

Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2013

Functional Skills ICT
Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

This was the twelfth 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 hotel in the Scottish Highlands.

Task 1 – Internet Research

Candidates were asked to research the internet for information about the Glenfinnan Monument.

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 'Wikipedia' page (or similar) rather than the search engine ('Google' or 'Bing' or equivalent) page. A number of candidates then gave the Google website address rather than the address for the page about the monument.

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 though examiners reported that occasionally candidates had been too vague in their answers to the question about what the monument commemorated. Several candidates incorrectly identified Sir Robert McAlpine as the engineer of the road.

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 minibus travel from the hotel to various attractions in the Scottish Highlands.

The first sub-task was to calculate the cost of fuel for the minibus trips. Candidates were given the hint to indicate the format of the formula. Most candidates managed to make use of this hint to provide a workable formula. Unfortunately the majority failed to realise that absolute cell references for the 'Price per Litre' and 'Miles per Litre' were more appropriate and did not gain the second mark for this task.

A simple conditional formula was required in the second sub-task. It is still surprising that so many candidates do not show evidence of being able to create formulae containing the IF function. A large number of candidates manually inserted the values – ignoring the instruction in the paper to 'use a spreadsheet function'.

The third sub-task required candidates to calculate the total profit from the series of trips. The data file provided had column headings for Income and Profit and a cell labelled with Total Profit. These were felt to provide sufficient support for candidates at level 2. Most candidates correctly calculated the Income, Profit and Total Profit but lost marks due to inefficient formulae. It is the expectation that candidates at Level 2 will not use the SUM function inappropriately [eg =SUM(F4-D4)]. It is often surprising that candidates will use the SUM function as in this example but then not use it when it is appropriate as in the calculation of the total.

These three sub-tasks required the printing of the formula view of the spreadsheet. It is very disappointing to see so often the majority of candidates at a few centres unable to produce a formula view of the spreadsheet. Centres should warn candidates that annotating the spreadsheet with the formula will not gain the marks for the formula. (Some candidates type in a separate location on a data view words such as 'The formula I used for this was ...'). Many candidates at a small number of centres provided several screenshots of the spreadsheet so that the formula could be credited from the formula bar. However this is not recommended and is unnecessary when the formula view is so easily produced. Candidates should also be reminded to ensure that the full formulae are visible. Examiners report that often the correct formula is used (as seen from the results in the data view) but the full formula is not available for assessment.

The fourth sub-task was to format the spreadsheet appropriately. Many candidates did not gain many marks for this task as they did not format currency values consistently and did not enhance the spreadsheet to make it easier to understand. Appropriate borders and shading and enhancements to column titles were the expected methods of producing a clear and easy to understand spreadsheet.

Candidates were then asked to produce a chart to show the fuel cost for each attraction. Most candidates produced the expected bar/column chart with the appropriate data. However a large number of candidates fail to produce appropriate titles and axis labels. The more successful candidates will use the wording of the question to provide a suitable title. Many candidates seemed to rely too much on the default title provided by the software ('Fuel Cost') and so do not include key words from the question ('Attraction'). Many candidates display an unnecessary legend for a chart with a single series of data.

Areas for improvement and development: (not all these were assessed on this occasion)

- 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, MAX, MIN 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 or sorting within a sort)
 - 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
 - axis labels where relevant
- printing
 - printing in data view
 - printing in formula view
 - ensuring that all formulae are visible in a print
 - 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 and text and images from the data files to produce a document aimed at a particular audience. Often the candidates will also be expected to select appropriate text and images to produce an integrated document.

In this series, candidates were asked to produce the inside pages for a folded leaflet. The stem of the question indicated that the front and back page had already been produced on one A4 sheet. This indication was intended to guide the candidates to producing a two or four column document.

The content of the pages to be produced were identified in the paper. Most candidates were able to include the correct information as credit was given even if the candidates had incorrectly identified the three most profitable attractions.

Many candidates lost marks because they did not use the title as provided in the data file. Where such titles are provided it is expected that they will be copied accurately.

Candidates were allowed some leeway in editing the text about the attractions but it is expected that the text will still make sense. Some candidates lost marks because they edited the text about Glenfinnan and did not include the three items of information from task 1.

Several candidates attempted to fit all the text and images from the data files into the document. This often meant that their product was either squashed on to one page or spread over two or more pages.

Candidates were required to add their own text to encourage guests to use the minibus service. Several candidates did not include appropriate text – often failing to mention the minibus or not including any text. Some examiners noted that many candidates seemed unable to construct simple sentences. At Level 2, it is expected that candidates will be able to use the proofing tools within the software to produce documents which are largely error free.

Many candidates also lost marks due to poor layout skills with images seemingly randomly arranged on the page with no apparent connection to the text. This often resulted in candidates losing fitness for purpose marks.

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 appropriately:
 - 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 the printout 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

As usual, candidates were asked to prepare an email with a suitable subject and an attachment. The quality of work for this task, particularly in the copying of email addresses and the content of the message is too often below the standard expected at Level 2.

Several candidates do not appear to check that email addresses are correctly entered. Since incorrect email addresses will not reach their intended recipient, this is a critical aspect of functionality.

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. The expectation at Level 2 is an appropriate greeting followed by an accurate, concise message which meets the criteria in the question paper.

Many examiners continue to comment on candidates who fail to gain marks because the screenshot evidence provided is not readable. Candidates are expected to check the printout of their work to ensure that examiners will be able to read the contents – especially email addresses, subject lines and attachment details. This is mentioned in the evidence box on the paper.

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
- accurate copying of 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. 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 questions about suitable backup media and changing system settings to meet a user's needs. Many of those who lost marks did so because their answers were too vague or incomplete. Adding additional hardware was not an accepted response to the question about changing system settings.

Areas for improvement and development:

- ability to identify ICT problems and respond appropriately
- ability to manage media storage.

Pass mark for FST02

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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