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Applied Information and Communication Technology IT15

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Unit 15: Supporting ICT Users

Report on the Examination

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Unit 15: Supporting ICT Users (IT15)

Most portfolios sampled had been assessed accurately, although where a centre had assessed too generously it was often because the candidates had not had the opportunity to actually run a real user support service over a period of time to gather enough evidence for their portfolio. Running the service, reflecting on it, evaluating and improving it, is the only way to access the higher marks on many rows of the marking grid for this unit.

The unit is based on setting up and running a user support service for an identified group of users. Also required is a system for logging and recording the problems that occur; a user guide to accessing the support service; and a help sheet for commonly encountered software or hardware problems, such as "How to create pivot tables in MS Excel."

Unfortunately, many candidates did not complete the portfolio in a logical way – some failed to do any real practical work at all, or worked in teams where it was impossible to verify if the candidates had actually solved any problems. It is acceptable for the teacher to make requests that cover some of the gaps in actual problems reported to the support service, but they should make sure that these are not identical for all candidates.

For feedback to the originator of the problem, either whilst a solution is being worked on, or when a problem is solved, it is not sufficient for a standard, non-personalised email to be used. Telling the person requiring support that "I have now solved your problem number 4" is not informative – especially when it is obvious that the email has never been sent. Manufactured evidence is easy to identify and should not be included in any portfolio.

Many candidates failed to produce a logically organised portfolio. Most often portfolios appeared with completed problem sheets just attached at the back; occasionally with a sheet headed "Appendix" and other items just added in, in no apparent logical order. Where a contents page was included in the portfolio then the appendix would usually not be mentioned.

AO1 – Providing User Support service - Practical work

Row 1 – Some candidates had a good range of problems that covered the required types, gaining 1 or 2 marks quite easily. Some problems were complex, although the majority were trivial as were the solutions offered – this does not indicate that a good service was provided as it does not show the competence of the support person, hence the requirement for some complex problems. A complex problem is defined as one where a series of steps is necessary to fix the problem.

Both the installation and uninstalling of software and software configuration must be done to award the first mark on Row 2.

The quality of the write-up of the solution determined the mark awarded for Row 3, and the way in which it was recorded determined the mark for Row 4. Few candidates scored highly on both rows.

The majority of candidates gained a mark for their help sheet. Many failed to get feedback from users beyond mere cosmetic advice. Some help sheets were far too comprehensive, covering many aspects. A simple help sheet on a single topic is all that is required – many gained both marks with a 2-sided sheet.

To gain both marks for standard ways of working, candidates should have recorded details of the steps they took to work safely with computer equipment when providing the user support service – many failed to do this. Those who did are advised to also get a witness to authenticate that they have worked safely.

AO2 – User aspects

Rows 1 & 2 are separate items. Users (and client) should be properly identified. Only those who are likely to use the support service are users – they can be people reporting problems, people administering the system (e.g. school technicians), people providing the support service, people reviewing the types of problems encountered (e.g. Network Manager).

Row 1 – Most candidates scored on this row with brief or full descriptions of the potential users of their proposed service.

Row 2 – Most candidates scored 1 mark on this row for a brief description of users' roles. Better descriptions scored 2 marks.

Row 3 – Many candidates described the current support service only very briefly, or failed to do so at all; others only described their proposed service and only a few said how the proposed service would improve the provision currently in place.

AO3 – Planning & Designing a User support service

To score highly on this section, there has to be extensive service-user involvement and self-reflection. Every row has marks that may only be awarded when improvement after evaluation takes place. Refer to comments about the time plan at AO4 Row 2 for an idea of what tasks may be required in AO3.

Row 1 – Many candidates failed to write up any investigation of the current service, and so could not score on this row. This row overarches all other rows in AO3 – the complete service.

Row 2 assesses the problem recording sheet and Row 3 the recording/cataloguing system. Most candidates scored on both rows and those who had refined their designs after use and evaluation were able to achieve the highest marks

Row 4 – Many candidates produced a workable guide to the user support service, gaining up to the fourth mark. Almost none wrote and justified the design in terms of the needs of the service users for the fifth mark. If the support service is to be accessed via an on-line form, then it was correct to show how to find the form and how to fill it in.

Row 5 – The format of the guide is the medium through which it would be provided to the potential users of the service. A short discussion of possible formats is required at the design stage for the first mark. Without this, the second mark cannot be awarded.

A04 – Evaluation

Row 2 – the list of tasks on the time plan should cover all steps taken to provide evidence for the portfolio. For instance for A03 Row 1, planning the service, the tasks might be:

1. Compose a questionnaire about the current support service
2. Give out questionnaire to 10 potential users
3. Collect questionnaires in
4. Compose interview question for current ICT technician/Network Manager
5. Interview ICT Technician/Network Manager
6. Write up interview
7. Check finding back with interviewee
8. Write up investigation
9. Identify the need and draft plan a new support service
10. Send a draft planning document to 5 users and ICT technician/network Manager and ask for their opinions
11. Collate responses and decide what needs changing
12. Amend service plan

Notes on the above list:

Tasks 1-7 may have been done as part of AO2

Task 9 could also be expanded to include the steps required to design the problem logging sheet, the problem/solution recording system and the user guide – with all their included tasks.

Row 4 – Many candidates scored 1 or 2 marks on this row by asking for comments about their help sheet and user guide.

Row 5 – Most candidates scored only 1 or 2 marks on this row, failing to include any sort of test plan for their service.

Row 6 – Only a few candidates were able to critically evaluate their solution in order to access the higher marks.

Row 7 – There were many ways to show communication skills in this unit: the help sheet; the user guide, the write-up of problems and feedback to users. Most candidates scored 2 or 3 marks, but some portfolios were not put together in a logical way, which made them difficult to follow.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results Statistics page of the AQA Website.

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw or scaled marks into marks on the Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator www.aqa.org.uk/umsconversion.