

Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2012

Functional Skills ICT
Level 1 (FST01)

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Introduction

The examinations for the functional skills specification are now well established. This paper closely matched the content, layout and degree of difficulty of all previous papers.

Despite past papers and Principal Examiners' reports being in the public domain and other support mechanisms available, large numbers of candidates seem ill-prepared for the examination. Particularly noticeable at this series were limited spreadsheet skills.

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; this would certainly facilitate the marking activity. Of some concern was the number of centres submitting photocopies of their candidates' work rather than the originals; this is not acceptable in the context of this examination.

There were five tasks to be completed by candidates based on a fictional event, a Winter Sports Holiday to take place in February 2013. Many candidates could have secured higher marks – and a pass grade - by following and carrying out the specific instructions of the paper.

Section A

Task 1:

Candidates were required to search the internet and find the height above sea level of Wengen in Switzerland. The information 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 height 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 retrieved figures and source used; thus securing all 4 of the marks available.

A considerable number of 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; a surprising number misspelt Wengen which impacted on the retrieved result. It was pleasing to note the low number of candidates recording the search engine as the source at this window.

Areas for improvement and development:

- reading the task and instructions carefully
- providing the requisite evidence
- differentiating between a search engine and a web page.

Section B

Task 2:

A spreadsheet was provided to the candidates in connection with task 2. The spreadsheet supplied details of snowfall in Wengen over the past five winters. The main requirements of the task were to edit the contents of a specific cell; carry out an addition; calculate an average and devise a chart representing the calculated total snowfall. Although some candidates scored extremely well on this task, as mentioned there were innumerable examples of limited spreadsheet skills.

All but a very few of the candidates identified the correct cell and effected the necessary change of value; thus securing both 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 entirely; very few candidates changed the wrong cell value.

Tasks 2(b) and 2(c) involved using formula 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 can gain in these sections.

The lack of formula views disadvantaged innumerable candidates. Most of those candidates who did produce a formula printout evidenced the addition required in 2b. It is disappointing to note the very large numbers of candidates still using $=B5+C5+D5$ etc rather than $=SUM(B5:F5)$. In most cases where a formula printout was included there was evidence of replication, however often one or more of the formulae were truncated – this was particularly noticeable with the $=B5+C5+D5$ approach. The candidates were asked to use a formula in column G to calculate the **Total** snowfall and then insert a suitable heading for the column. The vast majority of candidates who attempted to insert snowfall in their heading failed to copy and spell it correctly.

Calculation of the average in (c) undoubtedly proved the most problematic area of this task; very many candidates did not attempt 2(c) at all. Again the majority of the marks were derived from the formula view and without this candidates are seriously disadvantaged.

Where formulae were included, there was a wide variety of approaches used to the task. Some candidates used the correct formula $=AVERAGE(B7:B9)$ and thus secured all three marks. Others selected the wrong range eg B5:B10. There were a few candidates with inefficient formulae eg adding the cells and dividing by 3. Of those candidates who did not include a formula printout, a considerable number did show the correct value in the specified cell. As mentioned above, where a formula printout was included there was usually evidence of replication but often one or more of the formulae were truncated.

As at previous exams, a surprisingly large number of candidates ignored task 2(d) altogether; did not include any formatting whatsoever and thereby failed to secure any of the marks available. Despite a specific instruction to format the average snowfall as whole numbers, large numbers of candidates simply ignored this and retained the decimal places generated by the formula. Options for other formatting included adding borders and enhancing the main, sub or column headings. Some borders were included, though often haphazard, but there were few thoughtful examples of bold, italics or larger fonts for the headings. There was an over-dependence on the use of colour fills to enhance rows of figures.

2(e) required candidates to create a chart from their calculated total snowfall values. This was attempted by the majority.

Overall this task was reasonably well done, the majority of candidates securing 3 or 4 of the available 7 marks. Only a handful of candidates scored full marks on this task.

Large numbers of pie charts and line graphs were presented rather than the expected bar/column chart. Selecting the correct data proved problematic for many; a significant number of candidates included all the data rather than the single set of calculated values. Frequently candidates omitted a title and those included were often ill conceived, incomplete or inappropriate. The vast majority of candidates failed to include one or both of the axes labels. Very few of the candidates secured the fitness for purpose mark with examples of superfluous legends; blank rows/columns; spelling and grammar errors and/or other errors/omissions frequently encountered.

Areas for improvement and development:

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

Task 3:

For task 3(a), candidates were asked to produce a presentation promoting the Winter Sports Holiday using both provided and sourced information. They were required to include the text from the provided file InformationNov12L1; incorporate images from the ImagesNov12L1 file and include the height above sea level found in Task 1. The majority of candidates did this task extremely well, securing a good mark overall.

Few candidates omitted this task entirely. Most used the expected presentation software but there were a surprising number – entire centres – where word processed presentations were submitted. Most candidates secured the mark for producing four slides only although there were one or two examples of 10/11 page presentations.

Many candidates ignored the instruction to print with two slides per page and large numbers failed to include the logo on every slide.

The majority of candidates incorporated the date, mentioned Wengen and included the full contact details along with carrying forward the value retrieved in Task A. A small number of candidates retained the brackets and/or parts of the instructive text from the information file rather than replacing it entirely.

Innumerable candidates failed to follow the instruction to include an image on each slide; many having slides devoid of images entirely or, conversely, more than one image per slide. A surprising number included the wind surfer.

Many of the Title slides were poorly devised and presented, little thought having been given to the purpose of the opening slide. Some candidates repeated content and/or added their own to the detriment of the resultant slide.

The labels Slide 2, Slide 3, etc were retained by a few and a surprising number of candidates devised their own content for slides 2, 3 and 4. Chunks of text from the internet were frequently included and some candidates re-wrote the provided text file to devise post-holiday presentations.

There were a few instances of images overlapping text and distorted images but, in the main, the insertion/manipulation of images was very well done.

It was pleasing that the use of Word Art was seldom seen and most candidates retained a consistent font style throughout their presentations. There were issues of inconsistent font sizes within and across the slides where candidates had perhaps not noticed the automatic adjustments made by the software.

Most, though not all, of the chosen layouts were suitable; there were few reported instances of squashed text or empty areas of white space.

Unfortunately few candidates secured the fitness for purpose mark due to one or other of uncorrected errors; inappropriate content; incorrectly split bullets; hyphenation or line breaks, etc.

Areas for improvement and development:

- following instructions in respect of incorporating provided and sourced material
- checking for fitness of audience and purpose
- checking for accuracy of content (eg split bullets).

Task 3(b) required candidates to make their presentation 'read only' and provide a screenshot to show that they had done so. This task was omitted entirely by large numbers of candidates and poorly done by many others. Changes and updates to software appear to be having a significant impact on the way candidates are attempting to make documents read only. There were lots of variations on the approach taken to this 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 and/or carry the process to its conclusion.

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 presentation as an attachment to Imogen at Oakdean Parent Support Group. 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 word processed documents being submitted for this task than in the past but still examples of personal email accounts being used.

Most candidates 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; very few candidates securing this mark.

Frequently candidates failed to include both elements in their message – ie mention the attachment **and** ask that its suitability be checked. Some of the language/tone of the messages was totally inappropriate and out of context; there were omitted/superfluous salutations and complimentary closes and regularly 'Hi Imogen' was used.

Areas for improvement and development:

- use of subject line and choice of subject
- devising appropriate message
- language and tone of message

Task 5:

Task 5 required candidates to create a new folder called **Oakdean** and move their presentation into the new folder; providing a screen shot showing this had been done.

Although this task was omitted entirely by a surprising number of candidates most secured both marks available. Large numbers of candidates misspelt Oakdean.

Many of the screen shots were 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.

Pass mark for FST01

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	34
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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