

Unit 1: Communicating in the IT Industry

Unit code: K/601/3192
QCF Level 2: BTEC Specialist
Credit value: 5
Guided learning hours: 30

Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to use IT tools to communicate and exchange information safely, securely and effectively with different audiences. Learners will also consider the impacts of IT.

Unit introduction

Communication skills are key to success in any sector but are particularly important in highly technical sectors such as IT where the language used can become full of jargon. It is important that learners are able to communicate with technical and non-technical staff and understand how interpersonal skills affect communication.

IT provides opportunities for us to communicate more effectively using many different tools. Therefore, as well as developing interpersonal skills through more traditional methods of communication such as the spoken word, learners will be introduced to the software packages and tools that are used to present information.

Learners will be prompted to consider their audience when discussing IT-related information. Explaining an IT-related topic to a non-technical person can be challenging and avoiding jargon difficult. Learners will communicate with people with technical knowledge and those without.

This unit could be taught in conjunction with other units from the programme to emphasise vocational contexts and make use of naturally occurring assessment opportunities.

Learning outcomes and assessment criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria determine the standard required to achieve the unit.

On completion of this unit a learner should:

Learning outcomes	Assessment criteria
1 Be able to communicate information to suit audience information, purpose and content	1.1 demonstrate effective interpersonal skills in face to face communication 1.2 communicate IT-related information to a technical audience 1.3 communicate IT-related information to a non-technical audience
2 Be able to use IT tools to communicate and exchange information	2.1 use IT tools safely to effectively communicate and exchange information 2.2 select, set up and use a specialist communication channel to communicate and exchange information
3 Understand the impact of IT on individuals, communities and society	3.1 explain the social impacts of the use of IT

Unit content

1 Be able to communicate information to suit audience, purpose and content

General communication skills: adapting content and style to audience eg modulating voice, terminology, format; providing accurate information; techniques for engaging audience interest eg changing intonation, use of technology such as multimedia or use of animation in presentations; ensuring the message gets across eg asking questions to check understanding

Interpersonal skills: methods for communicating interpersonally eg verbal exchanges, signing, lip reading; techniques and cues eg body language, use of intonation, use of emoticons, capitalisation of text in emails; positive and negative language; paying attention and active engagement eg nodding, summarising or paraphrasing

Communicate in writing: following guidelines and procedures; identifying and conveying key messages in writing eg letter, fax, email; using correct grammar and spelling; reviewing and proofreading own written work; reviewing and editing documents created by others; note taking

Audience: technical eg frequent IT user, IT technician; non-technical eg casual or non-IT user

2 Be able to use IT tools to communicate and exchange information

Communicating and exchanging information: eg word-processed documents; presentations; web pages; email

IT tools: software eg word-processing; presentation; other eg email, specialist software for the visually impaired; proofing tools eg thesaurus, spell-checkers; other eg conversion of tabular information to graphics, text readers

Specialist communication channels: eg blogs, wiki, vlogs, podcasts, video conferencing

Safety: personal information; viewing digital content; uploading digital content; respect towards others; data protection regulations; securing data eg encryption, firewalls, backups, secure sites

3 Understand the impact of IT on individuals, communities and society

Impacts: social eg effects on local communities; economic eg employment structure, working practices, sustainability; legal eg ownership, copyright, plagiarism; ethical eg privacy of information; unequal access

Unequal access: implications eg locally, nationally and globally

Abuse of IT: threats eg cyber bullying, spam, phishing, denial of service attacks

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

The outline learning plan (OLP) which follows this section gives an indication of how time can be allocated between the various topics in the unit content.

There are two major ways in which this unit can be delivered, one is as a conventional, continuous unit, and the other is to run it in parallel with other units to gain the maximum benefit from using naturally occurring evidence for assessment purposes.

Whichever method is chosen, the logical plan for delivering the unit will be the same, they will just have different elapsed times. The OLP included in this document follows the sequence of the learning outcomes. Some tutors may prefer to vary the order of delivery, which is acceptable.

The first topic to look at is likely to be the general communication skills that are required in the industry. The various skills are listed under the content for learning outcome 1. The basic principles can be delivered through whole class teaching and learners can be given a checklist of basic skills. Learners can take part in roleplay situations and their peers can assess them against the checklist.

The next area for learning outcome 1 is interpersonal skills. Some basic information can be given out as information sheets and checklists. Learners should be encouraged to use this list and make notes whilst watching television, various tutors, peer groups, etc which can then be discussed in a whole-class situation. Role-play and practice presentations can also be used to provide additional scenarios with peers using the checklist to assess these activities. The use of role play where learners wear ear plugs or blindfolds and try to communicate are quite useful.

The third topic for this learning outcome is communicating in writing. Learners should consider a wide variety of examples of writing, containing good practice and less good practice. With tutor guidance they will analyse the writing, picking out elements of good and less good practice. They will also attempt to identify different styles of writing and determine where it would be appropriate to use them.

Learners will undertake small exercises to enable them to practice writing in different styles.

Tutors will also lead discussions and give demonstrations of how to check work (for errors in spelling, grammar, layout, etc) and review work (content). Learners will practice checking and reviewing their own work and that of their peers.

The fourth topic is the audience. Three types of audience are listed in the unit content and learners will take these into account when working on the first three topics.

The second learning outcome focuses on using IT tools to communicate effectively, which can be based on practical application. The first topic listed in the unit content deals with communicating and exchanging information. Tutors may have to demonstrate some of the techniques, although learners may already be familiar with much of the software. Learner exercises in using word processing, presentation, web page production, and email software will provide the basis. Learners will carry out exercises using the spell-checker and thesaurus available in their word processor software together with at least one other specialist tool. Learners need to be aware of the pitfalls which occur when relying

on, for instance, the spell-checker, where words spelt correctly but used in the wrong way are not identified. The problem with using auto-correct within the spelling check, or in using a grammar checker, also need to be emphasised.

The second topic, specialist communication channels, leads on from the first. Learners will develop their skills further by using different methods of communication. Blog, wiki, vlog and podcast production, plus voip software will provide basis.

This can be followed by class discussions on the benefits and disadvantages of the software based on learner experiences.

The final topic, safety, can be taught in parallel with the first two. Tutors will lead discussions and encourage safe working practices when learners use the internet. Learners will apply appropriate practical safety measures during their work.

Learning outcome 3 concerns understanding the impact of IT on individuals, communities and society. Some of the material will be covered in the context of learning outcomes 1 and 2. In particular, legal and ethical issues, and abuse of IT should be considered when learners are working with websites, blogs, podcasts, etc. The other issues could be made the subject of learner presentations in the first two sections of the unit content.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments. The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to the unit
Communication skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole-class exercise – tutor presentation on • general communication skills followed by learner exercises • whole-class exercise – tutor presentation on interpersonal skills followed by learner exercises • whole-class exercise – tutor presentation on written skills followed by learner exercises • whole-class exercise – tutor presentation on making a communication fit for audience followed by learner • exercises.
Assignment 1 - Communicating in IT
Communicating using IT: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whole-class exercise – tutor presentation on safety • whole-class exercise – tutor demonstration of communication channels followed by whole-class practical • whole-class exercise – tutor demonstration of software and tools followed by whole-class practical exercises.
Assignment 2 - Specialist Communication Channels

Assessment

It is suggested that this unit is assessed using two assignments as summarised in the *Programme of suggested assignments* table.

Finding a scenario which covers all aspects of all criteria is difficult, but the one suggested in the programme of suggested assignments table is acceptable. It places the user in a role which is at an acceptable level for their experience, which is important when devising assignments.

Some of the evidence required to complete the assignments could be naturally occurring within learners' work for other units within the qualification, or for other courses they are undertaking, and tutors are encouraged to use such evidence.

Learners should provide evidence for 1.1 over a period of time and should involve a variety of face-to-face communication. As much naturally occurring evidence as possible should be used, in fact there should be no need to set up simulated circumstances. Good evidence is a compilation of videos of a variety of formal and informal face-to-face communication. An alternative would be detailed observations by tutors, and other appropriate people, backed up by any relevant documentary evidence. There should be at least three separate and different examples of face-to-face communication.

For 1.2, learners should produce IT-related material for technical audiences specified either by learners or the tutor. The material produced as evidence must specify the audience for each item. It may be the same information being presented to two different types of audiences, for example a quick help menu for a frequent IT user and a full illustrated user guide for a casual IT user. The material may have been produced in a different unit.

1.3 is similar to 1.2, except that the audience is non-technical, requiring learners to adjust their language accordingly. As with 1.2, the material produced as evidence must specify the audience for each item, and the material may have been produced for a different unit.

For 2.1, learners need to show that they can use various software tools to help them check communications in order to exchange information effectively. There should be evidence of using proofing tools (at least two) and one other tool type. Tools can be selected by learners or the tutor. Much of the evidence will be naturally occurring in the preparation of documents for this and other units.

For 2.2, learners should select, set up and use a specialist communication channel to communicate and exchange information. Evidence can come from screengrabs and/or a written report. Learners should identify common safety issues and use appropriate methods to protect themselves and their data.

For 3.1, learners need to describe the social impacts of the use of IT. While the descriptions included should be clear, at this level learners are not required to explain the concepts involved in an in-depth way.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the assessment criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 2.1	Communicating in IT	You are to produce user guides to using email. These should be available as a word-processed document for complete beginners, a presentation aimed at casual IT users and a web page aimed at frequent IT users. Each guide should include a section on safety measures appropriate for the level of user.	User guides. Proofs (before/after).
2.2, 3.1	Specialist Communication Channels	You work for a recruitment agency and deal with clients face to face, over the telephone and through video conferencing. You are to use video sessions you have participated in to demonstrate your interpersonal skills and produce a blog explaining how to use video conferencing.	Videos, blogs.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC in IT sector suite. This unit has particular links with:

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
		Communication and Employability Skills for IT

This unit maps to some of the underpinning knowledge from the following areas of competence in the Level 2 National Occupational Standards for IT (ProCom):

- 4.6 Human Computer Interaction/Interface (HCI) Design.
- 4.8 IT/Technology Infrastructure Design and Planning
- 5.3 IT/Technology Solution Testing
- 6.1 Information Management
- 6.2 IT Security Management.

Essential resources

Learners will require access to a computer which has communication software and any required peripherals to install.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

The use of vocational context is essential in the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Learners will require access to computer equipment to enable them to gain a practical awareness and enable them to apply their knowledge and understanding in a practical situation.

There is a range of organisations that may be able to help centres to engage and involve local employers in the delivery of this unit, for example:

- Learning and Skills Network – www.vocationallearning.org.uk
- Local, regional business links – www.businesslink.gov.uk
- National Education and Business Partnership Network – www.nebpn.org
- Network for Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths Network Ambassadors Scheme – www.stemnet.org.uk
- Work-based learning guidance – www.aimhighersw.ac.uk/wbl.htm
- Work experience/workplace learning frameworks – Centre for Education and Industry (CEI University of Warwick) – www.warwick.ac.uk/wie/cei

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Maggio R – *The Art of Talking to Anyone: Essential People Skills for Success in Any Situation* (McGraw Hill Higher Education, 2005) ISBN 007145229X

Websites

www.btplc.com/responsiblebusiness/Supportingourcommunities/Learningandskills

www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/CommunicationIntro.htm

Functional Skills - Level 2

Skill	When learners are...
ICT - Using ICT	
Plan solutions to complex tasks by analysing the necessary stages	producing an outline project plan
ICT - Developing, presenting and communicating information	
evaluate the selection, use and effectiveness of ICT tools and facilities used to present information	reviewing a project against a project plan monitoring progress against the project plan, making adjustments as necessary.