and tended to give examples of validation rules for all three fields. Quite a number of candidates referred to "proof reading" and "Double Entry". In general, a number of candidates achieved some marks, although very few achieved good marks. Some students discussed creating fields with field types/lengths rather than validation.

10 (a) Many candidates gained some marks on this question. To gain the higher marks a detailed description of the disadvantages of the various methods was required.
(b) To gain full marks candidates needed to expand from naming various input devices to providing a description on the advantages and disadvantages of each.

11 To get marks in this question, candidates needed to look at the advantages and disadvantages from the viewpoint of the company. Answers from the viewpoint of the worker could not be given credit.

## 2360 Coursework Project 2

## Specific Assessment Objective Comments:

i) A1 - Define a problem; for the top marks to be awarded here, candidates need to identify a complex problem and describe the nature of the problem and the user requirements.
ii) A2 - Collect Information; where the candidate has to demonstrate they understand the whole process involved. This not only includes the choice and use of the most suitable method, but evidence that they understand this method would need to be set up.
iii) A3 - Inputs, Processing \& Outputs; comments based on a series of tasks that the present system provides the user with answers to.
iv) Design - ALL designs are required to be appropriate to the system to be developed, based on the comments made in the Analysis section.
v) D1 - Data structure; the designs must allow the system to do, at least, all that the candidate has described in A3.
vi) D2 - User interfaces; all designs must match the chosen data structure and not in some cases be based on data structure designs that have already been rejected.
vii) D3 - Output formats; again, all designs must be based on the requirements commented on in the Analysis section.
viii) D4 - Hardware \& Software requirements; the comments here must be made at application package level and not based on suites of programs, whilst justification of choice requires the comparison of features offered rather than prior knowledge, availability or cost.
ix) I1 - Implement the data structure; for more than 2 marks to be awarded here the changes made had to be "in light of unforeseen circumstances" (Specification - page 80). This did not include changes that had to be made as a result of poor design work.
x) 14 - Transfer data; for 2 marks to be awarded here a second and different transfer of data for further processing had to be shown; many assessors awarded the 2nd mark for producing multiple copies of the first transfer.
xi) T1 - Thorough testing (more than 2 marks); we continued to see marks awarded here for work that simply showed a large number of tests, but at no point were related to the tasks originally commented on in the Analysis section.
xii) Evaluation; it had been stated categorically on a number of occasions that if a candidate had failed to thoroughly test their system, it was considered impossible for them to do any more than state what their system could do, which only met the criterion for awarding 1 mark.

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