

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

December 2015

Level 1:

We have a variety of assessment papers in the bank, and these have shown themselves to be reliable in assessing a broad range of skills for the ICT qualification. The majority of assessments taking place are in the online format, and this is being well received by centres and learners. There are no common issues with the online format, although there are occasionally some misunderstandings from learners on the requirements of the tasks.

Learners generally perform well in the email and internet activities, but some errors include not sending information by email when requested, or not evidencing internet searches in full. However, these errors appear to be from not following instructions carefully rather than a skills issue.

Learners' performance in spreadsheet tasks has generally improved over subsequent years, as centres and learners are engaging in better preparation for these tasks. The lack of preparation is occasionally obvious however when a learner reaches a spreadsheet task and is unable to make a start on the task. When completing charts in a spreadsheet application, some learners still struggle to label the chart correctly with axes and main titles.

Although the production of documents, such as a poster or flyer, is often seen by learners as a manageable task, they often would benefit from a final review of their document and consider whether it is fit for purpose. There are often examples of the poor use of font formatting, excessive white space, and key information is not made to stand out.

In questions concerning wider ICT knowledge, learners are frequently providing partial answers or misunderstanding the question.

Level 2:

Learners at this level typically perform well with email and internet activities. Some common mistakes arise from not taking sufficient care and time to evidence their work accurately, for example in completing full details in a contact details form within an email application, or showing full records of internet searches.

With the majority of assessments now online, learners are showing better performance in their spreadsheet work. Common difficulties are still with using formulae efficiently, for example with a correct cell range, absolute cell references or more complex formulae such as the IF function. There are methods that learners can use to complete a task without the use of more efficient methods, but the consequence is that it takes the learner longer and they will lose some marks. 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 this level, learners generally perform well in the production of word-processed documents. However, even at this level they often would benefit from a final review of their document and consider whether it is fit for purpose. Documents often contain inappropriate space, formatting that is not suitable for the intended purpose of the document and key information that is not formatted appropriately.

In questions that require a demonstration of wider knowledge, learners are often not confident in the different types of data that can be used and how applications such as a database can be used to manipulate data. The specification requires a knowledge of databases and some understanding of the main features of such applications is required. Learners also often fail to show good understanding of the business and workplace uses of ICT in communication as opposed to, for example, the use of social media for communication.

Generic Overview:

At both Level 1 and 2, learners must take care to follow the instructions carefully. These may be distributed across the question page and emails, and learners need to assimilate the information presented in documents and spreadsheets. This creates a task that is more complex than a traditional direct answer and direct response assessment. This is deliberate, to create an activity that represents a holistic assessment of a learner's ICT skills within the simulation of real-life scenario. However, it does mean that learners need to take extra care in following the instructions, and they would benefit from some practice with such activities.

Learners need to take care to complete all parts of an activity that involve the use of internet and email applications. The nature of this part of an assessment means that there are often a number of smaller tasks to complete, and valuable marks can be easily lost due to carelessness of a hurried approach.

Learners will benefit from a greater focus on the presentation of charts. These may require the use of selected series of data rather than using all data in a spreadsheet. Charts are also of little value without full labelling of the data and axes, and the main title must be informative to be valid.

The assessments include a section that aims to assess wider knowledge and many learners at both levels are displaying limited knowledge of topics such as security issues and threats, the use of internet communication for work and business purposes, and the features of different applications such as databases that lend themselves to particular business uses.

It remains the case that some learners taking Level 2 assessments are significantly misinterpreting the tasks, and it is likely in such cases that the learner is not yet operating at that level. Centres should consider carefully if learners are ready for Level 2 and make use of the sample assessments at Level 1 and then Level 2 before making a live test entry.

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