

Examiners' Report

January 2016

Pearson Edexcel Functional Skills
ICT Level 2 (FST02)

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Introduction

There were fewer candidates entered for this series of the Functional Skills test than in previous series and the general standard of responses was higher than before. However, there are still some weak candidates who are unable to produce expected responses for the major tasks in the paper.

There were, as usual, five tasks to be completed during the test. These were based on a scenario about a poetry society and the Scottish poet, Robert Burns.

Task 1 – Internet Research

Candidates were asked to research the internet for an image of Robert Burns and information about him and his birthplace museum. Whilst candidates generally succeeded in using a search engine to find a suitable image in Task 1a, the weaker ones lost marks for not displaying the search engine in the screen shot, including a gallery of images and quoting the search engine as the source of the image. Candidates need to be made aware that the search engine is not usually the copyright owner of the image so it is inappropriate to quote the search engine as the URL.

In Task 1b, the candidates were asked to find the address and postcode of the Burns Birthplace Museum and the dates when he was born and died. Most candidates achieved full marks for this part of the test. Incorrect answers were due, generally, to mistyping the years such that, on occasion, it was suggested that he was only 10 years old when he died.

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
- copying carefully information gleaned from the internet (and other sources).

Task 2 – Spreadsheet

The spreadsheet work is generally the weakest task completed by candidates. There were five sub-tasks for the spreadsheet activity in this test. A smaller percentage of candidates than usual lost marks by not submitting a formula view of the spreadsheet. Candidates cannot gain credit for the formulae they use if the examiners cannot see the necessary evidence.

Candidates were presented with a worksheet that held the names and ages of the junior members of the poetry society. The candidates were asked to sort the data in alphabetical order. They were then asked to use a function to enter the annual subscription that depended on the age of the members and then calculate the total payments. After this they were asked to format the worksheet to make it clear and easy to understand. In the final part of the spreadsheet task they were asked to present the data in graphical format in a new worksheet.

There were many instances of candidates sorting either the first or last names but not completing the task of doing the secondary sort so that the members were in alphabetical order of first name within alphabetical order of last name. A surprising number of candidates did not maintain the integrity of the data when carrying out the sort.

The use of the =IF function to enter the subscription amounts was completed better by more candidates than in some previous series. However, candidates need to be reminded that the '£' symbol need not be included in the statement. In some circumstances, this can lead to errors in other calculations where '£25' is seen as text. In this series, this was not penalised.

The calculation of the total payment was also done well by most. Those candidates who lost marks generally included the blank row between the total and the rest of the column or failed to use the SUM function and ended up with a very long formula (=D2+D3+D4 ... +D20+D21). This was deemed as being not creditworthy in this test.

The formatting of a worksheet to make it clear and easy to use is done well by candidates generally. Very few fail to remove the truncation and most are able to use techniques such as borders and shading to present a worksheet effectively. Less well done was the consistency of decimal places on currency values.

Candidates were asked to use the data on a second worksheet showing the number of attendances each month over a six month period to produce their chart. Unfortunately, an oversight in the preparation of the data file meant that formulae were left in place on this worksheet. This formula was a random number generator. However, this would not normally affect the candidates and no marks were lost by candidates whose data differed from the original numbers. Where the candidates lost marks for the chart, it was for inclusion of poor titles and axis labels.

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
 - ensuring data integrity when sorting
 - using appropriate filters to show selected data from a table
- creating graphs
 - pie charts, line graphs and column or bar charts with one or more series of data
 - inserting a suitable title on the chart
 - appropriate legends
 - axis 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 formulae are not truncated when printing
 - making sure that colour schemes used are still readable when printed in monochrome.

Task 3 – Presentation Information

Task 3 usually brings together information from the internet research and, occasionally, the spreadsheet task to produce a document (either for onscreen or printed use) aimed at a specific audience. Often, candidates will be expected to select text and images to produce an integrated document.

In this series, candidates were asked to produce a short presentation for the junior members of the poetry society. Candidates were provided with a file that contained text for use in the presentation. They were provided with a set of images from which to select two suitable images. Candidates were asked to produce a title slide and three other slides. Most candidates produced a presentation that matched most of the requirements stated in the question paper.

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 a presentation is easily viewable on a large screen. It is also expected that fonts are used consistently and that presentation slides are balanced with a layout that looks professional. Often images and text were truncated because insufficient care had been taken in their placement and failure to check the layout.

In Task 3(b) candidates were asked to create a folder with a given name and move their presentation into this new folder. They are expected at this level to be able to name files and folders appropriately. Many candidates gave 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.

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 some 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:

- selecting appropriate software for producing an on-screen or paper-based presentation of information
- integrating information from a variety of sources including text, images, tables and graphs
- considering of suitability in selection of text/images for an audience and purpose
- using formatting techniques appropriately, such as:
 - text enhancements – bold, italic, underline, font sizes
 - selection of font styles

- selection of suitable font sizes for a presentation
- hyphenation
- columns
- checking for consistency in font sizes and styles
- checking for truncation of text and/or images
- considering fitness for purpose and audience
- creating a folder with a given name
- moving or copying files
- giving documents appropriate file names.

Task 4 – Email

Candidates were asked to prepare an email, correctly addressed, with a suitable subject, specific message and an attachment.

It is apparent that a number of candidates 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” are 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 and sent folders.

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 cannot provide suitable evidence of attachments, centres that do not provide the candidates with offline email clients are disadvantaging their candidates since some marks cannot be awarded.

There are 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:

- selecting appropriate offline email client software
- displaying and adding contacts or addresses
- copying carefully text from the question paper especially email addresses
- attaching files to an email
- using a suitable subject line for an email
- using appropriate salutations and language for email messages
- ensuring screen shot evidence is legible.

Task 5 - Using ICT

Often responses to Task 5 are entered at the end of the Responses document used in Section A. 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, candidates were asked about the dangers of proceeding to a website which was reported as having a problem with the security certificate. They were also asked about how to resolve issues with sound files.

Most candidates scored well on this task. Many of those who lost marks did so because their answers were too vague or incomplete or a repetition. For example, mention of viruses and other malware was seen as being the same risk. Most candidates achieved full marks on the second part of the task.

Areas for improvement and development:

- understanding the risks and how to stay safe when using the internet
- identifying methods of dealing with problems when using ICT systems.

Pass Marks

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

<http://qualifications.pearson.com/en/support/support-topics/results-certification/grade-boundaries.html?Qualification-Family=functional-skills>

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