0417 IGCSE Information and Communication Technology Frequently Asked Questions

General

What format is used for assessment?

At the end of the course students sit three examinations. Paper 1 is a theory paper which is 2 hours long. Papers 2 and 3 are both practical tests (taken on the computer) and are each 2 hours and 30 minutes.

When can my students take the exam?

Students can sit the examinations in May/June or in October/November each year.

What are the examination dates for IGCSE ICT practical tests?

The examination dates are 1st April - 30th April for the June session and 1st October - 31st October for the November session. The deadlines for receipt of materials in Cambridge are 15th May for June session and 15th November for November session.

Why should I introduce this syllabus, rather than IGCSE Computer Studies?

It was developed to offer more choice. Some Centres prefer not to do coursework and have more examinations. Also, the practical test papers are set in a workplace context, making this highly relevant to the skills students will need in employment. Both syllabuses will continue to exist side-by-side, allowing you the option.

What are hardware requirements?

Candidates should be provided with a hardware setup that will enable them to use efficiently the chosen software packages and to enable them to meet all performance criteria of 0417/02 and 0417/03. Each candidate will need exclusive access to a personal computer for the duration of the examination. Internet access is required and should be enabled for candidates. They will need access to a printer. Printers can be shared e.g. over a network and need not be exclusively for the use of the candidate. Care must be taken to ensure the security of network access so that candidates may not have access to the files of other candidates or their own practice files. Candidates must have their own, secure work area to save files and this may be within a network, or on an individual PC, either hard disk or removable storage. This work area must not be shared with any other candidate. Care and supervision must also be exercised to ensure that candidates only have access to their own materials from the printer.

What software do I need?

There is no prescribed platform or software for this course. Students will need access to word processing software, a database package (which allows record structures to be defined – Microsoft Excel, for example, will not do this), charting facilities (which allow students to produce bar charts, line graphs and pie charts), a spreadsheet, web editing facilities (this could be a simple text editor or a WYSIWYG editor), a graphics package (suitable for editing image type and colour depth, etc), a web browser, a presentation graphics package as well as internet and e-mail access.

Where can I get past papers and support materials from?

Past papers and mark schemes are available on the Teacher Support website and on CD-ROM from CIE publications department. The publications list and order form are available on the CIE website www.cie.org.uk in the section Order Publications.

Are there specimen papers available for all components?

Yes, these are available to order from Publications or on our website.

Theory Paper 0417/01

Are students allowed to use brand names in answers to certain questions?

No. For example, where a question requires a type of software to be named they must use the generic term such as word-processing software, desk top publishing software, database software etc. They must not use terms such as Microsoft Word, Publisher, Works etc.

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In questions where students are asked to circle two or three answers will they be penalised for circling more than the number asked for?

Yes, for every 'extra' answer the student provides they will lose a mark but they will never be awarded a negative mark for a question.

Does this apply to questions where students have to tick a number of boxes?

Yes.

After an exam sometimes some of my students say they had not got enough space to write their answers. Will they be penalised for writing the 'finish' to an answer on a blank page?

At the moment, students are not penalised. However, the number of lines provided for the answer is sufficient for a good answer. Students should learn to plan their answers so that they do not write more than is required.

My students sometimes get confused with the way questions are phrased. What are the differences between name, give, describe, reasons, discuss etc? What do they mean?

Give and name generally mean to use a phrase or sometimes even a single word, though students are advised to use a phrase wherever possible.

Describe generally requires sentences to be used and in addition to naming the answer students should go on to write a sentence or two to show their understanding of the answer.

Give reasons, in general, means to compare with alternatives.

Discuss requires students to give both sides of an argument and then to provide their conclusion.

Practical Tests 0417/02 and 0417/03

Can my students use notes to help them in the practical exams?

For the 2007 examinations (onwards) students are NOT permitted access to their own electronic files, personal notes, textbooks, centre prepared materials or past papers. They may use dictionaries, spell-checkers, and the software's online Help facility.

I don't have a font called serif on my machine.

It is unlikely that you will have a font called serif in your font list. A serif is the short mark at the ends of a letter in fonts like "Times New Roman" or "Courier", where as sans-serif fonts are those without the serifs like "Arial". Students must learn to apply those fonts containing serifs or without (sans) serifs from the font lists on their machines.

In presentation authoring what is the difference between transitions and animations?

Transitions are the effects used between slides, animations are the effects within a slide (these are called builds in some software).

When we import a CSV file in MS-Access, in the import wizard; there are two possible options: to add a primary key using Access and to choose no primary key.

Candidates may or may not apply an ID field when importing the CSV file and will not be penalised when the printing specification is for all fields, but the ID field should not appear in selections where only specified fields are requested.

When creating a new table from an existing file, two of the options given in Access are "import" the file or "link" the file. Is there a reason to choose one of these options over the other?

The papers specify import the file, and this indicates the option to take. When working on a single machine, the effects of linking versus importing may not be obvious, but when files are uploaded electronically a linked file will not be uploaded within the database and, hence, reports will not work as they cannot link to the source file data.

Should our candidates align header and footer elements roughly by eye, for example to centre text on a page that is in landscape?

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Candidates should be aware of the need to adjust tab stops in headers and footers when page orientation is altered, and will be expected to use tabs stops to align their text accurately. The use of tab stops will be apparent on electronically uploaded scripts, so will be used in awarding marks.

How do I create a link to a page opening in a new window?

This means set the target window to a new window name, for example if the question asks for a new window called "CIE", set target="_cie" in the source code.

Do my students need to know html?

Yes, a working knowledge of html is important. Students are able to use a WYSIWYG editor for much of the work, but they must be able to edit the html manually and have a limited understanding of the html.

What are widows and orphans in the document production section?

Widows and Orphans relate to how to split a paragraph between two pages when there is space for a paragraph to start near the bottom of one page but not enough space to fit the entire paragraph on that page. A widow is the name for a single line at the bottom of one page when the remainder of the paragraph is on the next page. If there is a single line (at the end of a paragraph on the next page that line is called an orphan.

How can I set a Boolean field type if I use Microsoft Access for the practical examinations?

The term Boolean type in the syllabus refers to a Boolean data type, which for the purposes of the exam could be any field containing 'bi-polar' states like True/False, 1/0, Yes/No, which are all stored in the same way within the underlying database. The question papers are not written around any vendor specific products, but we do appreciate that a large number of centres do use products from a single manufacturer. In Access there is no need to convert, a simple Yes/No field would be fine for these examinations.

Is it useful to study RGB colours for the website authoring?

RGB colour codes may appear in either of the practical papers, students need to have an understanding of common component colours and their hexadecimal format.

How precisely do candidates have to match a "bright" blue?

When describing colours for the presentation slides, all that is being looked for are colours that stand out against each other, especially if prints are given in grey shades, so words like dark blue, blue or bright blue, pale or light blue are used to indicate those contrasts, but do not require candidates to search colour palettes to look for colours to exactly match those descriptions.

How do we access the Practical Test for IGCSE ICT?

A letter will be sent to all Centres that have made entries for a particular session. This letter will give details of how to access the question papers via an auto-respond e-mail message or CIE Direct. Centres will be responsible for ensuring that the papers are received by an authorised member of staff only and then kept securely prior to the assessment taking place. Details on despatch dates of confidential letters are available from the Administrative Guide for Centres.

When are the practical papers released?

The practical papers for June will be made available to centres (not candidates) the last week in March for the June session and the last week of September for the November session. This is to allow for setting up the system, producing a supervisor worked copy and providing contingency planning (e.g. to reschedule examination times due to possible hardware failure) before the assessment session. Assessment is scheduled for 1 April – 30 April for the June session and 1 October -31 October for the November session.

The specimen practical test papers require the candidates to use specific files. How does this work?

When you access the relevant papers, you will also get a number of 'source data' files. These should be made available to candidates on your network or via individual PCs, in accordance with the instructions issued.

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Paper 2 requires candidates to use e-mail and the Internet. Is it possible to do this off-line?

Yes, although this paper does ask candidates to access a particular website and send an e-mail to a specific address, if you have concerns about your Internet connection speed, then it is acceptable to send e-mails internally and access the site off-line during the assessment. Candidates will then need to be made clearly aware of alternative arrangements for sending e-mail messages and searching for specified files required for the tasks before the start of the test.

Is it possible to make amendments to IGCSE papers, eg to specify local paper sizes or decimal separators?

It is not permitted to make any amendments to CIE examination papers. You may, however, make candidates aware of local arrangements for accessing files.

I work in a country where decimal point settings are commas and thousand separators are full stops. Can I amend the CSV source files to give semi colon separators?

Yes, it would be permissible to convert the csv file to your regional settings environment and the make the file available locally via your network system as indicated above.

When I open the csv file in Excel, all the data appears to be in one column

This is to do with regional settings as commented above. If all data opens in column A, highlight the column and on the Tools menu, select convert text to columns and when this is done, save the spreadsheet. It should now have replaced the separator commas with semicolons. It is quite permissible for you to do this before the examination and provide the file via your internal e-mail or intranet system, so that the candidates are not faced with the problem.

Why do I need to provide a worked copy of the examination paper?

We ask that the local facilities be checked to ensure that candidates will be able to meet all performance criteria of the paper using the available hardware and software setup. We ask that a tutor or supervisor carry out this task prior to the candidates sitting the examination and submit their supervisor worked copy together with the candidates' work. Time to provide a supervisor worked copy should be taken into account when arranging examination dates.

What options are available for disabled candidates?

Please refer to the 'Handbook for Centres' section 6. We will review all requests on a case by case basis.