

Examiners' Report

March 2014

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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Publications Code FC037928

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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 have been poorly prepared for the test.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should have access to the internet only 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 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. 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 ALL items in email clients are not cleared before the start of the examination week. Centres are 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. Centres must 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.

Candidates should be advised to submit their work in the correct manner with pages in the correct order or treasury tagged to the Cover Sheet as directed so that it is easy for the examiner to access the work.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a scenario about a fictional car hire organisation.

Task 1:

This task was generally well completed by candidates. In this series, candidates were asked to use the internet to find the speed limit in France and some facts about the Channel Tunnel.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the appropriate information. Where candidates lose marks, it tends to be for failure to screenshot the search engine page, submitting screenshots which are unreadable, and giving inappropriate acknowledgement of the source of the information. Candidates need to be reminded that "Google" and "Bing" are considered to be directories and it is not really appropriate to name these or derivatives as the source URL for information.

At Level 2, candidates might expect to be required to search web pages for the responses to questions. 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:

There were five sub-tasks for the spreadsheet activity. Candidates were presented with data about rentals for the organisation. Candidates were asked to calculate the daily insurance rate using a conditional function (e.g. =IF). They were then asked to use a LOOKUP function to enter the daily hire rate using the table of data on the second worksheet. The final calculation was to work out the total charge for each customer. They were then asked to sort the data using a primary and secondary sort.

The use of appropriate functions continues to cause candidates problems. Examiners report that weaker candidates often enter values without using any formulae or functions. Where they have entered formulae, these are generally acceptable but often fail to use absolute cell references (such as the lookup table) where these are necessary for facilitating replication. There were some candidates who lost marks because they did not apply the conditional statement correctly and ended up with the values reversed (cheaper insurance for the younger customers). It was also noted that the candidates at a number of centres used a named range for the lookup table. Where appropriate evidence was available these candidates were credited with the marks available.

In calculating the total charge, the formula required that the daily insurance and daily hire rate be added before multiplication by the number of days. Many candidates lost marks because they did not bracket the addition and so calculated the incorrect value. A number of candidates included the =SUM function, creating an inefficient formula.

These three sub-tasks required the printing of the formula view of the spreadsheet. It is very disappointing to see how often the majority of candidates at some centres are unable to produce a formula view of the spreadsheet. Centres should inform 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 cannot be seen to enable full credit to be given.

The sorting of the data in the customer table also caused problems for many candidates. Often the table was sorted on first name only, rather than the requested sort on last name followed by sorting on first name within that sort. A small number of candidates sorted only the first two columns in the table so that the data became mixed up.

Candidates were asked to produce a chart to show the total charge for customers. 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 used 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 ('Total Charge') and so do not include key words from the question (e.g. 'customer'). Many candidates included all the data rather than just the requested total charge.

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:

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 a newsletter for the car rental agency using the text file, the Images folder and answers obtained from the internet research.

Most candidates were able to insert the required information in appropriate locations. Some very attractive newsletters were produced but, sadly, did not gain full marks because they did not include all the required elements. Candidates should be advised to check carefully that they have fulfilled the requirements identified in the question paper. 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 with no apparent connection to the text. Often the images were truncated or overlapped text. Also it was observed by examiners that the logo image dominated the newsletter with the other images much reduced in size. These issues often resulted in candidates losing fitness for purpose marks.

As is usual with this qualification, candidates are expected to be able to select appropriate items from the data file.

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 document
 - 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:

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" are considered to be inappropriate ways to address business email messages. The expectation at Level 2 is an appropriate greeting followed by an accurate, concise message which meets the criteria in the question paper.

It was also noted by examiners that several candidates did not read the question paper correctly and attached the newsletter and requested feedback on the quality of this document. It would seem that such candidates have become so accustomed to attaching the document from Task 3 (which has been the case in several recent series), that they failed to notice that the question required attachment of the spreadsheet.

Many examiners continue to comment on candidates who fail to gain marks because the screenshot evidence provided is not legible. 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. Candidates are reminded of this in the evidence box on the question 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. 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 correct 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:

Often responses to Task 5 are entered at the end of the responses document used in 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 to create a named folder and move certain files into the new folder. They were then asked to answer a question about printer problems. There were many candidates who gained full marks in Task 5. Where candidates lost marks, it was often because they had not named the folder as given in the question paper or their answers to the printer issues were too vague or not appropriate.

Areas for improvement and development:

- ability to create and manage files and folders
- ability to identify ICT problems and respond appropriately.

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>

