

Examiners' Report

Summer 2013

GCSE Applied ICT (6953)

Paper 01 The Knowledge Worker

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Summer 2013

Publications Code UA035368

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General

In preparing candidates for this examination, teachers should cover all of the content in the specification. While it is important that candidates have used past examination papers in order to hone their examination technique, it is important to remember that they are being tested on their ability to demonstrate the skills detailed in the specification content and not to just replicate what has been tested in past papers.

As with January 2013, this question paper followed the overall approach of past papers, but there were some differences in the structure of the paper and the specifics of the activities. Problem solving is at the heart of the methodology of this paper.

The issuing of a pre-release model and scenario three weeks in advance of the examination is to help candidates to prepare for the examination. The key though, is to use it to practice a breadth of skills and gain familiarity with the context of the examination. Attempting to predict the exact nature of the tasks that will be examined can put candidates at a disadvantage. In comparison to past papers, there may be differences in the wording of the questions and the best examination advice for candidates remains: ensure you read all the questions carefully. It is clear that some candidates enter the examination room and answer the questions they were expecting and not those in the paper.

In many cases, this is most clear in the model building question, where a complicated formula had clearly been prepared in advance, but only a much simpler formula was required by the question. This sort of response does indicate that the candidate either has not read the question properly or does not have a real understanding of what is being tested. It remains the case that at some centres the cohort has been trained to produce certain responses.

Activity 1

This should be an activity in which most candidates can score well, especially the first part of the question.

- a) This question was familiar to the candidates as it is similar to the previous "Understanding the situation" activities. The candidates were asked specifically for 12 criteria that the design of the route must meet and were specifically asked for bullet pointed answers or numbered lists. Some candidates still produce more than the specified number, which indicates that they are not carefully picking out the most important information. Only the first 12 responses are marked in these cases. The question was a little narrower in its guidelines than some previous "relevant to the model" questions and only points which applied to the design of the route gained marks.

The candidates who read the question seemed to have little difficulty in producing ten or more criteria. However, many candidates lost

marks by making points about the race itself, for example, describing the four different competitions within the race and the “huge party” after it. It is very important that the candidates read the questions, determine what is required and provide the relevant information.

- b) The second part of the question was about data sources and told the candidates what the data sources were. No limit was put on the number of points which could be made as the number of things that COULD have happened is limitless. The candidates that understood the question and had read the scenario had little trouble in gaining marks. The higher achieving candidates often gained four or five marks and the lower achieving candidates generally gained a mark or two.

There were, however, many examples of not understanding the scenario. Many candidates made points about the spotters at checkpoints for the King of the Mountains not being able to see the time on the clock on top of the van. As these spotters had to only note down the ten first past the checkpoint there was no need to see the van.

Many candidates gave lots of better ways to do the various functions in the race using such things as GPS and Ordnance Survey maps, which were well thought out in themselves. Unfortunately this was not what was asked for and is an example of why reading and understanding the question is important.

Activity 2

This activity was a modelling question that candidates were clearly well-prepared for and as such there were a lot of high scores in this question. There was one common misconception. The misconception hinged around the labels in cells I52 and I53 and the mechanism in ensuring that there were 2 climbs in all in a climb stage, **at least** one of these being a Cat 1 climb. The label in I53 was “Climb > Cat 2” the content of the corresponding cells being the number of Cat 2 **and** Cat 1 climbs in that particular cell. Even if the > sign was confusing the corresponding formulae looked for climbs > 7% which would include any Cat 1 climbs. The candidates did not have to supply a formula for this. Many, however, saw this as an error in the spreadsheet and this coloured their view when it came to putting a formula into cell I8 of the Stage Builder worksheet. This misconception often hid the anomalies that were there, as the candidates stopped looking for errors at this point.

In general this activity was straight forward and most candidates scored well.

Activity 3

This activity was largely built around the vlookup function and was aimed at higher achieving candidates. These candidates manipulated the instruction well and scored very highly, scores of 28 being achieved often. Others lost a few marks by not using the absolute addressing or using constants for the position, but still scored reasonably well. Solutions using Index and Match were seen, and also named ranges, which were ingenious and gained the marks.

More students than expected struggled to use vlookup or similar functions, but still got some marks by simply pulling the relevant name from the results worksheet eg =‘Stage Results’!B23. For this they got some marks, but not all, as it could not work for the next set of results. Some picked up some marks by reading the results and typing the winners into the relevant cell. Another set of candidates felt their time would be better served putting more time into the report and, after importing the data, moved on. All these are valid tactics for the mid-range candidate although it was disappointing to see how many candidates were not confident with a straightforward formula such as a non-nested lookup.

Activity 4

This series has seen some of the best reports examiners have seen. Most candidates managed, in some form or other, to display their results. There were some good examples of organisation with the route displayed by the side of the justification. This was very nice but probably time consuming and not required. What held many candidates back was the evaluation of the model and improvements for next year. As is often the case there were a couple of anomalies for the candidates to find.

Firstly, the mechanism for setting up the drop-down list for choosing the type of stage was incomplete. The effect was that under certain circumstances they could assign “climb” to a stage that did not fully meet the criteria. The second was the count of the number of times a town was visited. Row 27 of the Stage Builder stage was a repeat of the last checkpoint visited which had to be the same as the town we started with. As the count included this it effectively meant the last town was counted twice. It was expected that higher achieving candidates would have noticed at least one of these. Sadly many were put off by the “phantom mistake” in the category $\geq 7\%$ calculation and consequently missed this.

Overall Comments

Candidates need to cover all aspects of the specification, including all the functions and formulae that are listed in the requirements. Examination technique is also important. Each activity has a recommended time frame and candidates should try to use these sparingly to ensure that they are able to complete all the tasks in the given time frame.

Candidates should also take care to read the questions carefully, and ensure that they provide their answers in the format required.

Different aspects of the specification will be tested in each session, and it is important that the problem solving approach is something that candidates are taught and become comfortable with.

The preparation time available after the pre-release is released is important and should be used wisely, but candidates need to remember that they need to answer the questions and tasks in the question paper and not give answers to those they expected.

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