

Examiners' Report/ Principal Examiner Feedback

January 2011

GCE

GCE Applied Business (6916)
Paper 01 Investigating People at Work

Edexcel is one of the leading examining and awarding bodies in the UK and throughout the world. We provide a wide range of qualifications including academic, vocational, occupational and specific programmes for employers.

Through a network of UK and overseas offices, Edexcel's centres receive the support they need to help them deliver their education and training programmes to learners.

For further information, please call our GCE line on 0844 576 0025, our GCSE team on 0844 576 0027, or visit our website at www.edexcel.com.

If you have any subject specific questions about the content of this Examiners' Report that require the help of a subject specialist, you may find our Ask The Expert email service helpful.

Ask The Expert can be accessed online at the following link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/Aboutus/contact-us/>

Alternatively, you can speak directly to a subject specialist at Edexcel on our dedicated Business and Commerce telephone line: 0844 372 2187

January 2011

Publications Code UA026053

All the material in this publication is copyright

© Edexcel Ltd 2011

General Comments

This question paper was based on replicating Assessment Objective (AO) and Mark Band (MB) weightings established in previous papers. This question paper was the second assessment for 6916 to be based on the revised specification Issue 2 - May 2009. The most significant change being that quality of written communication (QWC) is now being assessed. This was indicated by a statement on the front of the question paper and an asterisk (*) shown next to the question number where it was applied (actually questions 1d and 2c). 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.

In addition to reading and taking any notes or advice from this report, it is recommended that Examiner Reports for previous series are read and used to prepare candidates for external assessment. 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, supported by reports from all examiners who worked on this paper, are as follows:

As noted in each of my recent reports, it is apparent that candidates' handwriting is deteriorating to the point that it is barely possible to mark some answers. This is not totally subjective, but can be measured by the increase in the number of 'unreadable' items that are sent to me as Principal Examiner for review. These items will have been looked at by the professional markers who work on this (and other) papers, most of whom are used to reading poor handwriting, and declared by them to be 'unreadable' as judged by standards that should be reasonable for an applied business qualification at AS level.

This is a written paper, within an Applied Business qualification, so it is essential that candidates are able to communicate their answers in the written form - this means making sure that examiners can actually read the handwriting. All examiners will make an effort to decipher handwriting, but there is a danger that candidates may miss vital marks if the handwriting is so bad that it cannot be read. Much of the problem looks as if it could be due to rushing at the paper and writing as fast as possible, with the inevitable deterioration. Please reassure candidates that as part of the production of this paper it is sat and completed by reviewers who make sure that the paper can be completed within the time allowed, 1½ hours, so there really should be no need to rush the writing. Candidates need to remember that despite the widespread use of keyboards, screens and electronic communication, there is still a requirement for clear and legible hand writing in the workplace. In addition, it is important to inform candidates that quality of written communication (QWC) now carries marks in this paper, marks that will be lost if the handwriting is indecipherable. Please see the revised Issue 2 specification dated May 2009 for full details.

Many candidates seem to find it difficult to apply what they have learned to the 'real life' scenarios, situations or problems posed in the questions. A good example of this

was the way in which candidates approached question 3c which gave a business aim couched in the form of a brief scenario, then asked how the given aim satisfied Maslow's hierarchy of needs - candidates seemed to have little problem listing out Maslow's hierarchy, even illustrating it with labelled pyramid drawings, but only the strongest candidates could relate Maslow to the business aim, which was the whole point of the question and the source of most of the marks. Similarly, question 3e which asked candidates to name two environmental issues that could affect the business that used large quantities of paper and ink in its production process - again, candidates gave many and varied examples of 'environmental issues' but most were generic 'global' issues that had scant relevance to the high use of paper or ink, but just seemed to be about the candidate's pet concern. Other examples will be mentioned in the comments on individual questions.

Candidates are still missing marks because they do not give answers for the question that is asked. Part of this may be due to scanning the question quickly and writing about the first thing that they see, which is not always what is actually being asked. Candidates are advised to read the questions in full before starting to write their answers. Another reason may be to cover up a lack of knowledge by writing about a subject that they do know about, which may or may not be related to that which is asked. 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 the 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 these types of problem 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.

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 indicates 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, and certainly a discipline in the real world of business, is to keep the answer to the limits set.

As noted in previous reports, some candidates seem to treat this paper as a general knowledge quiz, and assume that general answers, peppered with a few business terms, concluding with '...to make a profit', will suffice for an answer. Inserting the word 'profit' into every answer is not the way to gain additional marks - although important, profit is not always the answer. Candidates should also be told 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 most 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.

Understanding of some basic business terms remains low, especially in respect of business functions. Responses in this paper highlighted that many candidates did not know what was meant by ‘aptitude tests’ (Q2b, point 1.2.7 in the specification). ‘Self-regulatory constrains’ (Q3g, point 1.4.3 in the specification) was another term that proved difficult for many candidates – I am sure that most candidates will know or have studied examples of self-regulation, but many candidates could not relate the term to examples from their own learning.

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.

Many candidates were wasting time and potential marks by not adhering to the requirement specified in the question. If a question asks for ‘one way’ or ‘one example’, marks will only be available for one way/example – no matter how many other ways or examples the candidate crams into their answer. Again, markers were sometimes put in a position of having to choose which examples to mark from a long list provided by the candidate, inevitably some correct and some incorrect.

Most of these issues can be overcome to some degree by preparing candidates’ exam technique, which is very important.

I am pleased to report that questions where the candidates could choose your own business worked well in this paper. As in previous papers, 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.

One final general point is that the teaching that supports this unit should be up-to-date. My reason for raising this is that we are still getting answers that refer to Woolworth, a business that ceased trading at the end of 2008, Virgin Megastores that has not traded in the UK since 2007, and to the Trades Description Act which was effectively replaced by The Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 which came into force in May 2008. I accept that some text books may still refer to these and other obsolete examples, but learners should really be guided to current businesses and legislation for their work on this unit.

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 *Berg printers Ltd*. Despite the focus on one manufacturing sub-sector, none of the questions needed specialist subject knowledge, and the use of a printing business as the subject does not appear to have caused any problems for candidates.

Comments on Individual Questions

(1a) Following the introductory scenario, this question asked candidates to simply: Give two reasons why survival is an important objective for the business. In fact the question tended to produce lots of circular answers e.g. 'survival is important because the business needs to survive'; candidates seem to have it drummed into them that survival is important (as a fact) but have little idea why survival is important. Lots of answers based on how or what the business needs to do to survive, which is a result of candidates either misreading the question or giving answers to something that they know about. Lots of misunderstanding over the features of the type of business - assuming that just because it is a family business it is a sole trader or is a partnership, and consequently has unlimited liability - again, not reading the information in the scenario.

(1b) Candidates were told that one aim of the business was to ensure a fast turn round from the initial customer order to delivery of the completed stationery. They were then asked to state two ways that ensuring a fast turn round will influence its objectives. This was not answered well, candidates found it difficult to link aims with objectives, providing descriptive answers that just expanded on the given aim, rather than any objectives that may result from this aim. It could be a useful exercise when teaching, to give learners different business aims, and ask for ideas of how a business could develop objectives to support the different aims. See specification point 1.1.1.

(1c) Question asks 'how' the production and distribution functions should work together to make sure that the business is successful - many candidates produced answers that explained 'why' the two functions should work together, completely missing the point and earning no marks. A good example of where it is important to read the question thoroughly before answering.

(1d) The first extended answer question on the paper, which also included marks for QWC. I am pleased to report that candidates do not appear to have any trouble answering this style of question, most providing a full page answer, differentiating well, showing the full range of levels. The majority of candidates could list issues that may affect the business if it takes out the large bank loan, but candidates found it more difficult to apply this basic knowledge of the mechanisms of a business loan to how this would affect the way that the business operates. Question asked for an assessment of the situation, and only the strongest candidates gave some assessment of the situation and offered an opinion as to whether it was a good idea or not, but those that did, scored the highest marks. Too many candidates just dwelt on the detail of the bank loan, ignoring the question which focussed on how the loan would affect how the business operates.

(1e) Answers suggest that candidates had a good idea of the basic steps that their chosen business had taken to help ensure its survival. Stronger candidates could explain how the steps they described would actually help the business survive in the face of changing markets and economic conditions. Candidates who gave answers based on smaller, independent businesses where the learner could get more in-depth information seemed to score higher marks than candidates who chose national or multinational organisations where the answers tended to be very generic.

(1f) Question asked candidates to outline the role of a manager in their chosen business. Whilst some answers tended towards listing generic management tasks which could apply to any business, most candidates have a good idea of the role of a manager in their chosen business and could outline the role as required, which was good.

(2a) Very good response to this question. Candidates could see that the arrival of the new printing machine would provide both good reasons and less good reasons for recruiting new employees. Most answers put both points of view, with the stronger candidates providing an assessment of the situation and an opinion, based on sound judgement.

(2b) Question asked how aptitude testing could be used if the business recruited new employees. Judging by many of the answers seen, a lot of candidates were not familiar with the term which occurs in the specification section 1.2.7. Some confusion by candidates who confused 'aptitude' with 'attitude' and proceeded to write about how attitude would affect the chances of recruitment. Also, some confusion between aptitude tests and psychometric testing. Too many candidates just defined aptitude testing in a generic way and did not apply it to a practical situation. Please help candidates by making sure that they know the basics of this specification before they take the examination.

(2c) This was the second extended answer/QWC question. Candidates responded well, producing good extended answers, demonstrating that training is an area that learners understand well. Most candidates showed knowledge and understanding of internal on-the-job training and external off-the-job training, and could put forward some advantages and disadvantages. Stronger candidates could apply their knowledge of these training methods to the situation in the scenario to the question and give some evaluation, as well as practical reasons, why one method may be judged to be more appropriate than the other. Pleased to see that many candidates gave an opinion and conclusion to their answers, which will have helped them to raise their marks for this question.

(2d) Candidates have a good understanding of the basic reasons why their chosen business needed to recruit new staff. With weaker candidates there was a tendency to generalise, but stronger candidates could expand on the basic reasons and give some further description of the reasons, gaining more marks.

(2e) Candidates showed a good understanding of assessment methods and could apply this to their chosen businesses. Some generic answers, but most showed good application. Again, candidates that chose businesses where they had been able to do some in-depth research, or where they had been recruited themselves for part-time work, tended to do better than candidates who tried to answer from general knowledge of well-known organisations.

(3a) Candidates grasped the situation described in the question and produced good reasons why it would be important to motivate staff that had not been trained on the new machine. Motivation seems to be understood well by the majority of candidates.

(3c) This question was designed to link Maslow's theories with the practicalities of being paid 'a fair wage'. Many answers are not clear, confusing Maslow with Taylor. In general, candidates seemed to have little problem listing out Maslow's hierarchy, even illustrating it with labelled pyramid drawings, but only the strongest candidates could relate Maslow to the business aim, which was the whole point of the question and the source of most of the marks. This is another example of where it is important for learners to be able to apply theories to 'real life' business situations. This can be done effectively through case studies, pointing out to learners where Maslow (or other theorists) relates to actual business practice.

(3d) Question answered very well. Candidates could recognise the employer's motives and the theory behind the concept of an 'away day', and produced very good answers, showing once again that learners understand motivation.

(3e) This question, which asked candidates to name two environmental issues that are likely to affect the printer, a business that uses large quantities of paper and ink. Question produced lots of generic answers, but most candidates could name environmental issues that could affect a printer that uses large quantities of paper and ink. However, some answers were just too sparse - single words such as 'pollution' with no reference to the business or the question and not showing any knowledge or understanding of the issue raised by the question. At this level the answers should really give some context or justification for the names environmental issue. Also, some environmental issues raised had no direct connection with the situation in the question, such as 'destruction of wild animals' so although they may be environmental issues in another context, for this question they could not be given any marks.

(3f) In this question not all candidates recognised what was meant by 'external stakeholders' and produced answers that were based on 'internal stakeholders' such as employees. For many, 'stakeholders' was synonymous with 'shareholders' which could more or less fit in the context of the question. Some good answers were produced, linking 'customers' with a wide range of communication including advertising and promotions as well as more obvious means of communication such as emails or telephone calls.

(3g) Judging by the kind of answers that were produced by many candidates, understanding of the term 'self-regulatory constraints' is very low - despite their

widespread use in most industries and businesses. Lots of answers were based on legislation, which, of course, is the ultimate externally applied constraint. 'Self-regulatory constrains' is listed in point 1.4.3 in the specification and so should have been covered during learning. I am sure that most candidates will know or have studied examples of self-regulation, but simply could not relate the term to examples from their own learning. The use of case studies, with explanation of self-regulatory constraints, will help improve understanding.

Grade Boundaries

Grade Boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:

<http://www.edexcel.com/iwantto/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx>

Further copies of this publication are available from
Edexcel Publications, Adamsway, Mansfield, Notts, NG18 4FN

Telephone 01623 467467
Fax 01623 450481

Email publications@linneydirect.com

Order Code UA026053 2011

For more information on Edexcel qualifications, please visit www.edexcel.com/quals
Edexcel Limited. Registered in England and Wales no.4496750
Registered Office: One90 High Holborn, London, WC1V 7BH