Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

Applied GCE 6952

Unit 2 – The Digital Economy

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General Comments

Again this summer, there were a large number of entries moderated for this core unit and it was good to see that much of the assessment was to national standards. Eportfolios with marks across the whole range were moderated and it was pleasing to see a good number in the 40s and 50s. This report does tend to concentrate on the weaknesses observed and thereby provide help for future assessment.

It was concerning to note that some centres are still not taking notice of the clarification provided in the Revised Specification which was issued in May 2010. This is the version that should be followed when teaching and assessing this specification.

It was also disappointing to see some candidates in some centres following writing frames in order to produce their evidence. This was apparent in Strands a, c and e with a very structured approach to Strand d. This is not appropriate practice for this A level qualification and does not support the independent approach required for marks in the higher mark bands.

In addition centres are able to seek further guidance and clarification through the Ask the Expert service.

The Examiners' reports for all units can be accessed via the Applied GCE ICT section of Edexcel.com.

Comments on Strand (a)

Once again there was some excellent evidence provided for this Strand with a good number of candidates achieving well deserved marks in mark band 3.

Most candidates within a cohort selected different transactional websites to evaluate which helps support the criterion that the candidate has found a site themselves. A few candidates chose sites that did not enable them to address the Strand well. The site should have a virtual shopping basket enabling goods to be ordered from stock and delivered to a stated address. Auction sites such as ebay and Amazon nowadays, are not the best sites to choose. Play.com is also to be discouraged as it is one used in an exemplar on the Applied GCE ICT section of Edexcel.com. Ticketing sites and fast food delivery sites are also not good ones to choose.

Most candidates addressed aspects of 2.3 but some candidates neglected to evaluate the transactional aspects of the site, ie the virtual shopping basket, payment methods and the capture of customer data in these processes, which limits the evidence to some marks in mark band 1.

Most candidates illustrated their evidence with suitable screen shots and it was good to see more candidates evaluating the features and relating them to the design of the site which is what is required.

The less obvious features were well addressed by many candidates but there was evidence where all candidates in a cohort mentioned the same things rather than demonstrating the independent approach required for the higher marks and demonstrating they were evaluating the site chosen rather than making general comments on transactional sites.

There was evidence of some very structured work submitted by some centres with the entire cohort following the same headings and also evaluating more than one site which is not what is required. Candidates accessing the higher mark bands should demonstrate a more independent approach and consider 2.3 and 2.5 in the features described and evaluated. Very often high marks were awarded as a range of features had been covered but the detail and evaluative comments were limited which did not support the marks awarded. Detailed descriptions are required for mark band 2 and comprehensive descriptions of the main features of the site's designs for mark band 3. Some candidates had been awarded high marks although few less obvious features had been included in the evidence.

Some candidates are still concentrating on the products and content of the site rather than evaluating the effectiveness of the site's design. Many of the improvements suggested related to the products rather than improvements/enhancements of the design features of the site.

Covert and overt methods of capturing information were sometimes given as general notes rather than relating the information to the transactional website being evaluated.

Few Assessors mentioned Quality of Written Communication in the feedback on the esheets for this Strand.

Comments on Strand (b)

The majority of centres are assessing to national standards for this Strand and it was good to see a good number of candidates accessing mark band 3. However, there were some candidates who did not address many aspects of 2.4 and concentrated on the events leading up to the purchase of a product online rather than addressing the back office processes which is the main requirement of this Strand. Stock and payments are two essential aspects of a transactional website and some mention of these is expected if all the marks in mark band 1 are being awarded.

More candidates attempted to show payment systems relating to transactional websites which involve third parties but there are still many diagrams that just show manual payment methods using cheques sent to an Accounts Department within an organisation.

Some diagrams were totally linear and did not demonstrate the different routes that could be followed, eg what happens if an item is out of stock.

Candidates being awarded marks at the top of mark band 1 are required to produce at least 2 diagrams and a comprehensive set to access mark band

3.   There were instances when candidates were being awarded marks in mark band 2 but had only produced one diagram.

Not all candidates awarded marks in mark band 3 had clearly evidenced the flows in and out of an organisation.

Comments on Strand (c)

The comments used in last year's report apply to evidence seen this year: "The majority of centres are assessing this Strand correctly. Many candidates are still producing general notes for this Strand rather looking at the threats to the data held by an organisation and how the organisation could put in place preventative measures to protect the data collected from customers. There were also many instances of candidates looking at these issues from their own point of view and the threats to their own computers. Better candidates related their evidence to the transactional website examined in Strand a.

There is still a tendency for many candidates to reproduce the wording of the legislative acts rather than describing how they can be used to help prevent threats and evaluating their effectiveness.

There was evidence of cohorts producing very similar evidence supporting a very structured approach to the Strand. Candidates should look at 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 when addressing this Strand.

Some candidates did not address threats and concentrated solely on preventative measures. Many candidates did not consider how effective either legislation or protective measures might be; yet were awarded marks at the top of mark band 2 or above."

Having said this, it is good to note that some candidates had addressed this Strand well and there were a reasonable number of candidates who achieved full marks.

Comments on Strand (d)

This Strand is still being very generously assessed by a significant number of centres. Although many candidates are now addressing the Strand well, it was disappointing that guidance given in previous Principal Moderator reports for this Strand had not always been taken into account. It is also apparent that not all centres referred to the revised specification and clarification given in the assessment guidance when awarding the marks to the Strand. The main problem in this series again was the lack of evidence of how output was achieved. This has been highlighted in previous reports and it is disappointing that many centres are still awarding marks in the higher mark bands although the evidence is not there. Candidates need to clearly evidence the manipulation of the database created, ie have annotated screen shots showing the queries in design view plus the output from the queries. It is important that output is presented in a meaningful way if marks in mark band 2 and above are awarded. This means that the

output needs to be presented using database reports and/or appropriate charts and graphs.

It is even more disappointing to report that the same comments that were in last year's Principal's report apply this year.

"Most centres are using the Edexcel datasets provided on the ICT microsite but it was good to see other datasets being used.   Other datasets can be used provided they are given to the candidates as one csv file so that the candidates are able to create their own structure. The datasets should also be large enough to enable trends to be identified. Although datasets do not have to be 5,000+, as is the case with the Edexcel ones, it is unlikely that less than 100 records would enable trends to be identified. There were a few instances if candidates using a dataset of only 20 records which does not address this unit properly. Candidates should not be provided with 2 or 3 separate tables nor should they key in the data themselves.

Too often the evidence was similar across a cohort, with the same validation rules, same queries, same graphs etc being presented. Candidates accessing the higher mark bands must demonstrate an independent approach to their work.

There were a lot of candidates who had been awarded marks at the top of mark band 2, or in mark band 3, although there were no processes evidenced to support the output. The candidates are required to show the manipulation of the database created and this is stated clearly in the revised specification. Graphs and charts without the evidence of the queries used to produce them are not sufficient evidence.   Many candidates who did produce the queries in design view often used limited and repetitive manipulation techniques and had not addressed the requirements listed in the assessment guidance. There were also many candidates who did not demonstrate that the database created had at least 2 tables with an enforced one-to-many link. Such evidence is required in order to access all the marks in mark band 1.

Many screen shots were too small to read and blurred when the zoom feature was used. It is important that candidates ensure the evidence presented can be read easily.

The evidence presented should demonstrate that the candidate has:
- examined a dataset
- created a suitable structure for a relational database, with at least 2 tables with an enforced one-to-many link, to include appropriate:
   - field names
   - field types
   - field sizes
   - validation
- tested the structure prior to importation of the dataset
- tested the dataset has imported into the created structure correctly
- manipulated the database to extract meaningful data (included evidence of the processes undertaken, eg annotated queries in query design view)

- presented the data extracted in a meaningful way (too often only datasheet view was used; database reports contained inappropriate headings and repeating data; pie charts not used properly, poor labelling of charts)
- Identified at least 2 trends (mark band 2)
- Made recommendations based on trends identified (mark band 3).

Few candidates produced good evidence of the use of search criteria in the manipulation of the databases created. There was a reliance on group and count. To access the higher end of mark band 2, there should be clear evidence of search criteria used on more than one field in a table and across tables for mark band 3. It is expected that fields from at least 2 tables are included in the output presented and there were many instances when all the evidence presented was using one table only.

Candidates need to be able to demonstrate how a database can be used effectively. Many seem to be following structured tasks without understanding how the appropriate use of search criteria can extract meaningful data and trends to enable decisions to be made. Poor presentation of the output often rendered it useless. Candidates did not appear to understand the difference between the various charts and graphs used. There were many examples of a Pie Chart being used to supposedly depict a trend. Many candidates did not seem to understand how validation can ensure databases performed efficiently.

Some candidates produced design notes relating to the tables to be produced but then evidenced a different structure. Not all candidates clearly evidenced the structure of the tables produced, ie field names, field lengths, field types, validation rules used. There were many instances when a relational database had not been produced either due to the omission of enforcing referential integrity or by using the flat file to produce the output. To access all the marks in mark band 1, there needs to be explicit evidence of at least one one-to-many link. Sometimes there was a screen shot showing this but then only one-to-one links in query design view screens. Some of the screen shots did not seem to apply to the same database.

There was also evidence that some centres are using Excel to produce the trends. It is fine to use Excel to produce charts and graphs but the queries need to be produced in Access in order to address this Strand.

Candidates should not include the database in the eportfolio as this is not an accepted file format and serves no purpose. Relevant screen shots, with annotation and explanation, should be used as evidence. There is no need to show every step in how to import, produce a report etc. Many candidates produced forms and explained how to do this which is not relevant to this Strand.

Testing was not always well evidenced. Many candidates neglected to provide explicit evidence that the dataset had imported into the structure correctly. There should be some evidence of this to access all the marks in mark band 1.

Candidates awarded marks in mark band 3 usually provided some evidence of testing using validation checks but not always sufficient to justify moving into this mark band which requires extensive testing prior to the importation of the dataset. This involves testing the structure created.

Comments on Strand (e)

It was good to see more candidates are making evaluative comments on the performance of the database created and also their own performance across the whole unit. However, there were still a significant number of candidates who did not seem to appreciate what was required in order to access the marks in this Strand. Very often the evidence was a list of what had been done in order to create the database and the problems that had occurred when using Access.

Some candidates are not demonstrating an evaluation of the PERFORMANCE of the database they have created. Many said it performed well but didn't understand how limited most of the databases were and how this could be put to good effect in the evaluation. How a limited database of only 2 tables and no user interface could support a database that is easy to use is very questionable. The use of feedback was often poor and not always convincing and few candidates incorporated the feedback properly into the evaluation. All too often, the feedback was listed but not used but still marks were awarded in mark band 2. The feedback needs to relate to the performance of the database. There was evidence of others commenting on the candidate's eportfolio, which is not relevant.

To access all the marks in this Strand, candidates need to have recommended one realistic improvement to the database. Although not many candidates were awarded all 6 marks, some that were did not address this aspect properly.

There were still many examples of candidates evaluating their eportfolio, or sometimes their ebook! Candidates need to read the requirements of the evaluative Strand for each unit – they are not all the same.

Comments on Administrative Procedures

Overall, the following of administrative procedures has greatly improved. The majority of centres submitted the CDs on the due date. It was good to see most centres had included candidate authentication sheets either on the CD or in hard copy format and many also included the signed mark sheet which is printed off when marks are inputted on line. However, there were still a significant number who had neglected to include candidate authentication which meant that moderators had to chase this. Candidate authentication sheets are an essential to the moderation process and must be provided.

Correct naming conventions were normally used for the eportfolios but often not for the esheets. There were some disks with no label, which means they could easily be mislaid. Overall the feedback on the esheets was more

helpful and related to the marks awarded. However, there will still some esheets with no feedback and many centres are still using a cut and paste approach. This meant the feedback did not really explain the reasons why the marks were awarded and were the same for the whole cohort, although very different marks had been given.

Some esheets had not been totalled correctly and marks did not correspond with those on line. Moderation is against the marks that have been input online.

Some centres did not use the correct candidate numbers for all candidates, which made moderation very difficult.

Some centres did not send the correct sample and there were several cases where the highest scoring candidate was not included in the sample. Assessors should ensure they are familiar with the Guidance for Centres: Moderation of ePortfolios document which is on the Applied GCE ICT section of Edexcel.com. There should normally be 10 eportfolios to include the highest and lowest scoring candidates. Extra eportfolios may need to be sent if eportfolios selected by the system do not include the highest and lowest scoring candidates. Substitutes also need to be submitted for any who are withdrawn after selection

Most eportfolios used the correct file formats, ie html or pdf. A very small minority of centres submitted an mdb file for evidence for Strand d, which is incorrect and is irrelevant as evidence. A few centres submitted work with no proper eportfolio structure, i.e. no html index page with links to evidence in either pdf or html format. There were also some centres who submitted work which was above the permitted file size of 20 mb for this unit. These centres had to be contacted to resubmit the evidence in the correct format. Failure to do this in the future may lead to evidence not being moderated.

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