AQA

ASSESSMENT and
QUALIFICATIONS
ALLIANCE

General Certificate of Education

Information and Communication Technology 6521

Unit 4   Information Systems within Organisations

Report on the Examination

2007 examination – January series

General Comments

In this January series of the examination both the AS and A2 units showed candidates achieving a good range of marks. There was clear evidence that many candidates were well prepared for the unit that they were attempting.

Candidates do need to be reminded to read the front of the question paper before beginning to read the questions themselves. It is clearly stated on the front of all GCE ICT question papers that, '…*the use of brand names will not gain credit.'* Marks were therefore lost by candidates using brand names of specific software packages as they <u>must</u> respond to questions with reference to generic types of software.

Some candidates gave answers to questions which have appeared on previous question papers or they repeated their answers within the same question. In any examination it is unlikely that any response in whole or in part would be credited more then once. Also the importance of reading a question properly cannot be stressed enough. It is imperative that candidates answer a question as it is asked, rather than simply give stock answers remembered from previous examination series.

Often questions cover topics that have been used many times in a similar, straightforward manner, yet some candidates fail to recognise the different topics, despite clues in the questions. A study of the specification, alongside past papers and mark schemes that are available on the web-site, might have helped candidates to prepare more thoroughly.

For ICT 4, more than in any other, candidates are expected to have a basic understanding of how ICT is used and managed in organisations of different types and sizes, and those with this basic understanding perform better in the unit than those who have not spent time relating the various topics to a range of organisations. Several questions asked for candidates to respond with answers appropriate to the strategic (high) level and many candidates failed to approach their answers at the correct level, instead giving low-level answers that did not fully answer the question.

Question 1

Candidates tended to gain all three marks, for Strategic, Tactical and Operational levels. Worryingly, however, all of the candidates from some centres showed little knowledge of this topic.

Question 2

Many candidates scored well on this question about ICT teams, finding two characteristics and correctly describing them. Some candidates offered personal characteristics, but these gained no marks.

Question 3

Most candidates scored at least 2 or 3 marks and many gained all 5. This was a 'give' command word question, and so did not need a long explanation of each change.

Question 4

Part (a) confused some candidates who were unsure of what constitutes a criterion. Weaker candidates answered the whole question as if it was about backup. The contingency plan is a document that is available after the disaster so it should be full of information about what to do

in any given case. There were some pleasing answers to part (b), but few candidates gained all 6 marks for a comprehensive discussion.

Question 5

Although there was some overlap in parts (a) and (b) in the mark scheme, they are two different questions. One is asking, 'What is a Code of Practice?', the other is, 'Why have one?'. Not all candidates could differentiate between the two. There was also some confusion with Code of Conduct (a general code of behaviour, not related only to the use of ICT). Part (c) was well answered, although quite a few candidates tried to offer adherence to legislation. This was not credited as it had been given in the question.

Question 6

The topic of Corporate Information System Strategy requires a broad understanding of how ICT is used by organisations. Too many candidates showed no understanding that this strategy is drawn up, considering a range of organisational factors, with no particular information system in mind – it is written so that any future Information System in the organisation will be commissioned and developed to fit in with the strategy. Many candidates answered the question as if they were required to provide the introduction of one new system, and hence failed to respond with factors at the correct level. Of those who recognised the factors, some went on to describe the factor, rather than give a reason for considering the factor, as was asked in the question.

Question 7

Part (a) of this question was asking for a legitimate way of an organisation controlling software use - in this case installing a package with limited licences on a big network - so that it could be used on any terminal. Only a few candidates were aware that network software controls could be set to monitor the number of users on the application, so restricting illegal use. An apparent misreading of the question led candidates to make quite a number of erroneous responses as there is no mention of how many engineers need the package. Many candidates offered impractical solutions, some even illegal ones!

Responses to part (b) were better, with most candidates gaining some marks and many gaining them all.

Question 8

In part (a), candidates were asked for differences between operational-level information requirements and strategic-level information requirements for a stated system. Many candidates could quote how they were different, but few could name the term for the difference (for example level, purpose, nature, source, type and so on).

Part (b) asked for characteristics of good information with examples in the given context. Candidates often did not use the given context, nor did they respond with an example in the negative. Writing that good information must be, 'Complete, because incomplete information leads to wrong decisions,' does not gain any of the marks for an example or extension. Stronger candidates might write, 'Complete, for example, the managing director needs a report that covers annual sales for all the stores in the chain, so that he can compare performance across the whole business in order to decide where to expand.'

Question 9

Training for a specialist package was required in part (a). Some candidates got confused between training and support. Some still feel that workers should train in their own time or at home. No college night class is likely to cover such a package, nor is the software house likely to put training tutorials within the application. Otherwise, many candidates scored well on this part, as most other training methods were allowed. Most candidates scored maximum marks for part (b), the support options.

Question 10

The standard of essay question responses varied considerably. Not all candidates addressed the three bullet points equally, although the marks that can be given are distributed over all three. Some essays had a lot of repeated points around end-user or managerial involvement.

Some candidates wrote a whole essay on the systems life cycle with little reference to anything else, and gained only a few of the available marks. The life cycle was only a small part of one bullet point. Good candidates were more succinct, giving a swift overview of the life cycle, discussing methods of acquiring (e.g. buying off-the-shelf versus bespoke, doing it in-house, or asking a software house), formal development methods (e.g. stages, formal documentation, sign-off, approval to proceed and so on), different ways of implementing (e.g. changeover methods).

Very few candidates mentioned people by title or role for the bullet on people involved in the development, although, apart from the obvious company managers, end-users and team leaders/project manager, most failed to consider all the rest, such as operations staff, network and other ICT technicians, user support staff and so on. Many confused organisational management with the ICT project management.

Many candidates gained marks discussing management's role in the introduction of a new system, including their knowledge of ICT and being practical in demands. Candidates also gained marks for consideration of organisational staff (for example, by keeping them informed, making sure training was available and in place, and the disruption that a new system might bring to working practices and conditions).

The quality of written communication was reasonable, although a lot of incorrect spellings and many grammatical errors were seen. To gain the higher language marks, the essay must have structure and relevance, as well as good use of English. Paragraphs must also be logically and smoothly linked. In this series there were a few instances of paragraphs not being used at all, and a few cases only of lists of items being written down. Proper essay planning would improve this. Well-structured essays, with good use of English spelling and grammar, gained three or four quality of language marks.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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