

Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2011

Functional Skills ICT Level 1 (FST01)

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FST01 – Functional Skills ICT Level 1

Introduction

This was the fifth series of the Level 1 Functional Skills ICT test. Many of the issues that have been noted in previous series are still evident in responses during this series. There were over 2000 candidates entered for the test. There are significant differences between the current specification and the Functional Skills Pilot specification. Reports from examiners indicate that there continue to be a small number of Centres where it seems that some candidates have been poorly prepared for the test. A pass in the test is intended to be approximately equivalent to the Grade F standard in GCSE. Responses from candidates do not always reflect this standard.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should have access to the internet only during the first 15 minutes of the test. There continues to be evidence that the relevant staff in Centres are seemingly unaware of this stipulation and that facilities for offline email are not made available to candidates for the purpose of this test. There are some centres where the use of students' personal email accounts (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo mail etc) is still evident. Centres need to ensure that candidates are reminded that there could be serious consequences if they are found to be breaching the code. The guidelines for setting up the user accounts for the test are clearly laid out in the Information for the Conduct of the Examination issued for each series. Centres are also reminded that it is a requirement that separate user areas, not accessible to candidates outside their sitting of the test, should be prepared. There is some evidence from screenshots produced during the test that candidates are using their normal desktop and documents folders.

Candidates clearly still have problems understanding the instructions for collating their work. Innumerable scripts were submitted with holes incorrectly punched, upside down, incorrectly ordered etc. Centre based supervision and/or preparation may well alleviate such issues and facilitate the marking activity.

There were five tasks to be completed by candidates based on a fictional event, a fun run to be held in Hastings in January 2012.

Task 1

Candidates were required to search the internet and find the name of the MP for Hastings. Once located, the name and source used were to be entered on the Responses document which was printed as part of the candidate's evidence. The name was saved for use in Task 3.

The majority of candidates provided the requisite screen shot of a search engine within which appropriate key words were visible and recorded both the MP's name and source used; thus securing all 4 of the marks available. Some candidates presented a screen shot of the result of the search rather than the search engine/key words; others recorded the search engine as the source and several recorded one or other name of former MPs – some from 35/40 years ago. In these cases, full marks were not secured.

Areas for improvement and development:

- reading the task and instructions carefully
- providing the requisite evidence.

Task 2

A spreadsheet was provided to the candidates in connection with task 2. The spreadsheet supplied details of sponsorship and mileage relating to the above mentioned fictional fun run. The main requirements of the task were to edit the contents of a specific cell; carry out a two-cell multiplication; an =sum() addition to generate an overall total and devise a chart representing the calculated totals. Although there were some exceptions, the vast majority of candidates did not score at all well on task 2.

All but a very few of the candidates identified the correct cell and effected the necessary change of value; thus securing all three marks available for task 2(a).

The marks for 2(b) derived from the formula view of the spreadsheet. For whatever reason, a large number of candidates failed to include a formula view of their spreadsheet and thus were unable to access the marks available. Notwithstanding the above, many of the spreadsheets presented indicated that candidates had added the values of "sponsorship per km" and "distance in km" rather than multiplying the two values. Where formulae were included some candidates had correctly used =C5*D5 but many others had inefficient formulae e.g. =sum(C5*D5). There were a surprising number of examples of =product(..) and a few where the values themselves had been added or multiplied i.e. =14.25*18.9.

The calculated values had to be totalled to secure the marks for 2(c). Regularly markers had to carry out manual calculations, sometimes on obscure values, because of omitted formulae view. The formula expected was =sum(E5:E10) i.e. not including the blank row. =sum(E5:E11); =E5+E6+E7 etc; =sum(E5+E6+E7) are all examples of the incorrect/inefficient formulae regularly encountered.

Surprisingly large numbers of candidates ignored 2(d) altogether and did not include any formatting whatsoever thereby failing to secure any of the 5 marks available. Despite the spreadsheet being 'sponsorship' and thus money and a specific instruction to do so, few candidates included £ 2dp on all appropriate values. Some haphazard gridlines were included but there were few thoughtful examples of bold, italics, widening of columns to accommodate labels etc.

The task to create a chart from the calculated 'Total sponsorship' values was attempted by the majority but, overall, not well done with few candidates scoring anywhere near the maximum mark available of 7. Whilst there were a few pie charts, most candidates correctly chose a bar/column chart and selected the correct data range – follow-through being applied to incorrectly calculated values. Innumerable candidates omitted a title and/or axes labels altogether and those included were often ill conceived, incomplete or inappropriate. Few of the candidates secured the fitness for purpose mark with examples of superfluous legends; blank rows/columns; sp and g errors and/or other unnecessary information frequently encountered.

Areas for improvement and development:

- printing in formula view
- efficient formulae
- correct syntax
- appropriate and effective formatting
- devising appropriate titles and axes labels for charts.

Task 3

For task 3(a), candidates were asked to design and produce an advert promoting the fun run using both provided and sourced information. They were required to select appropriate text from the provided file Information11L1; incorporate images from the ImagesNov11L1 file and include the MP's name found in Task 1. Virtually every candidate produced a document for this task utilising appropriate software. Disappointingly, many resembled posters, contained inappropriate and/or contradictory text and were not fit for purpose. Few candidates scored well on this task.

Large numbers of candidates failed to address the requirement for the advert to be no larger than A5; many were A4, some were multi page presentations. Although size and positioning were well done, the choice of wording for the title appeared problematic for many candidates; especially where the information file had been reproduced as provided. Often candidates failed to mention the fun run and opted for 1066 runners as the title.

The vast majority of candidates appeared unwilling or unable to discriminate in their choice of content from the provided text file. Frequently the entire contents of the information file were reproduced including duplicated dates and the spurious statement about swimmers. Few candidates omitted the statement about support. The MP's name as Official Starter was correctly incorporated by the majority although there were instances of unusual and inappropriate means of inclusion of the name. Many candidates retained the brackets around the name.

Although the choice of font was usually entirely appropriate; large numbers of candidates still rely on WordArt for presentation of enlarged textual content eg the title and thus cannot access the mark for choice of font. Few candidates thought to highlight the date of the event; or any other information for that matter. Many of the adverts were a single, recurring font style and size throughout.

Most candidates secured the four marks available for choice, position and size of images. Almost all candidates included the 1066 Runners logo but there were a few instances of images being incorporated which were not from those provided. Choices from the provided images were usually appropriate although a surprising

number of candidates included the picture of swimmers. Proportions were well maintained and placement considered in the majority of cases.

There was little evidence of planning of the adverts; poor use of white space and sense of balance, excessive hyphenation of textual content and haphazard use of formatting techniques. Candidates' inability to discriminate in respect of content and consider both the purpose and impact of the adverts were the main weaknesses. Mark points 2, 3, 6, 9 and 10 were those most frequently not awarded.

Areas for improvement and development:

- devising and positioning an appropriate title
- choosing textual content to fit the purpose of the document
- choosing, positioning and sizing of images to fit the purpose of the document
- appropriate rewording
- following instructions in respect of incorporating provided and sourced material
- using formatting techniques effectively
- planning to ensure sensible use of white space
- checking for fitness of audience and purpose
- checking for accuracy of content (eg spellings).

Task 3(b) required candidates to identify the strongest password from two provided and give a reason for their choice. Although there were some strange approaches to this question with candidates devising their own passwords and even including screen shots showing them in use; the majority of candidates chose Tvr89no44 and indicated the mix of letters and numbers as key thus securing both of the marks available.

Task 4

Task 4 (a) required candidates to email their advert as an attachment to Peter White at the Hastings Observer. The email address to be used was provided.

A significant number of candidates do not appear to have access to offline email software and so marks become restricted. Innumerable examples of word processed documents, including letters, were submitted for this task. Those with appropriate software scored reasonably well on this task with the correct addressee details, a message and attached file. The primary weakness was an inaccurate, incomplete or omitted subject line.

The email address was often reproduced incorrectly and sometimes illegibly small. Although meeting the criteria, a large number of candidates were unable to compose an appropriate message in a suitable format often personalising their messages, including salutations and complimentary closes and, in some cases, text speak.

The second part of Task 4 required candidates to give a reason for regularly updating anti-virus software - the answer to be included in the appropriate place on the Responses document. Very few candidates omitted this question but the majority failed to secure the mark. Most candidates responded in general terms providing the rationale and purpose of anti-virus software rather than answering in the context of the question i.e. new viruses.

Areas for improvement and development:

- accessing email software offline
- reproducing email addresses accurately
- use of subject line and choice of subject
- devising appropriate message – without salutations and complimentary close
- producing screen shots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read
- devising written answers to 'theory' questions.

Task 5

Task 5 required candidates to create a new folder to accommodate their edited/created work and provide a screen shot showing the folder with files within it. Although this task was omitted entirely by a small number of candidates most candidates secured both marks available.

Whilst most folder names were reasonable there were still a few instances of 'New folder' and the screen shots were sometimes inappropriately sized and difficult to decipher.

Areas for improvement and development:

- producing screen shots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read
- appropriate folder names – readily apparent on the screen shots.

Pass mark for FST01

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	31
UMS	6

Note: Grade boundaries vary from year to year and from subject to subject, depending on the demands of the questions.

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