Examiners' Report

Set 03

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
ICT Level 1 (ICT01)

EXAMINER'S REPORT TO CENTRES ON FUNCTIONAL SKILLS ICT LEVEL 1 – SET 03

This series was the third release of on-demand tests. The on-demand tests are designed to be of the same standard as the paper based series held during scheduled examination windows. The main variations between the tests result from the differences between printed and digital responses.

Many of the issues noted in the paper based series have been evident in responses during this Set 03 on-demand release. Reports from examiners indicate that there continues to be a number of centres where it appears that candidates have been poorly prepared for the test. A pass in the test is intended to be approximately equivalent to the Grade D standard in GCSE. Responses from candidates in this examination did not always reflect this standard.

It is a requirement of this test that candidates should have access to the internet **only** during the first 15 minutes of the test. A 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 evident. Centres need to ensure that candidates are aware that there could be serious consequences if they are found to be breaching the code of conduct. There is also evidence from pupil responses that centres are not setting up new accounts for each series, that data files from previous series are available and that items in email clients are not cleared before the start of the examination.

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 showed that a small number of candidates used 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.

It has also been noted by examiners that some centres are not printing out copies of the question paper before the examination. They are, instead, providing candidates with electronic copies of the question papers. This is not appropriate when the security of the examination is critical. It is the responsibility of the centre staff to maintain the integrity of the question paper before, during and after the test. The risk of a security breach is greater if candidates are permitted access to electronic copies of the question paper during the time they are allowed internet access in the test itself.

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 Pearson Edexcel if required.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a fictitious organisation called Chalks Community Centre.

Task 1 – Internet Research

This task was generally well completed by candidates. In this series, candidates were asked to use the internet to find the full address and postcode of Bowles Outdoor Centre in Kent.

Candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find the correct answer. Where candidates lost marks it was often for submitting a print out of the search results rather than the required screen shot of the search engine page showing the criteria entered. Many candidates submitted screen shots that were unreadable.

Areas for improvement and development:
- understanding the term "search engine"
- understanding the term "search criteria"
- producing screenshots that are legible and where the information can be read
- copying website addresses, not those of the search engine used, accurately and completely
- understanding the importance of reliability in relation to website information
- acknowledging appropriate sources of information.

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

In the spreadsheet task, candidates were required to calculate the sales of chocolate bars and the total income. In total, the task consisted of five parts. Candidates completing the on demand test benefitted from not being required to produce a separate formula view since examiners were able to open the spreadsheet and access incorporated formulae.

In part (a) the candidates were required to enter four (4) values on to the spreadsheet. Although some candidates transposed values along a single row, the majority secured all the marks available by correctly entering the given data.

In part (b) the candidates were asked to calculate the total sales for each chocolate bar using a formula and were expected to use =SUM function. Surprisingly, many candidates were unable to gain the mark for this task either because they did not use a function at all or used the =SUM function inappropriately. Additionally, within (b), candidates were required to insert a suitable heading for the column of total sales. 'Total' or 'Total Sales' were the preferred choice of the majority; some of the headings devised were cumbersome and many were incorrectly spelt or inappropriately capitalised.

In part (c) candidates were asked to calculate the income from sales for each chocolate bar. The candidates were expected to multiply the total sales calculated in (b) by the selling price provided to complete this part of the task. A hint identifying the basis and component parts of the formula to

be used was included in the question paper. Despite identifying the correct data, some candidates lost marks because they added rather than multiplied the two values. Large numbers of candidates utilised =SUM inefficiently within the multiplication. In this series, the replication feature was used well.

In part (d) candidates were asked to format the spreadsheet to make it clear and easy to understand. There were specific instructions to format two columns – G and H – as currency with 2 decimal places. Although many candidates scored well on this task, occasionally marks were lost because all values in the spreadsheet were formatted to currency. Formatting features such as bold or font enlargement were usually used consistently and well but borders and shading effects often appear randomly placed with little apparent thought to clarity and understanding.

In part (e) candidates were asked to create a chart using the total sales of each chocolate bar calculated in part (b) 8 data values. Whilst many candidates were able to produce the appropriate chart, some candidates selected incorrect data and often the entire spreadsheet was used. Irrespective of the data selected, many candidates lost marks due to the omission of axis labels and titles; prompts for these are provided in the question paper at Level 1.

Areas for improvement and development: (not all these were assessed on this occasion)
- inserting or amending given data values
- devising and inserting suitable column and row headings/labels
- using formulae
  - simple formulae using arithmetic symbols (+, -, / and *)
  - using functions e.g. SUM, AVERAGE, MAX, MIN where appropriate
  - using efficient formulae (e.g. correctly using the SUM function only for adding up a range of cells)
- formatting a spreadsheet
  - currency
  - decimal places
  - appropriate borders and shading
  - use of text formatting to enhance visual clarity e.g. bold, italics, font size
- charts
  - pie charts, column or bar charts with one or more series of data
  - correct selection of data
  - the appropriateness of different chart types
  - inserting a suitable title on the chart
  - using legends where appropriate
  - adding relevant axis labels.

Task 3 – Presentation of information

Task 3 brings together information from the internet research and sometimes a value from the spreadsheet task together with text and images from given data files to produce an integrated document aimed at a particular audience.

In part (a) candidates were asked to produce an A5 flyer using text and images selected from the data files together with the information from the research in Task 1. On this occasion, all aspects of layout and positioning of elements were at the discretion of the candidate. Many candidates lost marks because they did not check that they had met the requirements of the task by adjusting the document size and including all the correct items in suitable locations. For example, in this test many candidates omitted the title or devised their own and frequently the address of Bowles Outdoor Centre – retrieved from the internet in Task 1 – was located away from the name. Large numbers of candidates did not recognise the Community Centre logo within the image file and thus lost marks for both failing to include the logo and/or incorporating more than the one image expected. Although most candidates chose suitable images often these were cropped or distorted.

Areas for improvement and development: (not all these were assessed on this occasion)
- selection of appropriate software for producing an on-screen document or presentation
- production of documents on different page sizes and orientations
- integration of information from a variety of sources including text, images, spreadsheets and charts
- consideration of suitability in selection of images for an audience and purpose
- use of tables
- use of formatting techniques effectively:
  - text enhancements – bold, italic, underline, font sizes
  - selection of font styles
  - selection of suitable font sizes
  - bullets / numbering
  - hyphenation
  - text wrap and alignment
  - checking for consistency in font sizes and styles
- checking the document for truncation of text and/or images
- using software tools to check spelling and grammar
- checking that all the criteria stated in the question paper have been met
- devising a meaningful file name
- consideration of fitness for purpose
- consideration of audience.

Often responses to Task 3 and/or 5 need to be entered on the Responses document used in Task 1. In task part (b) at this series, candidates were given two suggested passwords that could be used to protect the flyer from editing. Candidates were asked to identify the strongest password of the

two and give a reason for their choice. Large numbers of candidates are clearly unsure about some of the 'theoretical' aspects of using ICT. Whilst most candidates chose the password expected, the reasons for its choice were often poorly thought out and written.

<u>Areas for improvement and development:</u> (not all these were assessed on this occasion)
- recognising aspects of 'strong' passwords, devising passwords
- understanding ways of protecting a document from change
- viruses and their prevention
- writing answers to questions that are clear in meaning.

Task 4 – Communication: preparing an email

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

A significant number of candidates do not appear to check that email addresses are entered correctly. Since incorrectly addressed emails 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 is far from suitable for a formal message. For example, "Hi" and "Hey" are considered inappropriate ways to address business email messages to unknown contacts. Candidates are expected to use 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 screen shot evidence provided is not readable. Candidates are expected to check the quality of their work to ensure that examiners will be able to read the contents. Candidates are reminded of this in the question paper guidance.

As mentioned above, examiners report that 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, such candidates are unnecessarily disadvantaged.

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 Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills website.

Areas for improvement and development:
- selection of appropriate <u>offline</u> 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

In this series, candidates were required to create a new folder called Bowles and move the flyer into the new folder. Examiners reported innumerable instances of incorrect spelling and capitalisation of the name of the folder created and many examples of incorrect contents within that folder.

Areas for improvement and development:
- accurate copying of folder name, including capitalisation
- ensuring folder content matches the question requirements.

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