

# Principal Examiner Feedback

May 2012

Functional Skills ICT  
Level 1 (FST01)

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Publications Code FC031544

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## **Introduction**

The examinations for the functional skills specification are now well established and always closely match the content, layout and degree of difficulty of both the sample assessment material and previous papers.

Despite numerous past papers, Principal Examiners' reports and other support mechanisms in place, some candidates still seem ill-prepared for the examination. As well as improving and enhancing their practical skills, many candidates could have secured higher marks by following and carrying out the specific instructions of the paper.

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. A surprising number of scripts at this window were submitted as loose sheets inside the answer folder which is not a good idea. Centre based supervision and/or preparation may well alleviate such issues; this would certainly facilitate the marking activity.

Some centres are disadvantaging their candidates by not providing them with the correct data files in the secure examination user folders. Several centres had mixed March and May data files, which meant that candidates could not be credited for evidence related to the March series. These issues are being dealt with and centres will be contacted regarding this. It is important that centres adhere to the guidance in the Instructions for the Conduct of the Examination (ICE) document to ensure the integrity of the examination is maintained and to maximise the opportunity for their candidates to achieve their potential in the examination.

There were five tasks to be completed by candidates based on a fictional event, a Family Fun Day and Horse Show to be held in Burrfield in July 2012.

## **Section A**

### **Task 1:**

Candidates were required to search the internet and find the year the Isle of Wight Donkey Sanctuary was established. Once located, the year and the website from which it was retrieved were to be entered on the Responses document which was printed as part of the candidate's evidence. The year was required 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 year 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 in which case full marks were not secured. There was a noticeable reduction in the number of candidates recording the search engine as the source in this series.

Areas for improvement and development:

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

## Section B

### Task 2:

A spreadsheet was provided for the candidates in connection with task 2. The spreadsheet held details of barbecue food and prices in connection with the fictional Family Fun Day. The main requirements of the task were to edit the contents of a specific cell; carry out a two-cell addition; an =AVERAGE() to generate an average price and create a chart representing the calculated prices. It is pleasing to be able to report that, although there were some exceptions, the vast majority of candidates scored 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). Where full marks were not awarded it was usually because candidates appeared to have ignored or overlooked the instruction to replace '0.62' with '£0.44'.

Tasks 2(b) and 2(c) involved using formulae to generate values; with the majority of the marks derived from the formula view of the spreadsheet. As is often the case, it was the 'formula' parts of the question that seemed to pose most problems. Large numbers of candidates continue to fail to produce a formula printout, thus significantly limiting the number of marks they could gain in these sections.

Most of those candidates who did produce a formula printout evidenced the simple addition (2b), although even here there were some strange – albeit 'workable' - formulas used. In almost all cases where a formula printout was included, there was clear evidence of replication. Most of those candidates who failed to include formula views secured 1 of the 2 marks available as a result of a correct value in data view.

The calculated values had to be averaged to secure the marks for 2(c). Again these marks were evidenced from the formula view. It was disappointing to note that this task proved problematic for the majority. Many did not attempt the task at all; others simply added the data in the column. There was a wide variation of formulae/functions used within a single task. Some candidates used the correct formula =AVERAGE(D11:D18) and secured all three marks. Others unnecessarily and incorrectly included the blank row ie =AVERAGE(D11:D19). There were a noticeable number of candidates with other inefficient formulae, e.g. adding the cells and dividing by 8. Sometimes this was presented as a 2 stage process: =SUM(D11:D18) in cell D19 and then =D19/8 in the average price cell. Many of those who attempted to carry out the same process in a single formula, e.g. =SUM(D11:D18)/8 failed to locate the division outside the brackets and generated an incorrect value. Of those candidates who did not include a formula printout, a considerable number did show the correct value in the specified cell.

As in previous tests, a surprisingly large number of candidates ignored task 2(d) altogether; did not include any formatting whatsoever and failed to secure any of the 4 marks available. Despite specific instructions to format all values to £ for 1 mark and all values to 2 dp for a second mark, at least 40% of candidates did not secure either mark. Options for other formatting included removing truncation, adding borders and enhancing the main, sub or column headings. Some borders were included, though often haphazard, but there were few effective examples of bold, italics or larger fonts for the headings. The most common improvement was the widening of the first column to remove the truncation of the food item names.

Task 2(e) required candidates to create a chart from their calculated prices. This was attempted by the majority, although where candidates failed the complete the entire paper the chart was often the task omitted.

Overall this task was reasonably well done, with the majority of candidates gaining 50% of the marks and a significant number gaining up at least 6 of the available 8 marks. Only a very small number scored full marks on this task.

Although there were numerous examples of pie charts there were no reported examples of line graphs; most candidates correctly choosing to produce a bar/column chart. Selecting the correct data proved problematic for many; a significant number of candidates included data from more than one column resulting in multiple bars for each item. A significant number of 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, spelling and grammar errors and other errors or omissions.

Areas for improvement and development:

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

### **Task 3:**

In task 3(a), candidates were asked to produce a poster advertising the Family Fun Day using both given and sourced information. They were required to select appropriate text from the given file InformationMayL1; incorporate images from the ImagesMay12L1 file; include the year found in Task 1 and two food prices calculated in Task 2.

All candidates produced a document for this task utilising appropriate software. There were a few examples of landscape and/or 2 page documents despite instructions to the contrary.

“Family Fun Day and Horse Show” was correctly inserted by the majority although not always, as might have been expected, as the title. Some candidates, for whatever reason, chose to change ‘and’ to ‘&’ - this was not considered appropriate in this type of document. The word ‘title’ appeared in numerous posters. Surprisingly large numbers of candidates merely copied the entire text file, as presented, into their poster. From the outset, such posters were not fit for purpose. The majority of candidates selected appropriate content from the text file but omissions of the date, time and location were frequent; again rendering the poster not fit for purpose. Many candidates retained the order of the provided text rather than grouping/repositioning related content which impacted the fitness for purpose and effectiveness.

The date found in Task 1, 1987, was incorporated by the majority but a few candidates retained the brackets which made the sentence nonsensical. Whilst burger prices were included by most candidates these were not always the correct prices; many candidates using the cost price rather than the selling price.

Although there were examples of candidates using their own or alternatively sourced images of burgers and horses, most candidates secured the mark available for choosing and inserting appropriate images – the burger plus two others – from the given images. There were instances of the inclusion of the bowl of cereal and car or more than the specified two images but these were few and far between.

Interestingly adding a border seemed to be centre based; either all candidates did this correctly or it was omitted entirely. There were few instances of partial or truncated borders reported.

Whilst their chosen title was enlarged/emphasised by almost all candidates, very few gained the mark for emphasising other significant content such as the date, time and location. Few candidates identified these as related items and that grouping and emphasising them was important in the context of the poster.

A significant number of candidates retained the body text at the size provided, which was too small for a poster. Although the font and style was usually appropriate; large numbers of candidates still rely on WordArt for presentation of enlarged textual content, e.g. the title and thus cannot access the mark for choice of font.

Most candidates secured the mark available for position and size of images. Proportions were well maintained and placement considered in the majority of cases. However, there was little evidence of planning of the posters; poor use of white space and sense of balance and haphazard use of formatting techniques. Candidates' inability to discriminate in respect of content and consider the purpose, audience and impact of the posters were the main weaknesses.

Areas for improvement and development:

- choosing and grouping textual content to fit the purpose of the document
- 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 make their poster 'read only' and provide a screenshot to show that they had done so. This task was omitted by large numbers of candidates and poorly done by many others. Changes and updates to software appear to have a significant impact on the way candidates attempt to make documents read only. There were lots of variations on the approach taken, with many candidates restricting parts of the document so they could not be edited or marking them as 'final'. Many candidates included screen shots showing they had accessed appropriate facilities but failed to 'apply' the read only command.

In many cases it was difficult to confirm that the process had been completed, ie [Read Only] appended to the file name by the software.

Areas for improvement and development:

- accessing software facilities
- completing a process
- providing appropriate screen shots.

**Task 4:**

Task 4 (a) required candidates to email their poster as an attachment to Sally Lucas, Secretary of Hampshire Pony Clubs Association. The email address to be used was provided.

Most candidates appeared to have access to offline email software as expected. There were fewer instances of personal email accounts being used than in the past but still examples of word processed documents being 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 lines, resulting in very few candidates securing this mark.

Some of the language/tone of the messages was totally inappropriate and out of context; text speak was still used.

Areas for improvement and development:

- accessing email software offline
- choosing and using a suitable subject
- devising appropriate message
- producing screen shots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read.

**Task 5:**

Task 5 required candidates to create a new folder to store their edited/created work and provide a screen shot showing the folder with files moved into it.

Although this task was omitted by a surprising number of candidates, many secured both marks available. Marks were not awarded where it was difficult to establish whether a new folder had been created by the candidate, since the screen shots suggested the candidate's initial exam folder had merely been added to.

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:

- reading the task and instructions carefully
- providing the requisite evidence
- producing screen shots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read
- using appropriate folder names – clearly legible on the screen shots.

### Pass mark for FST01

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	32
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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Order Code FC031544 May 2012

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