Chief examiner's report

T Level Technical Qualification in Digital Support Services (Level 3) (603/6901/2)

Summer 2023 – Employer set project (Digital Support)

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Assessment Dates: 09–19 May 2023

Paper Number: P001652

This report contains information in relation to the externally assessed component provided by the chief examiner, with an emphasis on the standard of student work within this assessment.

The report is written for providers, with the aim of highlighting how students have performed generally, as well as any areas where further development or guidance may be required to support preparation for future opportunities.

Key points:

- grade boundaries

- standard of student work

- evidence creation

- responses to the external assessment tasks

- administering the external assessment

It is important to note that students should not sit this external assessment until they have received the relevant teaching of the qualification in relation to this component.

Grade boundaries

Raw mark grade boundaries for the series are:

	Overall
Max	76
A*	67
A	58
B	49
C	41
D	33
E	25

Grade boundaries are the lowest mark with which a grade is achieved.

For further detail on how raw marks are converted to uniform marks (UMS), and the aggregation of the core component, please refer to the qualification specification.

Standard of student work

Learners' performance varied significantly across various tasks, resulting in a diverse distribution of grades. Stronger students demonstrated excellent responses, particularly in tasks one and three, which focused on applying knowledge and required higher-order skills. These tasks proved more challenging for students, and there were clear distinctions between those who grasped the concepts and those who did not.

While most students were able to communicate effectively during their interviews, many struggled to deviate from their prepared scripts, missing opportunities to ask follow-up questions. The email task revealed that many students needed more practice effectively communicating with technical and non-technical audiences and applying analytical thinking.

Furthermore, many students needed to improve in applying a logical approach to problem-solving, which was evident in tasks one and three. Weaker students found it challenging to evaluate how well the outcomes aligned with the given brief (AO5), as they needed to have the necessary approach and structure to maximise their marks.

It is important to note that learners unnecessarily lost assessment marks for English and Mathematics skills (AO4) across all ability levels. Therefore, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of proofreading and encourage students to develop the habit of thoroughly reviewing their work in the future.

Evidence creation

Most providers submitted evidence well, making it easier to review. The audio files and documents were in a standard format (usually mp3 and pdf), ensuring compatibility. The WAV audio file format is discouraged as its playback proved problematic.

Unfortunately, hyperlinks provided by learners within documents did not work as all evidence is scanned, i.e. removing the links.

On occasion, some evidence was inadvertently not submitted by providers, causing delays in assessment; providers must ensure that this does not happen in future.

Responses to the external assessment tasks

Task 1: Troubleshooting document

Most students successfully identified a sound driver setting issue, with approximately 60% scoring three or four marks. Strong responses recognised potential driver issues and included the necessary steps to resolve the problem. This task aimed to assess students' comprehension of troubleshooting by employing a logical process that involved relevant steps to identify computer faults. However, some students needed to fully grasp the importance of completely resolving the fault and stopped after providing a single recommendation.

Task 1: Test plan document

Most students understood how to structure a test plan but needed help to describe the logical sequence of relevant tests required to resolve the network faults. Many students identified the faulty hard drive as the problem and the steps needed to fix this problem.

Some students didn't understand the need to run tests to verify that they had rectified the faults. For example, ensuring the computer boots up; is stable and no longer crashes; applications run correctly, and files open.

Task 2: Interview

Students' completion of this task was generally satisfactory, with approximately 80% earning three to four marks. Most students demonstrated reasonable communication techniques by employing well-constructed questions to gather the required information. However, around one-tenth of the students received a band one mark, primarily due to their inflexible adherence to pre-planned questions, which resulted in missed opportunities for follow-up questions and active listening.

Providers approached this task with notable variability, from offering unsolicited answers to reading directly from the provided material. The interviews were more successful when providers paraphrased the information, creating a realistic experience. These providers gave students answers based on the provided material or derived logically rather than simply responding with, "I don't have that information."

The quality of the recordings is the providers' responsibility, and every effort should be made to ensure that learners' voices can be heard. However, this was different with some centres. In one instance, noise-cancelling headphones were used, inadvertently cancelling out the learner's voice and making it exceedingly difficult to access the information.

Task 2: Emails

Around 70% of students achieved three to four marks for this task. While many students adapted their communication styles to suit both audiences, their efforts remained superficial. There needed to be more technical terminology in their responses. To achieve higher grades in this task, students must demonstrate excellent application of analytical thinking and problem-solving skills when addressing scenario-based problems. Unfortunately, such proficiency was lacking in most of the evidence, indicating an area for improvement across the entire cohort.

Approximately 30% of students scored in band one for this task.

Task 3: Project Proposal

This task allows students to showcase their comprehension of the issues presented in the scenario and propose effective resolutions. It encompasses an analysis of current problems, potential solutions, evaluations of network hardware, software, services, and cybersecurity considerations. Around 30% of students achieved five to nine marks, while another 30% scored higher. Given its weightage of up to twenty-four marks, this task holds significant importance, as evident from the allocated four-hour completion time. However, some students failed to grasp the detail required to achieve higher marks and submitted insufficient evidence consisting of only one to two pages, which should have covered the task's full scope.

Approximately one-tenth of students achieved fifteen to nineteen marks.

Strong students correctly identified potential computer and software issues and proposed suitable solutions.

Many students appropriately selected hardware (such as laptops and desktops) to tackle the previously identified issues, but missed opportunities to recommend necessary hardware upgrades.

All students recognised the importance of standardising the operating system and made sensible suggestions.

Most students would have benefited from recognising the significance of mobile device management software (MDM) and providing more detailed coverage.

Strong responses delineated cloud services, addressed cybersecurity issues, and comprehensively described all required hardware and software. These responses consistently referenced the scenario's requirements throughout the evidence.

Task 3: Mathematics skills

In this task, students must showcase their numeracy skills within their proposal. Around 30% of students successfully obtained the full two marks. Slightly over one-third of students scored one mark, falling short of the maximum due to minor inaccuracies in their calculations.

Some students merely listed prices, sometimes in dollars, without providing any calculations, resulting in a score of zero.

Strong responses encompassed a table that included cloud services, hardware, and software costs. They also identified quantities when relevant, indicated whether the expenses were one-off or monthly, had subtotals, and provided an overall total.

Applying addition, subtraction, multiplication, or division operations was often sufficient to earn full marks.

Task 4: Testing method - audience testing (sample satisfaction survey)

Around 50% of students attained three to six marks in this task, with approximately 40% earning one to two. Notably, some students overlooked the survey's purpose and focused solely on the company and their network upgrade, disregarding the end user's perspective.

Strong responses featured well-structured and pertinent questions, employing a variety of question types to gather qualitative and quantitative data, with questions formulated using clear and concise language.

Task 4: Post-project review

Students handled this task proficiently, with the majority displaying a reasonable comprehension of the critical issues presented in the scenario. They provided their solutions, considered mitigations, and discussed security factors.

Additionally, many students evaluated their performance throughout the project, explaining the actions taken and proposing potential solutions.

Around one-third of students achieved three to five marks in this task.

Tasks 2, 3 and 4: English skills

Some students needlessly lost marks in this category due to spelling, punctuation, and grammar errors in tasks one, two, and four. Students must develop the habit of thoroughly proofreading their work. Around 78% of students earned three or four marks, while 22% obtained two marks for their English skills.

Administering the external assessment

The external assessment is invigilated and must be conducted in line with our Regulations for the Conduct of External Assessment. Students may require additional pre-release material to complete the tasks. These must be provided to students in line with our regulations.

Students must be given the resources to carry out the tasks, and these are highlighted within the Qualification Specific Instructions for Delivery (QSID).