



General Certificate of Education

Business Studies 2131

BUSS3 Strategies for Success

Report on the Examination

2010 examination - January series

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General Comments

In general, the paper proved to be accessible with the vast majority of students able to attempt all of the questions. Timing did not appear to be an issue as students were able to answer each question fully. Well prepared students revealed good subject knowledge, applied their answers well to the case, were able to develop good lines of argument and wrote well-balanced evaluative, conclusions. Weaker students were often able to make valid points which were usually in context, but their answers tended to be descriptive, lacked depth of analysis and revealed limited evaluation.

Question One

This question proved to be highly accessible. The majority of students revealed good knowledge of 'soft HRM' and/or identified relevant benefits resulting from it. In most cases, students were also able to gain analysis marks for explaining the benefits that would result, but only a minority developed strong lines of argument. Most students also gained application marks by referring to relevant examples from the case, but only a minority were able to relate the benefits within the retail context of *Out and About plc*. Some students failed to refer to any examples at all, and consequently lost potentially five marks out of the maximum 10 available. Other common mistakes were that students would compare 'soft' HRM with 'hard' HRM and write evaluative conclusions that were not required.

Question Two

This question proved to be the most challenging. It was disappointing to note that only a minority of students were able to display sound understanding of a marketing plan. However, most answers did identify relevant influences on the marketing plan and gained marks for both content and application. A common mistake was that students attempted to simply describe the marketing plan and assessed whether or not it would be successful rather than focusing on the specific influences. The best students were able to identify a range of both external and internal influences and explain in context why they would be important, in both the design and the implementation of the marketing plan. Students who were then able to justify the most important influence based upon their previous analysis, also scored highly for evaluation.

Question Three

The majority of students were able to identify and correctly calculate relevant ratios. Some students penalised themselves by calculating too many ratios or failed to show their calculations. A common weakness was the interpretation of the accounts when calculating ROCE and/or gearing. Students would often misinterpret the brackets on the non-current liabilities as being a negative figure which they would then deduct from total equity. Stronger students were able to gain high marks for analysis and evaluation by interpreting their calculations in terms of recommending the most appropriate sources of finance. Weaker answers simply described the financial health of the business with no reference to the actual question set. Although the majority of students revealed good knowledge of sources of finance, there was plenty of evidence of confused understanding. For example, many answers recommended using reserves or shareholders funds. Other responses focused on cost minimisation or improving cash flow. Centres are advised that financial analysis is a key part of business strategy and it is important that their students possess sound understanding of this concept.

Question Four

This proved to be an accessible question which also differentiated well between candidates. It was pleasing to note that many centres had prepared their students well in that they had written a plan before starting their answers. The best responses were well-structured with the arguments both for and against clearly indicated, followed by a conclusion / recommendation. Students who were able to show good understanding of a broad range of factors encompassing all the functional areas scored highly for content. Stronger answers were written using separate paragraphs each of which focused on a specific point. Students who were able to link data from different appendices and develop effective lines of argument were awarded high marks for application and analysis. In terms of evaluation, the best students were able to write a balanced conclusion as to whether the plan should be adopted based upon their prior analysis and also recommend any further actions that might be required.

Weaker students tended to write unstructured answers using continuous prose. Their answers tended to be too descriptive and simply repeated material from the case. Although marks would be awarded for content and low level application, there was little evidence of analysis, and evaluation was largely unsupported. A common mistake was to adopt a 'scattergun' approach in which students would identify several points but only analyse them to a limited extent.

Summary

It is important that students ensure that they can reveal sound understanding of the concepts being examined. Based upon this series, a key lesson is that students need to develop their skills of analysis. There were too few examples of answers that were able to develop a strong line of argument. Students should also spend more time reading the case material and planning their answers. This should provide a greater understanding of the actual business and enable students to gain higher marks for application by using the business context more effectively.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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