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

August 2016

Level 1:

The newer generation of assessments make greater use of emails as a means to provide task instructions rather than providing them as conventional questions. This results in a more functional and true-to-life assessment. However, some learners are not taking sufficient care to follow the instructions in full. This results in some learners losing significant numbers of marks because they are not saving attachments or providing the required evidence of an internet search. In the paper-based assessment, some learners are not taking enough care to provide all the evidence required for marking, such as screenshots of emails.

Learners generally show the ability to develop and use text formatting in a document. There are examples where marks are lost due to poor use of space on the page, or the final product not being suitable for the intended purpose. A final review of their document would be worthwhile to consider whether it is fit for purpose, and the assessment time should allow for this, so centres need to encourage learners to take this approach and review their work as they progress.

In spreadsheet activities, the trend is that learners at Level 1 often show either comprehensive skills in developing calculations with formulae and producing charts, or they are at the opposite end of the scale and are unable to produce much work that earns marks. Some learners will attempt to complete the calculations manually without any use of formulae, resulting in a lot of time being spent with no marks awarded.

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.

Most learners will attempt the questions on wider ICT knowledge, but the nature of many responses suggests a limited knowledge of the wider issues relating to ICT. Learners often display limited and incorrect understanding of the use of data types, and the purpose of a database and security issues.

Level 2:

At Level 2, learners perform well in tasks that make use of applications such as email and internet browsers. The current generation of assessment papers may expect the use of tools such as calendars and an address book. Learners are performing well with such activities and can adapt to the varying tasks that appear in assessments. Where learners lose marks, it is more likely because they have not provided all of the evidence as requested, for example by completing a folder and file management tasks as instructed, or they have not saved a crucial piece of internet search evidence. Contacts in an address book are usually created without difficulty but often with missing or incorrect details suggesting that the learners do not review their work to ensure it is complete. Greater care in following the instructions, combined with a review of the completed task would help learners achieve more marks.

In developing documents, learners at Level 2 will typically produce some good work. However, learners make careless errors, such as not adding all of the information requested, or deleting material that should be left in the document. Learners often do not make use of text formatting or other features to make information stand out and make it fit for purpose and for the intended audience. When developing presentations, learners generally perform well, occasionally making small errors that would be avoided by some proof-reading.

In processing numerical information using a spreadsheet, learners are becoming more proficient in the use of more complex features such as IF functions. However, the activity instructions are sometimes not followed carefully enough resulting in good examples of formulae but using incorrect data. A feature that can often be used to save time and work efficiently is the absolute cell reference, but learners often do not use this when the nature of the data indicates it would be beneficial. This results in a lot of time wasted in replicating and then correcting formulae.

In producing charts, even at Level 2, 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.

At Level 2, learners are expected to demonstrate their wider ICT knowledge through written responses to questions. However, these are often completed poorly, and learners continue to struggle with explaining the different types of data that can be used and what features make a database application useful. Although a limited knowledge of database applications is expected, 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, for example in collaborating to achieve a task. Learners often quote social media applications as a tool for completing a workplace activity and this is generally not appropriate where some degree of confidentiality would be required. It is understandable that learners often lack experience of business communication, but their preparation for the assessment should give them an appreciation of how a business might make use of communication and file-sharing technologies facilitated by the cloud.

Generic Overview:

Learners must take care to ensure that all of their work is saved. When completing a specific task with a document or a spreadsheet, then this is obvious. However, in tasks that involve the use of email and internet browser applications, there are often a number of small sub-tasks that need to be completed and several items need to be saved. It is likely to be the case that some learners will lose marks and may not achieve a pass result simply because they did not follow the instructions in full. It is not unusual to see a learner's script where there is an email missing or their internet search evidence has not been saved, and this will result in the loss of a significant number of marks. A careful review of their work and the activity requirements before moving on to the next task 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. Practice and experience of a range of documents would help learners make judgements about what is suitable for a given purpose. The learners' preparation should include exposure to a range of documents such as posters and flyers, presentations and reports. Learners need to be able to make decisions about combining 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.

In practising with spreadsheets, learners should experience a range of formulae types to complete calculations and should be able to use cell ranges in formulae, allowing more efficient replication. At Level 2, learners should be able to use absolute cell references. In working with charts, learners need to improve their ability to select specific data to create a chart rather than selecting an entire table. This needs greater care by learners to understand the meaning of the data they are working with, but this is part of a functional skill-based assessment. Learners should expect to have to make a choice of what method is appropriate for the data and the given task.

At both Level 1 and 2, learners often apply poor labels and titles to their charts, and some don't add any titles at all. It should also be noted that it is not acceptable to add something like a text box label to a chart instead of a title created as part of the chart, as although at first glance it might look adequate, the titles will not move with the chart as they are not part of it.

A useful and engaging approach to improve learners' wider knowledge of ICT issues could be to 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 teaching is advised on topics such as the significance of data types and the differences between applications such as a spreadsheet and a database, as many learners struggle with these topics.

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