

IGCSE ICT 4385, NOVEMBER 2005 CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

Paper 2H

General Comments

There was a very small entry for this session making the reporting of candidates' performance somewhat limited. Although some of the answers given by candidates showed good syllabus coverage, in general it was felt that the majority of candidates had been entered at the wrong level. A stronger grade profile would have been produced had all but two candidates been entered for the Foundation paper and not the Higher.

Question 1

The question was generally well answered. In part (a), most candidates scored over half marks. In part (b), the response was equally as good, showing a very good knowledge of web site activity.

Question 2

This question was again well answered with the majority of candidates' gaining good marks. In part (a), candidates lost marks by not stating a reason related to field length or type. Candidates were trying to give general answers and not relate them to the database structure. In part (b), candidates were able to describe the validation technique in question but could not always remember what it was called.

Question 3

Another example of a question well liked by candidates. In part (a), most candidates scored two marks. In part (b), most candidates were aware that transaction processing saved time. In part (c), few candidates could explain why coding was used for database fields. Part (d) was well answered by the majority of candidates.

Question 4

There was a mixed response to the different parts of this question. Nearly every candidate recognised some services provided in part (a), but were not always able to follow it through with a good enough reason to gain marks. Some candidates lost sight of the fact that it was a web site and suggested 'better delivery of services etc'. Most candidates knew about web rings and were able to answer part (b).

Question 5

There was a mixed response to the different sections of this question. In part (a), most candidates gained at least half the marks on this question by showing a reasonable understanding of computer modelling. In part (b), most candidates lost marks by not taking their argument further forward e.g. one candidate stated 'less accidents'. This was not qualified enough for a mark. They should have gone on to explain how there would be fewer accidents. Most of the better candidates answered part (c) correctly, although few candidates gave the correct answer to part (d). They seemed unable to make the link between reporting financial information and the use of a spreadsheet. In part (e), candidates' responses were better and a range of good answers were provided.

Question 6

This question was well liked by candidates, most gaining half marks or more. The better candidates were able to describe e-mail problems and give an effective cure.

Question 7

This question was answered reasonably well by most candidates. In part (a), most candidates only gained two marks, failing to give a third item of hardware used with video conferencing. In part (b), good answers were given by the majority of candidates. The advantages of using e-mail were well covered. Part (c) was reasonably answered by all except the less able candidates.

Question 8

This question was badly answered throughout and many candidates were struggling with this section of the paper. Candidates in the main seemed unaware of the need for any form of signal conversion, storage on a computer and then the transfer of data to a suitable integrated software package to produce the results on a poster.

Question 9

All candidates found this a difficult question to answer. Candidates did not seem to be able to work effectively with units of data storage.

Question 10

The examiners were surprised to see how badly students coped with this question. In the past this form of file generation has been well responded to by students, even when not asked as a question!

Question 11

Answered poorly by all candidates. In part (a), the top candidates mostly gained half marks here. Candidates appeared to be well versed in conventional network systems but not wireless protocols. The same applied to part (b). In part (c), the majority of candidates gained some marks by stating conventional hardware for connecting to the Internet.

Question 12

Although this question was at the end of the paper, the majority of candidates gained good marks here. This shows that the topic of spreadsheets had been well covered. In part (a), most candidates gave SUM as a function in this cell. In part (b), most candidates gained some marks by attempting the SUM formula found in this cell. In part (c), most candidates gained marks by providing some or all of the formula needed here. In part (d), the majority of candidates struggled with the IF statement needed as an answer.

Paper 3

Projects

The November entry was relatively small compared to the May entry and it is not possible to draw any meaningful conclusions about changes in the work submitted in November compared to that submitted in May. The report on the May entry should therefore be taken as applying to the November entry as well.

The text of the May report is repeated below.

May 2005 Projects

The majority of the work was presented in a satisfactory manner, but the following guidelines may enable some centres to improve their candidates' marks.

- Projects should have cover sheets, clearly labelled with a minimum of the candidate's name, candidate's number and centre number.
- Projects should be bound. Spiral binding or secure stapling will usually suffice. Ring or lever arch binders should be avoided as they frequently break in transit.
- Each project should have a contents page and matching page numbering. The numbers could be written in by hand when the project is finished.
- Projects should be presented in a logical order, preferably Identity, Analyse, Design, Implement and Evaluate.
- Dumps of Access code should be strongly discouraged; they add nothing to a project except printing and postage costs.

It was obvious that a number of candidates had submitted O level style projects for the IGCSE. There is no restriction on the same project being used for O Level, but some candidates should be made aware that the marking criteria for the two specifications have some significant differences. A substantial rewrite would be needed to change from one to the other.

It was also obvious that a number of candidates had submitted adaptations of one of the Set Tasks as projects. This is not advised, as the Set Tasks consist of three or four separate pieces of work done on different pieces of software. No single task is likely to have sufficient background or complexity of content to enable it to be used as a project. Candidates who tried to use a Set Task tended to score low marks.

Identify

Most candidates were able to identify a suitable project, but it was clear in many cases that they had pre-decided the solution and had all too frequently made the application first. Candidates who reverse engineered their project in this way tended to do less well than they might have, due to them leaving out much of the analysis and design.

Analyse

This section tended to be too weak. Many candidates could show that they had a reasonable idea of what they were doing but were unable to explain clearly the processing or data flow.

Examples of raw detail were very rare. Data collection, manipulation and processing were often only dealt with in terms of data already in the computer.

Alternative outputs were frequently dealt with in terms of alternative software, something which should already have been discussed in Identify.

Design

The correct sequence here should be Initial Design, User Comments, Final Design. The majority of candidates only did a final design or no design at all. Designs should ideally be in the form of annotated sketches, not printouts from the finished application.

A test plan should also be designed in this section, with reasons for the tests, test data and expected results. Far too many candidates ignored testing at this stage and simply included some tests with their implementation.

Implement

The emphasis here should be on evidence. Extension marks are decided in Implement. If a candidate is unable to give clear evidence that they have done the extension work mentioned in their Analyse and Design, the project is graded as Standard. Evidence is also essential in the testing. It is not enough to produce a set of tests and then claim to have done them; evidence must be given, usually in the form of annotated printouts or screen shots. Finally, candidates must produce evidence that they followed their design and produced a solution to the original problem. Once again, annotated screen shots are almost essential.

Evaluate

Most candidates managed reasonably in this section, but as with Implement, evidence was usually missing, meaning that top marks were not being achieved.

Set Tasks

The following guidelines were in the May report and remain valid for future entries.

- The Set Tasks should not be bound together with the projects. They may be allocated to different markers and removing the Tasks could damage some of the candidates' work.
- Set Tasks do not need to be bound. Markers need to be able to compare sheets eg designs and finished work. This is more difficult if the sheets cannot be put next to each other. Loose sheets, correctly labelled, in a plastic pocket will usually be sufficient. Treasury tags could also be used. When centres do staple or bind the Tasks, care should be taken not to obscure or damage the candidates' work.
- All pieces of work should be clearly labelled with the candidate's name, candidate's number and Task identification. This last point is perhaps the most important as it can be difficult to work out which Task the candidate thinks they are doing, especially if they do not submit all of the Tasks and/or they submit the work out of Task order.
- No extra pieces of work should be submitted eg if a Task specifies one sheet for a design, submitting two sheets will lose the candidate 1 of the 4 marks available for presentation/relevance of submitted material.
- Printouts should be on single sheets of paper. If a candidate submits a report which requires two or three sheets, they are wasting ink, paper and postage and are usually demonstrating an inability to format their report as anything but default.
- Everything that the candidate thinks will gain them a mark should be annotated or explained. Markers do try and find all of the marking points, but some candidates often present their work in the most muddled and obscure way possible.
- The correct sequence should be to design it first, make it afterwards, not the other way round. Reverse engineering the Tasks usually results in lower marks.

Question 1 (a)

Design of the leaflet.

Most candidates scored well on this task. The main problem, and one that recurs throughout the tasks, appeared to be that some candidates had not read the case study or had simply ignored the information given. The Train Tours company was clearly involved with providing luxury travel packages related to steam trains. Far too many candidates went down the route of providing cheap travel with no mention of steam trains.

Other problems were that candidates did not provide sketches of the illustrations and did not ensure that the leaflet could be folded so that the title was on the front and the contact details were on the back.

Question 1 (b)

Making the leaflet.

Nearly all of the candidates were able to translate their designs into finished leaflets. The most common problem was that some candidates did not indicate why they had made changes from the design in 1(a).

Question 1 (c)

Designing the spreadsheet.

A number of the design elements, e.g. tour code, date, could be awarded marks either here or on the completed sheets in 1(d).

Most candidates scored well on the basic layout, the better candidates were also able to indicate appropriate functions and formulae. Relatively few showed that the places remaining should be reduced in line with the places sold.

Question 1 (d)

The completed sheets were generally a good match to the design although there was still a significant proportion of candidates who did not explain the changes. As in 1(a), some candidates lost marks by not using the information given in the case study. Having the wrong number of clients or activities were the most common errors.

Question 1 (e)

Designing the script or macro.

As expected, the weaker candidates often left this task out. The main problem was that candidates gave over-complicated designs, probably because they reverse engineered from a completed macro. Those who produced a simple design first tended to get good marks for a sequence of select, copy, move, paste, print.

Question 1 (f)

Those who attempted a design in 1(e) were usually able to score something here as well. Even an incomplete or non-working macro could be given marks for suitable annotations.

Questions 2 (a)

Designing the input screens.

Far too many candidates failed to include all the details given in the case study, thus losing some easy marks. Many of them also left all their field types and sizes as the Access default of text 50.

Validation checks and customisations for ease of use were often included but rarely explained.

Question 2 (b)

Building the database.

Producing a printout of the ACTIVITY and HOTEL tables was often done badly. Many candidates printed a series of screens, illustrating 10 hotels and 20 activities. This should not have been possible at this stage, since the database should not have been filled in until task 2(c). Those who did print the tables did not always ensure that their field types and sizes matched their designs from 2(a).

Question 2 (c)

Completing and using the database.

Those candidates who succeeded in making the database usually did well in this task. As with previous implementations of design, some candidates failed to indicate why changes had been made.

Setting up and using the search gave the most difficulty but some candidates were able to do it correctly and a substantial number of others were able to gain credit by successfully using an incorrect search.

Question 2 (d)

This was a relatively simple final task and even weak candidates were able to score well if they attempted it.

ICT 4385, NOVEMBER 2005 GRADE BOUNDARIES

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Foundation Tier				59	51	43	36	29
Higher Tier	78	68	58	48	39	34		

Note: Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the question paper.
