



General Certificate of Education

Applied Business 8610

A2 Portfolio Units

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - June series

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General Comments

At A2, each of the Applied Business GCE portfolio units requires students to investigate and solve a suitably complex and realistic business problem. Some centres understand that this means their students should adopt an investigative approach and they provide their students with a framework for research and analysis. Unfortunately, too many centres are setting tasks that encourage students to produce large quantities of descriptive evidence. Such evidence will struggle to get out of the lower mark bands across the assessment objectives. These centres are strongly advised to contact their portfolio adviser (contact business-studies@aqa.org.uk).

Assessment issues

Too many assessors are failing to annotate their students' portfolios. This is unacceptable and, inevitably, results in poor assessment decisions. Please refer to last year's report for guidance in this matter.

This year a new and worrying trend seems to have emerged. Some centres are not differentiating between the qualities expected at AS and those expected at A2. At times it almost seemed that some assessors were using AS assessment grids. Again, if in doubt, please contact your portfolio adviser who will provide you with the quality descriptors for AS and A2 – they are different.

BS08 – Business Planning

Students from a large proportion of centres produced some effective and interesting evidence for this unit. These students understood what was expected of them and they produced some realistic and well-founded business plans. These centres often used the 'two folder approach', ie one body of evidence containing research, analysis and some evaluation; the other body of evidence containing the business plan.

However, too many students continue to produce descriptive work for this unit. It is, often, almost impossible to recognise the evidence as being part of a business plan. Centres are strongly advised to ensure that their students do **not**:

- waste time explaining the meaning of a SMART objective
- include extraneous materials, eg theoretical descriptions
- include reference to business ideas that have been rejected
- explain every form of business ownership used in the UK (or sometimes the USA).

BS09 – Marketing Strategy

As referenced in last year's report, many students continue to spend too much time describing every marketing strategy listed in the unit's specification. This, quite simply, is a waste of time.

The best evidence was produced by students who focused on a small-scale business (eg a local retailer or a theatre), were given the marketing objectives and strategy (by the organisation or teacher) and then showed considerable analytical and evaluative skills by building up a convincing marketing mix capable of implementing the strategy. This marketing mix was based on focused research and analysis of customers and competitors.

BS10 – Promotional Activities

This unit continues to produce some of the most effective evidence. On the whole, students understood what they had to do and they produced realistic plans for a promotion campaign. For example, one centre had their students developing a plan for a promotion campaign for a local community radio station. It needed 16 000 listeners per week to maintain funding. This brief resulted in imaginative and focused work.

However, there are still examples of unrealistically high budgets. It is strongly recommended that the budget for the campaign is kept between three and four figures (and not much more than £3 000). The budget should **never** get into five figures. Such generous budgets tend to confuse students and contribute to unsound decisions.

BS13 – Managing Information

There are still examples of assignments that are really ICT assignments. These miss the point of the unit, ie an information system to solve a problem that involves a range of different users. The focus must be on the information and data needs of people within an organisation. The brief given to students must be focused, eg an information system for an End of Year 13 Ball. When this is the case, students produce interesting and effective evidence.

BS14 – Managing Change

It is important for centres to note that this unit requires students to work as a team. They should, as a team, carry out a presentation of their change plan. Through this, they will, hopefully, reflect on the suitability of the plan and the way they have worked together.

Many students are approaching this unit as a project management unit, ie they are concentrating on the mechanics of implementing a project rather than investigating the nature of the change and how people within an organisation can be motivated to accept and implement the change programme.

BS16 – Managing Resources

The advice given in the 2009 report remains pertinent. Far too many students are attempting to cover every single aspect of the unit's content. This is made more complex as they are attempting to do this through a study of very large manufacturing businesses.

Centres are advised that their students:

- investigate smaller, local businesses, eg a local branch of a cinema chain
- focus on aspects of the specification relevant to their chosen business, ensuring that one area from each of three main headings in the unit are covered (planning production, managing production, improving the efficiency of production)

If in doubt, centres should contact their portfolio adviser.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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