



**General Certificate of Education (A-level) Applied
June 2011**

Applied Business

BSPA/2

**(Specification
8611/8613/8616/8617/8619)**

Report on the Examination

Further copies of this Report on the Examination are available from: aqa.org.uk

Copyright © 2011 AQA and its licensors. All rights reserved.

Copyright

AQA retains the copyright on all its publications. However, registered centres for AQA are permitted to copy material from this booklet for their own internal use, with the following important exception: AQA cannot give permission to centres to photocopy any material that is acknowledged to a third party even for internal use within the centre.

Set and published by the Assessment and Qualifications Alliance.

The Assessment and Qualifications Alliance (AQA) is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales (company number 3644723) and a registered charity (registered charity number 1073334).
Registered address: AQA, Devas Street, Manchester M15 6EX.

General Comments

It is always a pleasure to moderate succinct and focused A2 Applied Business portfolios which demonstrate a high level of analysis and evaluation. Whilst it was pleasing to see many students carrying out focused investigations, far too many included extraneous information. A2 portfolios should contain a range of information taken from a variety of sources, but this should be pertinent, selected and used purposefully.

To help focus students on their investigations, it is strongly recommended that the objectives of each portfolio be kept to a maximum of three succinct statements. For example, listing six promotional objectives will not help a student to develop a focussed promotion campaign plan.

This leads to the final general comment that successful students know the value and purpose of their research. This is not an easy position to reach. Centres could help their students by encouraging them to carry out preliminary research and analysis to identify the key features of the problem they are tackling, eg by evaluating the likely success of a business idea before developing the business plan or by understanding the market position of a business before considering the real purpose of a proposed marketing strategy.

Administrative and Assessment Issues

As in previous series, exemplary centres and their assessors:

- ensured that marks on the student record forms matched those of the moderator mark forms
- used treasury tags or plain folders to secure each student's portfolio as opposed to multiple plastic wallets or ring-bound files
- annotated student evidence so that it was very clear to the moderator how the assessment decisions had been reached, eg by placing AO2/MB3 next to evidence illustrating this achievement
- recognised that the four assessment objectives could be evidenced anywhere within a portfolio as opposed to the sections originally intended by the teacher
- took into account the quality of written communication when awarding marks for AO4 and recognised that a mark of zero for AO4 would be highly unlikely
- understood the qualities required for each assessment objective at each mark band by attending teacher standardisation meetings and/or contacting their portfolio adviser
- carried out internal moderation, especially when more than one assessor marked a unit, to ensure that standards had been applied uniformly.

Where moderation hit problems it was due to some or, in very severe cases, all of the above practices falling short.

BS08 – Business Planning

This compulsory unit continues to provide both exemplary and problematic portfolios, often by centre.

Where students are successful it is clear that they have considered the likely success of the business idea before embarking on developing the business plan. This is evidenced by a range of focussed research and analysis that helps to gauge the practicality of the idea, eg focus group interviews, observations of similar business activities and relevant internet research. They demonstrate their insights by developing realistic marketing, operations and financial plans. These are realistic because they show a genuine understanding of the key issues, eg customer preferences, operational issues, such as the layout of the premises, and a realistic scale of operation with matching financial figures.

Less successful students fail to take this approach and evidence this by listing a wide range of inappropriate and often generic business objectives, eg increase sales by 50% in the third year of the business. They often fail to consider the operational aspect of the business and the personnel required. The finance plans are not backed up by suitable research, eg a sales forecast upon which to base a cash flow forecast. The marketing activities are inappropriate or too vague to attract the target market.

BS09 – Marketing Strategy

Successful students usually had a very clear understanding of what the business needed to improve upon in terms of marketing activities. They quickly moved on to one or two marketing objectives and identified an appropriate strategy. This was not laboured, and did not occupy too much of the portfolio, but provided a clear background to the marketing plan. These students went on to develop a coherent and illustrated marketing mix that was fully justified. All of this was possible because:

- the chosen business was often small scale and local
- a range of research into customers and competitors had taken place before completing requirements A and B
- students understood the need for a marketing mix that supported the marketing objectives.

Less successful students often chose inappropriate businesses, ie too large or remote. Some tried to base their strategy on the business idea they developed in Unit 8. This often proved difficult as students had nothing to judge their decisions against and they simply repeated evidence from Unit 8.

Too many students spent an inordinate amount of time on requirement A. Students do not have to consider all possible types of marketing strategies. They are encouraged to choose one (eg product development) and quickly move on to developing their marketing mix.

BS10 – Promotional Activities

Successful students chose realistic and achievable contexts, ie local and small-scale businesses or organisations. They often had very small budgets to work with (eg £2000) and used their creativity to consider ways in which the target market could be persuaded. They used AIDA with proficiency and understood the importance of sequencing and timing when explaining the delivery of their promotional activities.

Less successful students often gave themselves impossible challenges, ie the converse of the features of successful students. For example, it is not possible for a 17/18 year old to make sensible decisions with budgets in the 10s of thousands for businesses that would spend this budget in an instant! These students, faced with almost impossible contexts, often demonstrated restricted analysis and judgements. They found it very difficult to access the higher mark bands in assessment objectives 2, 3 and 4.

This unit works best when students investigate practical contexts and, given these, virtually all students can demonstrate what they know and understand in a purposeful way. It is often the case that not-for-profit contexts provide these opportunities, eg local charities, local authority activities and schools/colleges.

BS13 – Managing Information

Very few centres enter students for this unit. When successful, students consider information system problems that are not too complex, eg organising 6th form social events. However, it might be interesting to see investigations that do not involve the student's own school or college, eg a small local business that wishes to improve communications with its customers.

Examples of less successful contexts usually involved a consideration of a large business's financial or stock control systems. This is either very challenging or extremely simple depending on which software is considered! In other words, the focus should always be on people rather than software, ie the information and data required to inform employees and managers rather than particular software packages used to handle this data.

BS14 – Managing Change

This unit offers students an opportunity to develop their understanding of how individuals respond to change and how they can be supported in the change process.

Successful students demonstrated their understanding by considering both their own team's performance and the ways in which individuals within the investigated organisation could be involved in the change process. They interviewed key employees and understood the factors promoting and resisting change. They used this research to construct realistic programmes for change, demonstrating an appreciation of the key stages within that programme. The contexts were predominantly school/college based and this made it easier to obtain and understand key information.

Less successful students failed to appreciate that a change programme is not the same as a project plan, ie they focussed on the mechanics of the change rather than the people involved. This often resulted in, effectively, the production of a simple critical path that stated the order in which things had to be done rather than how individuals might be persuaded to accept particular changes.

BS16 – Managing Resources

Successful students investigated local and small-scale organisations, eg restaurants. They chose relevant businesses when completing requirement A, ie carrying out similar activities, on a similar scale, to the business investigated in requirements B, C and D. They had, much as in Units 8 and 9, carried out focused and purposeful research prior to completing requirements B, C and D. This allowed them to select the aspects in the specification that were of relevance when considering how the business might improve the planning, management and efficiency of its production. This resulted in succinct and applied work with clear evidence of analysis and judgement.

Less successful students adopted a mechanical approach, whether by design or necessity, where each and every aspect of the unit's specification was systematically referenced. This resulted in descriptive evidence that was not always relevant. Consequently, it was difficult for these students to demonstrate any sustained analysis or judgement.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

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