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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

October 2016

Level 1:

Skill Standard: Using ICT (1 – 4)

Learners are expected to organise and save their assessment work, and there are some that are losing marks because they are not saving their work correctly. This could be because they are not using folders correctly and saving in an appropriate place. In some cases, learners are not saving evidence at all, although the explanation for this could be that the task was misunderstood.

In questions concerning wider ICT knowledge, although most learners will attempt the questions, the nature of many responses suggests a limited knowledge of the wider issues relating to ICT. Questions on security issues typically produce responses that indicate some knowledge, although this tends to be quite limited and does not show a broad understanding of the issues related to email and internet, document use and other areas such as online retail. In general, however learners show the ability to make appropriate choices in the use of software and when required they are able to adjust system settings or demonstrate the knowledge of these.

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

Learners generally show the ability to use a search engine, but often fail to demonstrate that they can refine a search with the use of multiple keywords. Whilst the constraints of an online assessment platform mean that this process is largely artificial, we expect learners to demonstrate that they know how to refine their search and they must demonstrate this.

When learners are collating their results from an internet search, they should review the content to ensure that it is relevant. Some are copying large volumes of text even when some material is not relevant to the search task, and this will result in the loss of marks. In internet searches, learners must evidence how they found the material, and although the requirements of each assessment may vary, the expectation is often that information such as website addresses and search keywords are recorded. Learners often show omissions in this information, and it is important that they review the task before moving on to the next task, to ensure they have produced everything requested.

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

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, or the final product not being suitable for the intended purpose. Learners would benefit from a final review of their document and consider whether it is fit for purpose.

In spreadsheet work, learners often use cell references inefficiently in their formulae, for example using discrete cell references rather than specifying a range of cells. Learners at level 1 often show a limited knowledge of calculation types and at level 1 this must go beyond being able to add a column of values.

There are some learners who perform manual calculations, indicating that the learners do not appreciate the functions of a spreadsheet are they are not prepared for the assessment. By performing manual calculations, or not replicating formulae effectively, learners are spending far more time on the activity than is necessary. Learners are usually capable of producing a chart but the data is often all data rather than the specific series requested. Learners often do not fully label their charts fully, and axes titles as well as a meaningful main title are expected.

In creating or replying to an email, it is expected that 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)

Even at Level 2, learners occasionally lose marks for simple tasks such as titling folders suitably and saving their work in folders. It is important to review the task before moving on to the next and check that they have evidenced their work in the format required. Learners are capable of using appropriate applications and system settings to meet their purpose.

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

Learners at Level 2 continue to perform well with applications that will be familiar to them, such as email and internet activities. 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 should also check that saved website addresses are correct and complete. This is usually a matter of copying the address from the web browser so should be a simple task. 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)

At Level 2, learners produce some good document work, but a final review of their work and its fitness for purpose would make a difference. Where a document has a more formal purpose, such as a report or presentation, learners are often not presenting information and titles in a clear and appropriate manner. Learners make errors such as not adding all of the information requested, or deleting material that should be left in the document. When a document is used to attract attention, learners often do not make use of text formatting to make information stand out.

At Level 2, learners are increasingly making use of more complex features such as IF functions, although the activity instructions are sometimes not followed carefully enough, resulting in some good examples of formulae but using incorrect data. Many learners are not making use of absolute cell references in their formulae and the consequence can be a lot of time wasted in replicating and then correcting formulae. In producing charts, 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.

In managing contact details in an email application, learners often make mistakes in entering details. The result is an incorrect or incomplete contact detail and this will lose marks.

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. Further classroom teaching on some of the basics of ICT applications is important, such as the significance of data types and 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 of 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 stipulated by the task or marks will be lost. A careful review of their work and the activity requirements would help to avoid work not being submitted for marking.

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. In preparing for the assessment, practice and experience of a range of documents would help learners. This might include posters and flyers, but also presentations and reports. Learners need to be able to combine text and image information, making effective use of the space available and using formatting tools to present information in a way that is appropriate for the stated audience.

Learners' performance in spreadsheet applications has improved, but learners often display a limited range of skills. Learners should practice using a range of formulae types to complete calculations and should be able to use cell ranges in formulae, allowing more efficient replication of formulae. At Level 2, learners should be able to use absolute cell references. In working with charts, learners need to improve their ability to chart specified data and to label it correctly. If learners are more familiar with charts then they ought to be able to consider if their work has met the purpose stated in the question; often the chart does not present the data required, and learners should be able to identify this themselves and make modifications. This ability to review their work and modify it to suit the purpose and given audience is an important skill, yet it is something that seems to create difficulties at both level 1 and level 2.

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.

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