

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

June 2016

Level 1:

Where learners are required to perform activities using email or internet applications, some learners are losing significant numbers of marks because they are not saving their work. This is a particular issue in online assessments, and is most likely due to the learner not following the instructions carefully. Most learners will not be under time pressure in the assessments and there is a generous time allocation, therefore learners can take more time and care in completing the assessment.

Most learners show abilities 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 activities, learners at Level 1 often show a limited knowledge of calculation types. Most learners understand how to add a column of values, but many appear to be unfamiliar with types of formulae that multiply or show a maximum or minimum. Learners often use cell references inefficiently in their formulae, for example using discreet cell references rather than specifying a range of cells.

There are still some learners who perform manual calculations, indicating that the learners do not appreciate the functions of a spreadsheet or 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 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. Topics that are often weaker are the use of data types, the purpose of a database and security issues.

Level 2:

Learners at Level 2 continue to perform well with applications that will be familiar to them, such as email and internet activities. Learners manage occasionally to lose marks for simple tasks, such as titling folders suitably, or creating complete and correct contact details in an address book. Greater care in following the instructions, combined with a review of the completed task would help learners achieve more marks.

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. Learners make careless 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. 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.

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 questions that require a demonstration of wider knowledge, learners continue to struggle with explaining the different types of data 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:

When using email and internet applications, learners must take care to ensure that all of their work is saved. This is a particular issue in the online assessments when learners occasionally omit some of their work. If all of the instructions are followed, in the question and in other information such as emails, then learners will not have a problem. 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 all 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.

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.

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