Principal Moderator Feedback

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Applied GCE 6961

Unit 11: Using Spreadsheet Software

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Contents

General Comments

Although the entry was very small, there was work at all levels. Some high marks and top grades were secured. There were very few instances where a pass grade could not be awarded; most of these had been identified at the centre.

The requirements for 6961 are well established in the public domain and defined in the specification. The assessment criteria indicate the primary focus of the work to be submitted and the assessment guidance documents explain how and where marks are accessible and to be awarded.

It was pleasing to note that the majority of centres at this series had accurately assessed the work submitted at national standards. However, some centres are failing to address previously reported issues and there were still a few examples of over-generous assessment and high marks being awarded which were not supported by the evidence submitted.

Some candidates had used the created spreadsheet solution as their 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.

Comments on strand (a) – Functional Specification

The required content is outlined in 11.2 of the unit specification; there are only four aspects to be considered. Many candidates addressed this strand well, and appeared to have 'ownership' of a problem to be solved. The success criterion is, more often than not, the primary omission when full marks for the strand are not confirmed.

As at previous moderation windows, some candidates still relied on content from their unit 6958 proposal and scope documents to support this strand rather than producing the expected stand-alone functional specification. Further, despite interesting and well written background information, many candidates failed to specify specific tasks/objectives in relation to their proposed spreadsheet solution.

It was disappointing to note again at this window the level of detail incorporated in some of the functional specifications – including design work and screenshots from the finished product. This suggests a retrospective approach which is not appropriate.

Comments on strand (b) – Design

Undoubtedly, this is the strand where the most lenient centre assessment is seen. Some centre assessors award marks for strand (b) designs, which inappropriately reflect those awarded for the product. It is possible to submit good design work but a weak product, and vice versa.

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. Documenting decisions made and other pertinent issues is the evidence required for this strand; the level of detail being the primary consideration in determining the mark band accessible.

Often commentaries on the finished product and/or processes undertaken or details of step by step implementation were submitted for this strand. Where design work was included, many candidates did not consider more than the user interface, aesthetics, layout and presentation. Frequently candidates failed to identify or explain what they planned to do in relation to input, output, the incorporation of functions and formulae and other software facilities, future proofing and validation.

Future proofing appears problematic and is often misunderstood with some candidates considering updates to software particularly significant.

Comments on strand (c) – Fully Working Spreadsheet Solution

As required, the actual spreadsheet products were included in all the portfolios at this moderation window although, as always, location of the necessary password proved problematic.

The principal requirement of the strand, to produce a "technically complex working spreadsheet", is being evidenced much more frequently and often very well. However there remained instances at this series where, albeit used appropriately, the software facilities used within the products were limited. The range and effectiveness of the facilities used is the determinant of the mark band accessible.

Submitted by the majority, the user and, separate, technical guides were not always comprehensive and/or fit for purpose with validation and associated error messages often the major omission from the user guides. Frequently, the technical guides included instructions in relation to the application software ie "how to" and/or details of implementation which is not necessary and renders the document not fit for purpose.

Comments on strand (d) – Testing

In the main, this strand was reasonably well evidenced at this series. There were instances of long Word tables indicating everything working perfectly albeit the testing was at a superficial level ie of hyperlinks and macro buttons rather than the spreadsheet itself.

Some candidates did not make sufficient use of prototypes and end users to support testing.

Comments on strand (e) – Evaluation

There were some very good evaluations presented at this moderation window with candidates accessing top MB2 and/or MB3.

Some candidates struggle with this strand and present descriptive detail of processes undertaken and problems encountered rather than evaluative content.

The best evaluations address all three aspects of the strand well, relate to the initial requirements and incorporate the client, end user and/or peer tester's opinions. Good evidence produced for strand (a), particularly in relation to objectives for the system, enables candidates to do this effectively.

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