

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

Functional Skills ICT
Level 1 (FST01)

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Introduction

The examinations for the functional skills specification are now well established. This paper was aligned with all previous papers in respect of layout, content, order of tasks and degree of difficulty. Despite numerous past papers and Principal Examiners' reports being in the public domain, large numbers of candidates seem ill-prepared for the examination.

It is clear that candidates continue to 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.

There were five tasks to be completed by candidates based on a fictional event, a sale of computer equipment 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 within the paper.

Section A

Task 1: Internet Research

Candidates were required to search the internet and find the address, including postcode, of the Warwickshire Exhibition Centre. 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 address 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 the complete address and source used; thus securing all 4 of the marks available. As in previous series, many 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.

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: Spreadsheet

A spreadsheet was provided to the candidates in connection with task 2. The spreadsheet supplied details of items, quantities and prices of equipment to be disposed of by YKA Computers. The main requirements of the task were to add an extra item; carry out a multiplication; sort the information into alphabetical order of equipment type and devise a chart representing the calculated sale income. Although some candidates scored well on this task, there were innumerable examples of apparently limited spreadsheet skills.

The majority of candidates affected the necessary entry of the additional item required in task 2(a) - though not always accurately. There were innumerable examples of marks lost because of 'Flash Drive' or 'Flashdrive' being keyed in instead of 'Flash drive' as given and/or 'Kingstone', 'kingston' or similar instead of 'Kingston' as given. There were however few instances of the numeric values being incorrect.

Task 2(b) involved using a formula to multiply quantity by price and generate a sale income figure. All the marks for this task were derived from the formula view of the spreadsheet. As is often the case, it was this 'formula' part 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 accessible. The lack of formula views disadvantaged innumerable candidates. Most of those candidates who did produce a formula printout evidenced the multiplication required in 2b. It is disappointing to note the very large numbers of candidates still using inefficient formulae such as =SUM(C4*D4). Additionally, at this series, =PRODUCT was frequently used. In most cases where a formula printout was included there was evidence of replication.

Sorting the information as required in task 2(c) was very well done and most candidates secured both marks available. Task 2(c) included the instruction "Make sure the information is clear and easy to read". This incorporates formatting of the finished spreadsheet, including removing truncation, and is an integral part of every functional skills exam within the spreadsheet task.

A surprisingly large number of candidates either ignored the instruction altogether or failed to understand its significance; had truncated data, did not include any formatting whatsoever and thereby failed to secure any of the marks available. Where formatting was included this was limited to bold headings and borders. There was an over-dependence on the use of colour fills to enhance rows of figures.

2(d) required candidates to create a chart from their calculated sale income values. This was attempted by the majority. This task was not done at all well at this series. Most candidates scored 2 or 3 marks only. Only a handful of candidates scored full marks on this task.

Large numbers of pie charts were presented rather than the expected bar/column chart. Selecting the correct data proved problematic for some with several candidates including 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; sp and g errors and/or other errors/omissions frequently encountered.

Areas for improvement and development:

- accuracy of data entry
- 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: Presentation of Information

For task 3, candidates were asked to produce a flyer advertising the forthcoming sale of equipment using both provided and sourced information. They were required to include the text from the provided file FlyerTextJan13L1; incorporate images from the ImagesJan13L1 file and include the address and postcode of the Warwickshire Exhibition Centre found in Task 1. A plan indicating placement of content was provided and it was expected that candidates would use this.

This task proved outside the scope of many candidates and large numbers failed to score well. Very few candidates followed the provided plan. A few candidates omitted this task entirely but most used appropriate software although there were examples of using presentation software. Most candidates secured the mark for using one page of A4 portrait although there were some examples of text and/or images being truncated.

Although omitted entirely by some, the logo was usually incorporated but not always placed at the top of the flyer as would be expected. Despite the opportunity to copy and paste it from the provided text file, the title "Computer Equipment Bargains!" was not always accurately inserted as given. Most candidates enhanced the title in some way and the use of WordArt was seldom seen.

Very large numbers of candidates failed to select text from the provided file appropriately. The sentence about ice cream sales was included by most and often mention of Warwickshire Exhibition Centre itself was omitted entirely yet the address – found in Task 1 – was included as apparently random content.

The provided plan stipulated a "Table for items on offer, prices and images". Very few of the expected multi-column tables were seen; this skill seems outside the scope of the majority. Some structure was expected for the presentation of the items, prices and related images but this was seldom the case. Insertion of the correct three images was the norm but these were not always located with the related item/price and often totally different in size. Although there were some excessively large and distorted logos, most of the logos were appropriately sized with the proportions maintained.

It was pleasing that the use of Word Art was seldom seen and most candidates choose appropriate fonts. Very few candidates enhanced the key information – date, time and place – in any way and few additional formatting techniques were incorporated other than the occasional page border and/or centring of text.

Unfortunately very few candidates secured the fitness for purpose mark.

Areas for improvement and development:

- following instructions in respect of incorporating provided and sourced material
- checking for fitness of audience and purpose
- checking for appropriateness and accuracy of content .

Task 4: Communication – preparing an email

Task 4 required candidates to email their task 3 flyer as an attachment to Andy Fleming at YKA Computers. 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 a few examples of personal email accounts being used.

The majority of candidates scored reasonably well on this task. Whilst the correct attachment was usually apparent and the message devised appropriately, there were weaknesses in respect of insertion of the correct email address, completion of the subject line and inappropriate tone/language.

Many candidates transposed the 132 in the email address and included afleming123. Subject lines are often omitted entirely and frequently the language/tone of the messages was totally inappropriate and out of context; there were omitted/superfluous salutations and complimentary closes and regularly 'Hi' or 'Hey' was used.

Areas for improvement and development:

- accurate entry of provided email address
- use of subject line and choice of subject
- devising appropriate message
- language and tone of message.

Task 5: Using ICT

Task 5(a) required candidates to produce a screen shot showing the stored created/edited files. Of those candidates submitting this task, most secured both marks available. Many of the screen shots were inappropriately sized and difficult to decipher and there were examples of inappropriate file names eg doc1.

Areas for improvement and development:

- using meaningful file names at all times
- reading the task and instructions carefully
- providing the requisite evidence
- producing screen shots of a sufficient size to enable them to be read.

Task 5(b) required candidates to select the 'strongest' of two suggested passwords and give a reason for their choice. The password and reason were to be entered on the Responses document which was printed as part of the candidate's evidence.

Most candidates identified 'JO4nn4' as the strongest password but often the reason provided related to perceived weaknesses in the alternative (ykacomputers) rather than the mixture of lower case and upper case, letters and numbers in the password chosen. Many candidates cited 'ykacomputers' as the strongest password with the reason it was easy to remember.

Areas for improvement and development:

- devising passwords
- techniques for security of passwords.

Pass mark for FST01

Maximum mark	50
Pass mark	35
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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