

Examiners' Report

November 2013

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

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 candidates are not adequately 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.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should only have access to the internet during the first 15 minutes of the test. Relevant members of staff in a small number of Centres appear to be unaware of this stipulation and facilities for offline email are not being made available to candidates for the purpose of this test. There are still some centres where the use of students' personal email accounts (e.g. Hotmail, Yahoo mail etc) is still evident.

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. Some screenshots produced during the test show that a small number of candidates are using their normal desktop and documents folders. It is also important that data files should be copied into each candidate's user area before the start of the examination window.

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. 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 Gym.

Task 1 – Internet Research

This task is generally well completed by candidates.

In this series, candidates were asked to use the internet to find the date of the 2014 London Marathon and information about the first running of the event.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the relevant information. However, as in previous series, candidates lost marks for failing to either screenshot the search engine page, submit screenshots which are readable, or by giving inappropriate acknowledgement of the source of the information.

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
- 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 two worksheets; the first related to target heart rates and the second related to a fitness challenge.

Candidates did not do well on the first sub-task which required the use of absolute cell referencing to calculate target heart rates of 70% and 85% for a range of age groups. Only a small number made use of absolute cell referencing and there was, in general, little knowledge shown of how to calculate a percentage value using the difference between two given values.

The second sub-task was to calculate the total of four values. Surprisingly at Level Two many candidates used the inefficient formula =B4+C4+D4+E4; at this level the expectation is that candidates will use the most efficient formula for any calculation. Candidates did however generally achieve a mark for replication.

The next sub-task was to use an IF statement to identify gym members who had achieved a particular standard. This was a relatively straightforward task compared to other series, however there was evidence to suggest that some centres had not practiced the use of IF statements. Many candidates lost a mark for failing to identify the need for the inclusion of '=' in a statement where the comparison is '80 or more'.

Evidence for these three sub-tasks was required in a formula view printout, as in previous series these were not produced by a significant number of candidates. Centres should inform candidates that a spreadsheet annotated with the formula will not gain the marks. 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 clearly visible i.e. not truncated and legible.

In the next sub-task candidates were required to sort the table in descending order; a significant number either misread the instruction or did not understand the term 'descending' and sorted the table in ascending order. However they were credited for the follow up mark for sorting the whole table. A disappointing number failed to gain marks for enhancing the spreadsheets and many failed to remove truncation.

The final sub-task was as usual to produce a chart; in this instance a bar / column chart. While the majority did manage to produce the correct type of chart and use the correct data range, they failed to gain further marks for the inclusion of a suitable title and data labels. Only a small minority gained the fitness for purpose marks, the main issues being incorrect spelling and capitalisation and also failing to provide the chart on a separate worksheet.

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 cell contents are not truncated in printouts
 - 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 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. Candidates will also be expected to select appropriate text and images to produce an integrated document.

The task in this series was to produce a newsletter and, in general, the candidates scored well showing a good understanding of layout and content.

Unfortunately a minority lost marks by not reading the instructions carefully, produced documents which were not formatted into two columns and including more than two images.

Candidates often lost marks for their use of images in the document. Centres should encourage candidates to include logos which are smaller than other images and ensure that images do not dominate the page, detracting from the text. Often the images were truncated or overlapped text and several candidates attempted to incorporate the logo into the title.

As is usual with this qualification, candidates were expected to be able to select appropriate items from the data files, unfortunately many made no attempt at selection and included the 'Nutrition for Children' text.

Marks were often lost for inconsistent fonts in either body text or sub-headings, however it was pleasing to see a reduction in the use of Word Art in documents.

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

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

As in previous series it was clear that candidates have not checked 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 or grammar-checked and the tone used is not suitable for a formal message. Candidates continue to include “Hi” and “Hey” as salutations, these are considered to be inappropriate ways to address business email messages to unknown contacts. The expectation at Level 2 is an appropriate greeting followed by an accurate, concise message which meets the criteria in the question paper.

Once more candidates failed 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:

- o 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

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 this series, candidates were asked questions about methods of reducing the risks of viruses and others making unauthorised changes to documents .

Many candidates did not gain full marks for methods to reduce the risks of viruses as they referred to not opening emails from unknown senders, rather than not opening attachments. Many gained at least one mark for the second part of the question, however many gave vague responses about security settings.

Areas for improvement and development:

- ability to identify ICT problems and respond appropriately

Centres may be interested to know that Edexcel have introduced an on-demand version of the Functional Skills assessments. Candidates complete the assessment in the same way as the paper based version except that work is submitted electronically. Further details can be obtained from Edexcel.

Pass Marks

Pass marks for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

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