

Chief Examiner Report for Functional Skills ICT

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

NCFE Functional Skills Qualification in ICT at Level 2 – 600/0139/2

September 2019

Level 1

Skill Standard: Using ICT

The assessments include questions concerning wider ICT knowledge and (when asked) to show understanding of data types, such as text, date, currency, and their use in databases and spreadsheets, learners often struggle. Many learners do not appear to understand what data types are.

When asked how they would respond if faced with technical problems or system errors, learners often respond by suggesting they would contact the IT Help Desk. This response does not achieve marks, as it does not show any understanding, and learners must demonstrate how they would remedy the stated issue themselves.

Skill Standard: Finding and selecting information

Learners are expected to save information from internet searches such as website addresses and search keywords and may be expected to provide this evidence in an email. Some learners omit this part of the activity, or do not include all of the requested information. It is therefore essential that learners read the task instructions carefully, and check that they have fully evidenced their work in a form that can be reviewed by the examiner.

Learners are expected to show how they can refine their internet search, for example by using multiple keywords. It is important that learners understand they need to demonstrate this.

Skill Standard: Developing, presenting and communicating information

When composing an email message, learners should be aware that any message must be appropriate for the context. The message should have an appropriate structure and closure such as their name. Issues of spelling and grammar will not be assessed.

When a task suggests the use of a spreadsheet, there are still some learners who will try complete calculations manually, so without using the formulae functions of the spreadsheet and actual values are entered instead. All calculations will require a formula with cell references in developing the numerical data. Many learners show that they can add a column of values, e.g. with a SUM formula, but appear unable to complete any other calculations. Learners are expected to know other single-step formula calculation methods beyond SUM (which is typically an Entry Level 3 skill), such as multiply, subtract and divide.

When producing charts, learners often do not label their charts; a main title and axes titles are expected. A chart should be reviewed to check that the information is displayed clearly, and the reader will understand what is being displayed.

Document marks are often lost due to poor layout and the use of space on the page. Where formatting instructions are provided, it is important that these are followed in full. Learners should review their final document and consider whether it is fit for the stated purpose and that all parts of the task have been completed.

Level 2

Skill Standard: Using ICT

File and folder management may be assessed, and learners may be expected to create and use folders within a file storage space such as a hard drive (or the simulated hard drive in the online assessment), or in an email application by creating an email folder. Some learners have difficulty with following the instructions and create the wrong folder in the wrong place, or do not name it correctly. Some learners are able to create folders, but then do not save information within the folder. Instructions will be given in the task, so these must be followed carefully.

In questions that require a demonstration of wider knowledge, learners continue to struggle with explaining the use of data types that might be used in a database or spreadsheet, for example text, number, date, percentage or logical. Many learners do not seem to know what data types are.

Skill Standard: Finding and selecting information

Following internet searches, learners must follow instructions carefully and record all the requested information. Examiners will look for full evidence of the search process as well as the results obtained, and it is not sufficient to simply show the outcome of a search. Full website addresses are often requested, and learners sometimes provide an abbreviated address that would not work if re-entered in a browser. Learners must always show the search terms used in their results and make it clear that this is what they are. It may be a requirement to show this information in an email, and where this is the case the learner should structure their email message appropriately.

Skill Standard: Developing, presenting and communicating information

Spreadsheets often present challenges to learners, with some not able to evidence their understanding of skills beyond Level 1. At Level 2, learners should be able to identify when absolute cell references would be appropriate, or when a formula function such as IF would allow for efficient processing of the data. Where spreadsheets are completed with relative cell references only, this does not always allow for efficient operations such as the replication of a formula that includes a constant data value from elsewhere in the spreadsheet. Some learners will attempt using an IF function but use values rather than cell references, and this shows a lack of understanding of the ability of a spreadsheet to automatically recalculate a range of calculations when central base data is amended. These skills show that a learner has progressed above Level 1, and a submission that is limited to simple formulae with relative cell references will never achieve full marks.

Spreadsheet charts at Level 2 will expect learners to display more than one series of data, and data from non-adjacent series. The latter presents a challenge for some, with learners having to re-arrange the data table before selecting data for the chart. Learners often do not show full titles and labels for their chart, and this should always include a main title as well as axes titles, with data labels where requested.

In developing documents, learners may be expected to use tables to display information. When a table is appropriate, it is expected that use is made of a row and column structure, with information grouped under row or column headings. Learners often struggle to structure their table with appropriate row and column sizes, and do not make effective use of table formatting tools to emphasise key information and improve the overall appearance of their table.

Generic Overview

The assessments mostly demonstrate that there is preparation for the assessment. The ability to use spreadsheets effectively has improved and learners generally perform well in email and internet search activities and in formatting documents. There are examples where learners do not have an adequate range of skills in developing numeric data or presenting tables in documents. A common reason for the loss of marks is that learners are not following task instructions carefully and omit parts of the task.

Overcoming an area

In evidencing an internet search, learners must include all the required information and provide this evidence in the appropriate form, which may include the use of an email.

Spreadsheet skills require preparation in the use for formulae and the presentation of charts. and learners must always use cell references rather than numerical values in calculations. At Level 2, learners should be able to use absolute cell references and functions such as IF. When calculating with a series of cells, learners must use cell ranges in formulae, for example B2:B6 rather than a series of discrete cell references. When working with charts, learners will need to chart specified data and apply titles and labels.

Learners need to review their final work and make sure it is fit for purpose. In a spreadsheet, this includes checking that the information is all displayed clearly. In other documents, learners should understand how to make effective use of the space available, including using text and image formatting. Where tables are used, for example at Level 2, these must be formatted to make the contents clear, with the use of borders, shading and possibly features such as cell merging used for good effect. Learners must understand the difference between a poster, report, presentation etc. and make appropriate application tools and formatting choices.

Learners will perform better if they review their work before leaving the assessment room, and check that they have completed all parts of each task. Learners should attempt all tasks, even if they do not feel confident in that area of work; marks can be awarded for any work towards the overall outcome, and learners will be credited for skills that are evidenced, even in a partially completed task.

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