**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**

**January 2019**

**Level 1**

**Skill Standard: Using ICT**

The assessments may include questions concerning wider ICT knowledge and 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.

It is expected that learners have some understanding of data types (such as text, date, currency) and their use in databases and spreadsheets. The knowledge of this is often not shown, with many learners not responding to the question.

**Skill Standard: Finding and selecting information**

Learners are expected to show how they can refine an internet search, for example by using multiple keywords. This presents a problem for some, who limit the scope of their search and consequently do not produce all the required results.

When an internet search is required, learners are expected to save information such as website addresses and search keywords and may be expected to provide this evidence in an email, but some learners omit this part of the activity. 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.

**Skill Standard: Developing, presenting and communicating information**

Learners may be required to compose an email message, and should be aware that any message must be appropriate for the context with an appropriate structure and closure such as their name. Issues of spelling and grammar will not be assessed.

In working with a spreadsheet, learners should expect that all calculations will require a formula and the use of cell references will always be required in developing the numerical data. Some learners show that they can add a column of values, e.g. with a SUM formula, but other types of calculations are completed using either mental arithmetic or with a calculator; 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.

Learners are generally capable of producing a chart in a spreadsheet, but learners often do not label their charts; a main title and axes titles are expected.

When working with documents, marks are often lost due to poor layout and the use of space on the page. The task instructions may include formatting instructions, and 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**

As with Level 1, when asked how they would respond if faced with technical problems or system errors, some learners respond by suggesting they would contact the IT Help Desk or similar. 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.

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 and moving emails to that folder. Although learners are generally familiar with using folders, a common difficulty for learners arises when they have not read the instructions carefully enough and use an incorrect type of folder in an incorrect location.

Learners are expected to understand the functions and benefits of cloud storage. Although many learners are aware of cloud storage, they show limited understanding, and particularly in how a business might make use of cloud storage for the purposes of sharing documents or improving data security.

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.

**Skill Standard: Finding and selecting information**

As with Level 1, learners must follow instructions carefully and record all the requested information to evidence their internet search methods. 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, and this evidence is often not provided.

**Skill Standard: Developing, presenting and communicating information**

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. Many learners complete the spreadsheet activity with relative cell references only, which 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. Even when using an IF function, some learners will use values rather than cell references. 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. Using values in formulae restricts the capability of the spreadsheet to do this.

When developing charts in a spreadsheet, learners may be expected 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 will also be expected to format titles and borders.

**Generic Overview**

Mostly, the assessments indicate that learners are being prepared for the assessments by their centres. 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 however occasions when it is apparent that learners are not ready for the assessment, and some learners struggle with certain skill areas.

**Overcoming an area**

When completing an internet search, learners must check the activity instructions and make sure they have included all the required information and provided this evidence in the appropriate form. This may include the use of an email, so it is important that learners check they have completed all parts of the task.

Assessment at both Levels 1 and 2 will require the use of a spreadsheet application. However, it is evident from some assessments that learners taking Level 2 assessments are not adequately prepared. Suitable preparation is likely to include further teaching beyond the Level 1 skills; it is not reasonable to expect a learner who has just passed at Level 1 to be immediately ready for a Level 2 assessment.

When developing and processing numerical information in a spreadsheet application, learners need to demonstrate that they can use a range of suitable and efficient formulae. and 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 This should include the use of appropriate formulae structures that allow for efficient formula replication across rows and columns. When working with charts, learners will need to chart specified data and apply titles and labels. Learners at both levels will be expected to format spreadsheets, for example the formatting of titles, the use of cell formatting for different types of data and adjusting row and column sizes. In working with charts, learners need to improve their ability to chart specified data and to label it correctly, including data value labels when requested and axes titles.

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. 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.

At both levels, some learners score low marks because they have not completed all tasks. Learners are likely to perform better if they review their work before leaving the assessment room, and check that they have completed all parts of each task. Tutors should advise learners to 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.

Further advice and guidance including the aforementioned suite of resources that can support learners at all levels can be found at:

[**www.ncfe.org.uk**](http://www.ncfe.org.uk)

**Email: service@ncfe.org.uk**

**Call: 0191 239 8000**

There are also a number of Common Learner Error Videos, and Overcoming Learner Error Videos which can be found at:

[**https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL05CIlRfHw9jh4n5ChWeVdVtEkm4A1P0Y**](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL05CIlRfHw9jh4n5ChWeVdVtEkm4A1P0Y)

**Chief Examiner: David Foster**

**Date: January 2019**