

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2010

GCE

GCE Applied Business (6916) Paper 01

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PE Report on examination paper 6916/01 - Investigating People at Work- January 2010

General Comments

This question paper was based on replicating Assessment Objective (AO) and Mark Band (MB) weightings established in previous papers. The structure of the paper matched the sample assessment material issued June 2009, which included exemplars for the extended writing questions that are now an integral part of the assessment for this unit. In every other way the requirements of the question paper should be directly comparable with previous series.

It is recommended that in addition to reading and taking any notes or advice from this report that Examiner Reports for previous series are read as they contain lots of general advice that is still relevant and likely to be useful for staff and students in preparation for future papers.

My own general observations about this paper are as follows:

Candidates are still missing marks because they do not produce answers for the question that is asked. Candidates are advised to read the questions in full before starting to write their answers. No matter how well written or knowledgeable an answer, if it does not answer the question asked it can be awarded no marks.

Linked to this is the tendency to miss, or misunderstand, the command words at the start of each question. Each command word has been carefully selected as part of the paper development process to elicit a particular response, linked to the AO and the level of answer expected. A question that starts 'Discuss...' or 'Analyse...' is expected to be given a different response to ones that start 'State...', 'Explain...', 'Describe...' and so on, and each will carry a number of marks appropriate to the response expected.

To help candidates overcome this I recommend that:

1) Teachers make good use of examination preparation sessions to introduce students to the command words that they will commonly see within the GCE assessment. For further information please see: Appendix 8, in the Teacher's Guide that accompanies the Edexcel AS GCE and GCE specifications for Applied Business, May 2005.

2) Past papers and associated Mark Schemes are used to identify how command words relate to mark allocation and exemplar answers.

Candidates should be reminded that just stringing together a few business terms such as '...this will increase, profit, turnover, sales, employees, savings, motivation...' is not an answer and markers will not pick out the appropriate word on behalf of candidates in some kind of multiple choice exercise. Candidates also need to be reminded that this is an AS level examination and answers are expected to show some development and application. This means that unless specifically asked for, simplistic answers at the level of single words such as 'easier', 'cheaper', 'quicker', 'faster', etc. are not really acceptable and unlikely to score any marks.

The tendency for candidates to write out the question as the start to their answer, sometimes their entire answer, remains a common practice amongst the weaker candidates. This may help their thought process but will not score any marks unless the question explicitly asks for the answer to be drawn from information given in the question or scenario.

Finally, as part of their preparation for written examinations, candidates are advised to look at the spaces left on the question paper for their answers. The number of lines guides the length of answer that is expected, and whilst I would not want to curtail a candidate from giving a long and thorough answer to a question if they need the extra space, they should bear in mind that part of the discipline of written examinations is to keep the answer to the limits set.

There is a lot of guesswork going on, and not enough precision in answers to the 'choose your own business' questions. Leading retail businesses such as ASDA and Tesco are often chosen as a basis for answering these questions, and variously described as being a plc, limited company, franchise, partnership, even sole trader. If a candidate selects a business for their answer they really do need to know what kind of business they are talking about, and that it is appropriate to the question and the kind of answer that they are required to give.

These 'open' questions continue to cause problems for candidates who chose inappropriate organisations or examples. It is good advice to candidates to read the question before they choose a business to write about, so that they can consider which of the business that they have studied is most appropriate and which will produce the best answer.

As a general observation, candidates who choose smaller, local businesses tend to produce better answers than candidates who choose large national or international 'famous name' businesses. It seems that studying small/local business tends to give candidates a greater understanding of the 'real life' of the business and provides them with more opportunities for real application in their answers. Whilst large organisations may be high profile and provide a wealth of information on their websites, much of it tends to be aimed at PR or publicity. Although this may provide an impression of the business it is often too general to be of much use when trying to answer questions based on specific issues that affect the business.

The fundamental requirement of the 'open' questions is that they are based on a real business that the candidate has studied or learned about during their course. Thus they are expected to name the business and give a brief outline of its main activities, to provide context for the marking of their answer. It is surprising how many candidates still do not bother to name a business, but just launch straight into an answer. If a business is not named, and cannot be identified by direct naming within the answer, then no marks can be given as the answer could be pure fiction. Please remind candidates that it is most important to name the business about which they are writing.

The last question on the paper, 3f) was about consumer protection legislation. Judging by most of the answers that I have seen this is a subject about which candidates know very little. Despite the fact that The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 came into force on 26 May 2008, effectively replacing several pieces of consumer protection legislation that were in force prior to 26 May 2008, such as the Trades Description Act, not one of the many hundreds of papers that I saw mentioned these regulations. Indeed, the now defunct Trades

Descriptions Act was probably the most widely mentioned, although by name only, with little understanding of what it meant. In most units the specification does not name particular pieces of legislation, but it does expect learners, and tutors, to be up-to-date with relevant legislation that is current.

This report is designed to help future teaching and learning. It may come across as a critique of the ability of candidates, but it should not be interpreted as being unduly negative. Judging from the many papers and answers that I have seen, most candidates have indeed worked hard on their studies and the paper is just designed to give candidates the opportunity of demonstrating, within the terms of the Assessment Objectives for this Unit, just how much they have learned. I offer my congratulations to all students, whatever grade they may ultimately achieve.

The theme of this paper is based on various business activities that affect *Poly Ltd*, a manufacturer of household goods. None of the questions need specialist subject knowledge, and the subject does not appear to have caused any problems for candidates.

As in previous papers, the last two items in each question should have been based on a business that the candidate has studied during their course. Recent changes in the British economy sometimes resulted in candidates naming a business that they have studied but has now disappeared, such as Woolworths. Although it is expected that candidates, and teachers, should be up-to-date with current business developments and legislation, candidates were not penalised for choosing defunct businesses as they may well have studied them when they were still trading.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1(a)

Question required basic knowledge of the main business activities found in the largest functional area of the business. Candidates were provided with a pie chart which indicated the number of employees in each of the main functional areas. There were no particular or no issues arising from this question, beyond the fact that awareness of what goes on in a production function is scant, resulting in some very general answers. A percentage of candidates did misread the question - assuming that they were required to name the two largest functional areas, rather than give examples of activities.

Question 1(b)

Candidates needed to outline why good communication between sales and production is important. No real problems, but for this kind of question candidates are advised to think about the reality of this situation - some answers were based on situations where these two functional areas would not normally communicate directly with each other, such as R&D or design.

Question 1(c)

This question is designed to test candidates' knowledge of the use of 'objectives' rather than 'aims', and was marked as such - despite the confusion between the two in the answers from some candidates. Candidates need to be familiar with, and understand the distinction.

Question 1(d)

This is the first of the 'extended writing' questions in this paper. Based on the answers that I saw, candidates responded well to this opportunity to give longer, extended answers, and there was some good work coming through. However, judging by some of the answers, not all candidates were familiar with matrix structures as a form of organisational structure. Although none are listed specifically in the specification, learners should be made aware of the main forms of organisational structure that are common in business.

Question 1(e)

Open question based on candidate's own choice of business - outline how the type of ownership influences how the business operates. Lots of answers were just descriptions of forms of ownership. Only the strongest candidates answered the question as intended, applying ownership to how the business operates.

Question 1(f)

Another 'own business' question. Here we wanted candidates to examine the role of the human resource (HR) function in their chosen business. For such a high profile function in most businesses, candidates' knowledge did not extend much beyond 'hiring & firing'; with many candidates just describing the recruitment process rather than the HR function. An example of where candidates wrote about something they knew about, rather than answering the question.

Question 2(a)

This was the second of the 'extended writing' questions in this paper. The answer should have focussed on assessing the recruitment strategy described in the scenario - this question was not about describing the recruitment process. In general, there was little assessment going on in most answers, except those from the strongest candidates. Candidates that listed advantages and disadvantages gained some marks. Some candidates not reading the question or not understanding 'assess' and just described the recruitment process, with no reference to the scenario or the question, missing the point entirely.

Question 2(b)

Question designed to test candidates' knowledge of psychometric testing. For such a well used form of assessment, the question produced surprisingly poor results. Candidates who knew the subject answered well, but in many cases it produced just low-level general answers related to interviews.

Question 2(c)

Question about protecting business from accusations of discrimination when recruiting new employees. Lots of good answers about anti-discrimination legislation, and some thoughtful ones about making sure that staff are well trained for doing the interviewing, etc. Only the strongest candidates actually gave ways that the business could avoid potential accusations of discrimination.

Question 2(d)

Based on own choice of business, candidate had to describe the method business uses to advertise its vacancies. This question does not seem to have caused any problems for candidates as it was pretty straightforward to answer. There was no shortage of methods of advertising vacancies being listed, with the strongest candidates actually providing the descriptions required.

Question 2(e)

Question based on use of 'nationally recognised training schemes', which, despite its inclusion in the specification, seems to be a bit of an unknown quantity for most candidates. Candidates produced lots of long answers describing induction training and similar activities, but few could name even the most obvious nationally recognised training schemes such as NVQ or apprenticeships. Some candidates named Investors In People (IIP) which suggests that past papers have been used for practice, which is good.

Question 3(a)

Question asks for a comparison of advantages and disadvantages of motivation method described in scenario. Comparison came in the form of narrative or bulleted lists, both are acceptable. The advantages/disadvantages could apply to either the business or its employees - depending on how candidate interprets question, either is acceptable. Lots of good answers, candidates could clearly see the advantages and disadvantages, with the stronger candidates making a comparison rather than just listing.

Question 3(b)

There seems to be scant knowledge of the theories of F W Taylor beyond 'money motivates'. Some candidates did link this to piece work, many just copied out the description of piece work that was provided in the stem of the question, but this earned them no marks.

Question 3 (c)

Question about the National Minimum Wage, which candidates seem to know a lot about, consequently lots of good answers.

Question 3(d)

Question about the impact of an external environmental issue on Poly Ltd. Lots of general answers based on a general awareness of environmental issues. Most were just random speculation as to how the situation in the scenario would impact on the business, but the strongest candidates could pull this together as a coherent 'discussion', as required.

Question 3(e)

Explain how own choice of business motivates its employees. Straightforward question producing a wealth of good answers - candidates seem to be very familiar with methods of motivation, and could identify examples of these within their chosen businesses, with the stronger candidates actually describing how the named methods of motivation were designed to work.

Question 3(f)

Final question, based on 'consumer protection legislation'. Judging by the wide range of general answers understanding of 'consumer protection legislation' is low. Many candidates seemed confused between 'consumers' and 'employees' in their answers, and many answers referred to employment legislation. Even where consumer protection legislation was mentioned there was little precision in the answers. Candidates should be reminded of the importance of consumer protection legislation in business. Please refer them to The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 as a useful starting point, and to their local Trading Standards Office for further advice.

Grade Boundaries - January 2010

6916	Total	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Mark	90	57	50	43	37	31
UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40

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