

Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2010

Applied GCE

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Information and Communication Technology (6961)

Paper 01 - Using Spreadsheet Software

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General Comments

This was the first time work was assessed on the updated version of the specification.

Although overall there is an apparent upward trend in the quality of the work being submitted for this unit and significant improvements in the sophistication and complexity of many of the spreadsheet products themselves, however previously reported issues are not yet being addressed by all centres.

The updated specification, wherein the requirements of unit 6961 are even more clearly defined than previously, is well established in the public domain. The narrative outlines the primary focus of the work to be submitted; the assessment criteria specify the nature of the material to be devised and submitted; the assessment guidance documents explain how and where marks are accessible and to be awarded. In addition, comprehensive Examiner's reports on this unit have been published several times; on each occasion the principle weaknesses in centre and/or candidate interpretation and approach have been identified.

There are still centres that do not appear to have considered and implemented the main points of the above mentioned documents and/or taken advantage of the other systems in place to support them and their students.

Some centres still fail to appreciate the main requirements of this unit; particularly in relation to the nature of the spreadsheet product required. Both of strands (b) and (c) use the phrase "technically complex spreadsheet". The design, prototyping, development and testing of such a spreadsheet is required to fulfil the requirements of this unit. If all elements of this process are completed every strand of the unit will be addressed and, by definition, a good grade secured.

The issue of complexity remains the major stumbling block for many centres and/or candidates and is the primary reason mark adjustments are made. Innumerable candidates had not addressed the issue of complexity and had produced spreadsheet solutions that did not reflect A2 standards. These candidates were not able to access many marks, particularly in strands (b) and (c).

Fewer candidates used Visual Basic user forms to address the issue of complexity at this moderation than previously. This was encouraging to see as, more often than not, this approach does not address the unit 6961 requirements well.

It was again evident from the material submitted that some centres take a very structured approach to the production of the material for assessment and moderation. Whilst it is quite acceptable for a generic brief or scenario to be provided, this should be sufficiently open ended to enable candidates to adopt an independent approach to the production of a unique solution - as is required to access the higher mark bands. Candidates who have independent 'ownership' of a problem from the outset undoubtedly secure the highest marks overall.

Many centres had used the created spreadsheet solution as the project for Unit 6958. Whilst this approach is understandable, centres should ensure that candidates collate and provide two sets of evidence which are clearly differentiated and mapped to the individual unit requirements.

QWC

This was assessed for the first time under the updated specification, The majority of centres commented on QWC on the e-sheet and used the criteria correctly. However some misunderstanding was evident in a few cases.

The rules for QWC are as follows.

- The content of the work is marked, identifying the band and the mark that the work is worth.
- The QWC is assessed and the mark is then adjusted, within the band, to give a final mark.
- The content mark cannot be increased on the basis of QWC.
- If the content mark awarded is at the bottom of a band, the student's mark cannot be reduced further.
- QWC should not be assessed elsewhere in the unit.

Centre Administration

Candidates need to supply explicit evidence to support their achievement of the criteria in the various marking grids. It is easier to confirm marks if the evidence is easy to find and supplied in an explicit form. Assessors must use the e-sheets as an opportunity to explain why they have awarded marks, there are two advantages to this for the centre. If the moderator can see why and where marks are awarded it is easier to agree with the centre marks, secondly if the centre marks cannot be agreed then the moderator can give better guidance to help future assessment.

A number of centres still do not meet deadlines for submitting work to the moderators; the deadlines are published in advance and must be adhered to unless special permission has been obtained in advance from Edexcel. Permission will only be granted in exceptional circumstances. Centres who miss the deadline risk having the results delayed or the candidates recorded as absent. Each unit must be on a separate CD, even if sent to the same moderator.

Strand A - Functional Specification

The nature and contents of the requisite functional specification are identified in section 11.2 of the unit. As at previous moderations, in general candidates addressed this strand very well although far too frequently it was apparent that a 'reverse engineering' approach had been taken to the production of the functional specification and this restricts the marks available. Notwithstanding the above, the majority failed to include details of how they would "judge the effectiveness of the solution" by presenting measurable success criteria thus MB3 was seldom accessible.

Strand B - Design

The aspects about which decisions are expected to be made prior to commencement of the spreadsheet product itself are listed in 11.3 of the specification and expanded in 11.4-11.9.

Overall, this strand was poorly addressed at this moderation with any design work considering little more than the user interface, aesthetics, layout and presentation in

many cases. Few candidates identified or explained what they were planning to do in relation to input, output, the incorporation of complex functions and formulae, future proofing, validation etc

Future proofing, if included, was often misunderstood and innumerable candidates failed to make any mention of validation. Prototyping, implied in many portfolios, was often not supported by the expected part-complete systems as spreadsheet files and end user feedback to inform development was seldom incorporated.

All too frequently candidates presented commentaries on processes undertaken and completed systems with innumerable examples of screenshots from the finished product being presented as 'design'. This approach restricts the marks accessible.

Strand C - Fully Working Spreadsheet Solution

The principal requirement of the strand, to produce a "technically complex working spreadsheet", is being evidenced more and more frequently although as mentioned this issue remains the main reason for mark adjustments on the unit overall. There were some good products incorporating appropriate complex functions and formulae and securing high marks at this moderation window.

Although far fewer in number than presented previously, some centres are still addressing the issue of complexity by incorporating extensive use of Visual Basic. The resultant product is often far more appropriate for Unit 6962 (Customising Applications) than this unit. Some limited use of VB is reasonable but moderators cannot be expected to examine code to establish use of formulae. Also slowly reducing in numbers but still being submitted are systems which comprise embedded formulae but no data; these are often difficult to access for the moderators and/or confirm functionality. Disappointingly, text based systems, where the product should clearly have been a database and created using alternative software, are still regularly presented.

Notwithstanding the above comments, despite individual reports to centres and previous Examiners' reports, it was disappointing to note the large number of candidates who devised and presented spreadsheet products evidencing little beyond level 2 skills in relation to functions and formulae used. As has regularly been reported, 2 cell formulae, If statements and vlookups are insufficient on their own in this context.

Many candidates included extensive and unnecessary instructions in relation to the application software in one or both of the requisite guides. Further, many guides were presented as commentaries on the finished product rather than overviews of use / technicalities.

Usually nicely produced and presented, innumerable User Guides did not comprehensively demonstrate the facilities of the spreadsheet system to a potential user and frequently omitted elements eg input validation and associated error messages.

Some centre cohorts omitted the expected technical guide altogether which suggests a misinterpretation of the requirements.

Strand D - Testing

The evidencing of this strand is improving overall although some candidates still concentrate on aspects such as navigation hyperlinks and macros rather than elements of the spreadsheet itself. Many fail to appreciate the relevance of the prototyping process with end user feedback to this strand.

It was disappointing that some candidates only submitted test plans and/or long Word tables which described tests. These should be supported by screenshots showing direct evidence of tests having been undertaken, eg testing of validation using test data. A structured approach to each test would be evident where candidates have addressed this aspect well - incorporating acceptable, unacceptable and extreme data.

Strand E - Evaluation

The quality of the evaluations is undoubtedly improving overall and there were some very good evaluations presented at this moderation window with many accessing top MB2 and/or MB3.

Conversely, a considerable number of candidates appear to struggle with this strand of the unit and produced descriptive detail of processes undertaken and problems encountered rather than evaluative content.

The best evaluations address all three aspects of the strand well and incorporate the client, end user and/or peer tester's opinions. Often, candidates addressed 1 or 2 of the strand requirements particularly well but content in respect of the other(s) was limited.

As mentioned, many centres combine undertaking this unit with unit 6958. At this moderation window there was a considerable amount of material in the evaluations which directly related to project management rather than 6961 and the spreadsheet product itself.

The evaluation should relate to the initial requirements. Good evidence produced for strand (a), particularly in relation to objectives for the system, enables candidates to do this effectively.

Unit Results

Grade	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	N
Boundary Mark	60	45	39	33	27	22	17
Max Uniform Mark	100	80	70	60	50	40	0-39

Candidates who do not achieve the standard required for a grade E will receive a uniform mark in the range of 0-39.

Note

Grade boundaries may vary from year to year and from subject to subject.

Qualification Results

Advanced Subsidiary (Single Award)

The minimum uniform marks required for each grade:

Qualification Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Maximum Uniform Mark = 300	240	210	180	150	120

Candidates who do not achieve the standard required for a grade E will receive a uniform mark in the range of 0-119.

Advanced GCE (Single Award)

The minimum uniform marks required for each grade:

Qualification Grade	A	B	C	D	E
Maximum Uniform Mark = 600	480	420	360	300	240

Candidates who do not achieve the standard required for a grade E will receive a uniform mark in the range of 0-239.

Advanced Subsidiary (Double Award)

The minimum uniform marks required for each grade:

Qualification Grade	AA	AB	BB	BC	CC	CD	DD	DE	EE
Maximum Uniform Mark = 600	480	450	420	390	360	330	300	270	240

Candidates who do not achieve the standard required for a grade EE will receive a uniform mark in the range of 0-239.

Advanced GCE with Advanced Subsidiary (Additional)

The minimum uniform marks required for each grade:

Qualification Grade	AA	AB	BB	BC	CC	CD	DD	DE	EE
Maximum Uniform Mark = 900	720	690	630	600	540	510	450	420	360

Candidates who do not achieve the standard required for a grade EE will receive a uniform mark in the range of 0-359.

Advanced GCE (Double Award)

The minimum uniform marks required for each grade:

Qualification Grade	AA	AB	BB	BC	CC	CD	DD	DE	EE
Maximum Uniform Mark = 1200	960	900	840	780	720	660	600	540	480

Candidates who do not achieve the standard required for a grade EE will receive a uniform mark in the range of 0-479

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