



General Certificate of Education

Applied Business 8611/8613

BS08 Business Planning

Report on the Examination

2008 examination - June series

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General comments

It was pleasing to observe many centres getting to grips with the particular challenges set by the GCE Applied Business A2 portfolio units. Candidates from these centres had:

- set realistic problems to solve that were neither too complex nor too simplistic (Requirement A)
- carried out sufficient primary and secondary research to analyse the nature of the problem (Requirement C)
- developed practical solutions that addressed key parts of the problem (Requirements B and D).

As stated in last year's report, where candidates and centres struggled, it was nearly always the case that one or more of the above conditions were missing. In particular, when a mechanical approach was adopted which encouraged candidates to trawl through each unit's specification rather than selectively applying concepts to the problem at hand, the evidence was descriptive and failed to demonstrate the candidate's ability to solve realistic problems.

One particular feature of this round of moderation was the use of Unit 8 (Business Planning) by candidates as the context for Unit 9 (Marketing Strategy) and Unit 10 (Promotional Activities). When this promoted a coherent development of ideas, the tactic was successful and eminently sensible. However, sometimes this tactic resulted in a lack of development of ideas. In a number of cases, the evidence for Unit 9 or 10 was superficial and consisted of a re-hash of ideas present in the candidate's Unit 8 portfolio. Centres are advised that, when using Unit 8 as the context for linked units, they *must* ensure that candidates *develop* their initial ideas by carrying out further research and by presenting a coherent and detailed consideration of marketing tactics (Unit 9) or promotional activities (Unit 10).

Finally, a few words on the use of group work. It is entirely in the spirit of the GCE Applied Business to use group work as it encourages the development of key skills and helps reduce the burden of research. It is also a key component of Unit 14 (Managing Change). However, the following rules must be observed when assessing candidates' portfolios:

- each candidate must complete their own unique portfolio of evidence
- assessment decisions must be based on evidence produced solely by the candidate.

Unfortunately, albeit in a limited number of cases, some assessors were awarding marks using evidence which could not be attributed to a particular candidate. This left moderators in an intolerable position where they could not validate candidate evidence and could not support assessor decisions.

Assessment issues

The quality of annotation improved and many more centres were using assessor feedback sheets to indicate where candidates had achieved the highest mark band within each assessment objective.

Where annotation was effective, assessors accurately indicated the Assessment Objectives and mark bands against key candidate evidence. This greatly assisted the moderation process and enabled moderators to provide focused feedback to centres.

Unfortunately, it is still the case that a significant proportion of centres are failing to annotate their candidates' portfolios and/or are misinterpreting the qualities required by the mark bands. It is of the utmost importance that assessors annotate candidate evidence by indicating both the assessment objective and the mark band next to key pieces of evidence e.g. AO3/MB2. It is also obviously important that the mark band standards, across the four assessment objectives, be understood by the team of assessors within a centre. Further guidance can be found on pages 22 to 27 of the Teachers' Guide, which can be downloaded from the AQA website.

The following comments on individual A2 units identify successful and less successful approaches to each unit by candidates.

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Successful candidates based their business plan on realistic ideas and thorough research. This often resulted from variants of a 'two-folder' approach, ie one folder containing the research, analysis and judgements (evidencing Requirements C and D); the second, and far more succinct, folder containing the completed and 'polished' business plan (evidencing Requirements A and B).

Candidates might improve their performance in this unit if they:

- select realistic and achievable business ideas, eg local and small-scale operations, such as service providers
- carry out necessary research, analysis and initial judgements into the business idea's marketing, operations and financial plans (folder one)
- based on this analysis, and associated judgements, write up the business plan to include Requirements A and B (folder two)
- pitch the idea to an informed audience and reflect on the viability of the idea, adding this evidence of reflection to folder one.

This approach will ensure that candidates propose realistic business ideas and achievable business objectives. It will also support greater consideration of each component of the plan. In too many cases, little consideration was given to the operations plan and/or sales forecast. Centres are reminded that financial plans are outcomes of the marketing and operations plans. Candidates cannot carry out in depth analysis and/or evaluation by reflecting on financial ratios alone. These ratios are undoubtedly important, but if a candidate does not understand the ways in which the marketing and operations assumptions underpin them, they are unlikely to make supported judgements as to the viability of the business idea.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the [Results statistics](#) page of the AQA Website.