

Principal Examiner Feedback

November 2012

Functional Skills ICT
Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

This was the eleventh series of the Level 2 Functional Skills ICT test. Many of the issues that have been noted in previous series are still evident in responses during this series. 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 particularly for spreadsheet tasks. A pass in the test is intended to be approximately equivalent to the Grade B standard in GCSE. Responses from candidates in this examination do not always reflect this standard.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should only have access to the internet 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. There is also evidence from pupil responses that Centres are not setting up new accounts for each series and data files from previous series are available and that items in email clients are not cleared before the start of the examination week.

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.

It is important that Centres provide the appropriate facilities for candidates to complete all tasks within the specification. 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. Further guidance on email and internet access is available from Edexcel if required.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a scenario about a cottage rental company linked with the annual Rhubarb Festival.

Task 1 – Internet Research

Candidates were asked to research the internet for information about the Rhubarb Festival.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the information in Task 1a. They were asked to take a screenshot of the search engine, clearly showing the search criteria. Many candidates seem unaware of what constitutes the search engine and failed to show the full page and often search criteria were not evidenced clearly. Several candidates produced a screen shot of the Wakefield Council web page (or similar) rather than the search engine page.

Candidates should be reminded that they should check the printout to ensure that the necessary evidence is clear and easy to read. Most candidates scored marks for correctly obtaining the required information.

Candidates were asked to obtain the dates of the Rhubarb Festival in 2013. Most candidates correctly identified the dates as Friday 22 February to Sunday 24 February. A small number indicated that the dates were yet to be confirmed. However the web page quoted by these candidates did include the actual dates. At Level 2, candidates are expected to be diligent in searching out information. It will not always be found in the first few words of the web pages.

Areas for improvement and development:

- understanding the term "search engine"
- understanding the term "search criteria"
- producing screenshots which show the required information in a readable manner
- ensuring that information is current and up-to-date
- copying website addresses accurately and completely
- acknowledging appropriate sources of information.

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

There were 5 sub-tasks for the Spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with data about cottages for rent.

They were first asked to format the sheet so that it was clear and easy to understand. Candidates need to be taught that this generally means ensuring that all data is readable (i.e. not truncated), using appropriate number formats (e.g. date/time or currency or number of decimal places), applying suitable font styles to make headings stand out and using appropriate borders and/or shading to make the sheet easier to read. Vertical shading of data does not often fulfil these criteria since most spreadsheets are designed for horizontal reading of the data. Many candidates scored only one or two of the three marks available with a large number of candidates failing to format the **Weekly Rental** column as currency.

The second sub-task was to sort the data into alphabetical order of **Cottage Name**. Most candidates completed this task successfully. However there were a significant number who did not sort the whole table but only the first column.

In Task 2c, candidates were asked to calculate the **Charge** based on the more expensive properties being offered at a discount. A surprisingly large number of candidates did not attempt to use the IF function. At Level 2, candidates are expected to produce efficient formulae for calculation not manual entry. Many therefore also were unable to demonstrate replication skills since they had not used appropriate formulae to calculate whether a discount was applicable. Many candidates also used the inappropriate SUM function in calculating the charge in column G.

In Task 2d, candidates were requested to filter the data to show only the rows for cottages with 2 bedrooms and a satellite TV. This does not involve deleting other information or re-sorting the list. Most candidates identified the correct records but did not clearly demonstrate the filtering of the table by showing row headers.

In Task 2e, candidates were asked to produce a chart to show the charge for the cottages with 2 bedrooms and satellite TV. Many charts were suitably presented but as has often been the case in previous series, titles and axis labels are poorly done. There were also several instances where an unnecessary legend was included. Several candidates lost marks by including additional columns or producing the inappropriate pie chart.

Areas for improvement and development:

- formatting a spreadsheet
 - currency
 - decimal places
 - appropriate borders and shading
 - word wrapping
 - appropriate row heights and column widths
 - use of text formatting to enhance visual clarity e.g. bold, italics, font size
- using formulae
 - simple formulae using arithmetic symbols (+, -, / and *)
 - using functions e.g. SUM, IF and VLOOKUP where appropriate
 - using efficient formulae (eg using SUM for adding up a range of cells)
 - using absolute and relative cell references
- sorting and filtering
 - on one column
 - on multiple columns (secondary sorting)
 - expanding selection to include full table in a sort
 - using appropriate filters to show selected data from a table
- charts
 - pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts with one or more series of data
 - understanding the appropriateness of different chart types
 - inserting a suitable title on the chart
 - using legends where appropriate
 - axes labels where relevant
- printing
 - printing in data view
 - printing in formula view
 - adding footers with candidate details
 - fitting a spreadsheet to one page
 - making sure that colour schemes used are still readable when printed in monochrome.

Task 3 – Presentation of information

Task 3 usually brings together information from the internet research and the spreadsheet tasks to produce a document aimed at a particular audience. Often the candidates will be expected to also select text and images to produce an integrated document.

In this series, candidates were asked to produce an A5 portrait advert for the cottage rental company. Candidates were provided with a text file from which they needed to select information relevant to the advert. They were provided with a set of images from which a suitable selection was expected. They were also required to include results from their searches in Task 1 and information from the spreadsheet. Incorrect responses from these other tasks is not penalised in this task. Most candidates produced a document which matched most of the stated requirements. Some candidates included text and images which were not relevant.

Candidates are expected to present the information so that it is fit for purpose. This will usually involve choice of appropriate fonts and styles so that documents are consistent and show a professional looking layout. Fewer candidates are using inappropriate graphic text in business documents. Often images and text were truncated because insufficient care had been taken in their placement and checking the layout.

As a second part of the Task 3, they were asked to create a folder for the advert and move the advert into this new folder. They are expected at this level to be able to name files and folders appropriately. Many candidates give their folders and/or files names which relate to the examination rather than the scenario. They are generally expected to maintain the concept of the scenario so folder names such as 'Exam work' are not appropriate at this level.

Many screenshots again demonstrated poor understanding of the requirement that text should be readable so that work can be credited.

Some Centres had not prepared the facilities for the examination correctly since screenshots showed evidence of work from normal classroom activity such as folders for Year 7 and Year 8 work. This is a breach of the regulations and centres are advised that this may result in awards being withheld from candidates.

Areas for improvement and development:

- selection of appropriate software for producing an on-screen or paper-based presentation of information
- integration of information from a variety of sources including text, images, tables and graphs
- consideration of suitability in selection of text/images for an audience and purpose
- use of formatting techniques such as appropriate:
 - text enhancements – bold, italic, underline, font sizes
 - selection of font styles
 - selection of suitable font sizes for a presentation
 - hyphenation
 - text wrap and alignment
 - checking for consistency in font sizes and styles
- checking for truncation of text and/or images
- checking that all the criteria stated in the question paper have been met
- consideration of fitness for purpose
- consideration of audience.

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

Candidates were asked to prepare an email with a suitable subject and an attachment.

Several candidates also do not check that email addresses are correctly entered. Examiners continue to find that email messages are not suitable in tone or content. Often the messages are not spell-checked and grammar-checked and the tone is not suitable for a formal message. For example “Hi” and “Hey guys” were considered to be inappropriate ways to address email messages for business purposes.

As mentioned previously, some examiners report that there are still several centres where there is evidence that candidates are accessing the internet during this task and using online accounts - often these are the candidates’ personal accounts. This is unacceptable and a breach of the code of practice for this examination. Candidates who access online accounts may face disqualification for these breaches. Examiners also noted that some candidates seemed to be using an existing account with several (often personal) contacts already in the address book and messages in the inbox/outbox/sent boxes.

Some examiners have reported that candidates at some centres do not appear to have access to an offline mail client and produce ‘emails’ in word processing software. Since these do not provide suitable evidence of attachments or ability to use email, centres which do not provide the candidates with offline email clients are penalising their candidates unnecessarily.

There are many ways of producing the evidence using offline account systems – for example the setting up of Outlook or Outlook Express accounts as part of the examination account used by the candidate. Centres are reminded that the accounts set up for the test should be cleared of previous contents. Further guidance is available on the Frequently Asked Questions section of the Edexcel Functional Skills website.

Areas for improvement and development:

- selection of appropriate offline email client software
- careful copying of text from the question paper especially email addresses
- attachment of files to an email
- using a suitable subject line for an email
- using appropriate language for business email messages
- ensuring that screen shot evidence is readable.

Task 5: Using ICT

Often responses to Task 5 are usually entered at the end of the Responses document used for Task 1. Many candidates print out and include multiple copies of this document. Some candidates produced 4 copies of the document – one each for Task 1a, 1b and 5a and 5b. This is unnecessary. A single completed copy is all that is required. Instructions to print at Task 1 are included in case candidates fail to complete the full examination.

In Task 5 for this series, candidates were asked about the dangers of downloading an email attachment and alternative methods of online collaboration. Most candidates scored well on this task. Many of those who lost marks did so because their answers were too vague or incomplete. For example downloading or buying anti-virus software is not sufficient in that the software needs to be installed to be of use. Many candidates did not realise that online collaboration requires that the documents can be shared or exchanged.

Areas for improvement and development:

- understanding the requirements for staying safe online
- understand methods of online collaboration

Centres may be interested to know that Edexcel will be introducing an on-demand version of the Functional Skills assessments in 2013. Further details can be obtained from the Edexcel website.

Pass mark for FST02

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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