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Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills ICT

Functional Skills in ICT at Level 1 – 600/0030/2
Functional Skills in ICT at Level 2 – 600/0139/2

April 2017

Level 1:

Skill Standard: Using ICT (1 – 4)

In questions concerning wider ICT knowledge, learners attempt the questions but many show a limited knowledge. Questions on security issues produce reasonable responses, although this tends to be quite limited and does not show a broad understanding of the issues related to email and areas such as online retail. A topic that learners struggle with is data types, and many learners do not appear to understand what this means in the context of spreadsheet data.

Skill Standard: Finding and selecting information (5 – 6)

Learners should practice using multiple keywords in a search engine, to refine the search and narrow the results. Learners often perform very basic searches. Whilst the constraints of an online assessment platform mean that this process is largely artificial, learners are expected to demonstrate that they know how to refine their search and they must demonstrate this.

Learners need to take care to select relevant information from an internet search. They should try to review the content to ensure that it is relevant. Large volumes of irrelevant text will result in the loss of marks. In internet searches, learners must evidence how they found the material. The requirements of each assessment may vary, but when an internet search is required, learners are expected to save information such as website addresses and search keywords. It is important that they review the task before moving on to the next task, to ensure they have produced everything requested.

There are occasionally learners who fail to evidence their internet search, either as a saved file or with an email. This is likely to be due to the learner not following the instructions carefully. Clearly it is important that learners check they have done everything in the task, as such an omission causes many marks to be lost.

Skill Standard: Developing, presenting and communicating information (7 – 11)

When working with a spreadsheet, some learners complete manual calculations rather than use spreadsheet functions. Learners need to be aware that if a task suggests a spreadsheet application, it is not expected that they will complete calculations manually. Such calculations will not achieve any marks, and the use of cell references and formulae will always be required in developing the numerical data. Learners are often failing to complete all required calculations in spreadsheet work.

When a mathematical method is required that may be less familiar to learners, the calculation method is explained in the task. The explanation may therefore be that learners are not following instructions accurately. Another likely explanation may be that learners struggle to complete formula based calculations with anything other than a SUM formula. Learners often use cell references inefficiently in their formulae, for example using discrete cell references rather than specifying a range of cells.

Learners are usually capable of producing a chart in a spreadsheet, but a very common problem is that learners select all data for the chart. In many cases, a specific set of values is named for the chart, and learners must select this data. Learners often do not label their charts; a main title and axes titles are expected and the labelling must make it clear what the chart shows. Data labels may also be expected. The Centre should provide opportunities for their learners to practice these skills.

Learners make simple errors when handling images, particularly when resizing them. Learners must appreciate that to distort an image is not acceptable, and learners often lose marks for this. Learners generally show the ability to develop and use text formatting in a document, although marks are often lost due to poor use of space on the page. Learners should review their final document and consider whether it is fit for the stated purpose.

When creating or replying to an email, learners should use a correct email address, subject line, and finish their message with an appropriate close. A close could be something simple such as 'thanks' or their name, but a blunt and truncated message is not appropriate; the message must be appropriate within the given context.

Level 2:

Skill Standard: Using ICT (1 – 3)

Learners are often expected to demonstrate file management skills, for example by using folders. Learners often fail to save all files in a folder, and do not create appropriate folder structures with suitable names. When using email applications, a learner may be asked to complete detail in an address or contacts book; such details are often not presented in full, with learners not completing all required fields.

Skill Standard: Finding and selecting information (4 – 5)

When completing an internet search, learners perform well. As with Level 1, learners must demonstrate the ability to refine an internet search, for example with multiple keywords, but there are some who fail to show this. Learners must also follow instructions carefully and record all the requested information to evidence their search methods, such as website addresses and search terms. Full website addresses are often requested and learners sometimes provide an abbreviated address that would not work if re-entered in a browser other than to produce a list of search results.

Skill Standard: Developing, presenting and communicating information (6 – 10)

When working with a spreadsheet application, learners should always be aware that cell references must always be used. This allows source data to be changed without having to amend all formulae. When given values are to be used, learners can enter

these values in a spreadsheet, but then use them elsewhere by including cell references for the values.

Learners are increasingly using more complex formulae, such as the IF function and percentage calculations. However, learners are often not following instructions carefully and complete calculations using incorrect data, or omit some calculations completely. The use of absolute cell references or defined names in formulae is a problem for learners, with most learners not using such features at all; to be able to use a feature such as absolute references would allow learners to complete tasks more efficiently and save them time.

In producing charts in a spreadsheet application, learners often show difficulties in selecting specific series of data for charts, and in titling charts appropriately. Learners must check their completed charts carefully and consider if they meet the required purpose. Learners may also be expected to include data labels in their charts.

Learners often do not make use of text formatting to make information stand out. Where a document has a more formal purpose, such as a report, learners are often not presenting information with an appropriate structure; experience of different types of document would be helpful to learners, to allow them to judge what layout would be appropriate. Some features such as sub-headings, image captions and the use of text boxes may be appropriate, depending on whether the document is a report, poster, newsletter etc.

In questions that require a demonstration of wider knowledge, learners continue to struggle with explaining the different types of data formats that can be used and what features make a database application useful. With databases, learners are expected to have an understanding of the principal features and benefits of such applications, and should be able to recognise the difference between database and spreadsheet applications. Learners generally fail to show a good understanding of the business and workplace uses of ICT in communication and confuse such uses with their own experience of communication tools such as social media applications; although it is understandable that learners often lack experience of business communication, their preparation for the assessment should give them an appreciation of how a business might make use of communication and file-sharing technologies.

Generic Overview:

Learners are expected to use folders to organise their work, and saved files should be in an appropriate folder. In their preparation, learners should develop an awareness of the importance of file management.

In improving learners' wider knowledge of ICT issues, learners could make use of topical events that relate to security issues. Such events are reported in the media and provide an interesting method of illustrating what can happen and how security issues can be managed or avoided by users of ICT systems, particularly when using communication tools or internet search engines. The meaning and significance of data types is important to the correct function and presentation of some applications, and learners need to be aware of this. Learners also need to be aware of the differences between applications such as a spreadsheet and a database.

When using email and internet applications, learners must take care to ensure that all their work is saved in the format and location requested. It is important that the details

of website addresses, search keywords and selected internet search results are presented as asked by the task or marks will be lost.

In document development using word-processing, formatting and presentational features, learners need to review their final piece of work and make sure it is fit for purpose. Learners need to be able to combine text and image information, make effective use of the space available, and use formatting tools to present information in a way that is appropriate for the stated audience. This requires learners to appreciate the difference between a poster, report, presentation etc. and make appropriate software and formatting choices. Learners must also position images appropriately, making effective use of the space available. This also applies to company logos, which should be positioned appropriately and with an appropriate size; learners must understand how logos are commonly used.

In spreadsheet work, learners need to demonstrate a range of skills. This will include using a range of formula types to calculate, using data types in their formatting, and formatting row and column sizes. Learners must always use cell ranges in formulae, for example B2:B6 rather than a series of discrete cell references, and must always use cell references rather than numerical values in calculations. At Level 2, learners should be able to use absolute cell references and formulae such as IF. In working with charts, learners need to improve their ability to chart specified data and to label it correctly, including data value labels. Correct titling of a chart, to make its meaning clear, is important and a review of their work should allow learners to identify any omissions.

If learners are asked to manage contact details, then they must enter information accurately and provide all the information requested. Frequent omissions are evidenced in this work, and this is most likely due to the instructions not being followed accurately.

Learners are likely to perform better if they review their work before leaving the assessment room, and check that they have completed all parts of each task.

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