

Business Studies

Advanced GCE A2 7811

Advanced Subsidiary GCE AS 3811

Report on the Units

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2871: Businesses, their Objectives and Environment

General Comments

The one phrase which sums up this session is an old chestnut: "Read the question!" Many candidates lost marks by not doing so, and such answers are at best tangential to the actual question set and so are not going to score well. This was apparent on several of the questions on this paper.

The quality of spelling and presentation remain a concern. The two spelling errors that cropped up the most were "loose" instead of "lose" and "oppurtunity" instead of "opportunity". There were also some very untidy scripts and, regrettably many of these did not contain paragraphs either. It has been pointed out before that candidates answering in this way are highly likely to disadvantage themselves because 'stream of consciousness' answers lasting several pages are, by their nature, not going to be clearly structured.

The overwhelming majority of candidates were familiar with all areas of the specification examined and there was no evidence of time pressures on this paper.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) This was the first time that a question had been explicitly asked on directors but it is pleasing to report that most candidates were able to tackle it and that this part of the specification has been well taught. Some did not read the question properly and explained what a board is (eg "a board is made up of the senior managers of the company") rather than its function. Answers did not have to be in the context of STL Ltd and candidates were not penalised if reference was made to directors in a plc. Possible answers included running the company on the shareholders' behalf, making the strategic decisions and monitoring the overall progress of the company.
- 2) This was a standard 'stakeholder framework' question - which many centres had obviously been expecting. It proved a very good discriminator. Level 2 answers pointed out obvious facts such as "employees will lose their jobs", "suppliers to the two shops will be negatively affected" and "customers will lose out", but even so these were still able to gain up to six marks. In other cases the question produced some very good analysis with these points being developed by statements such as "and as the employees are in their 50s and have only worked in a toy shop so they may find it hard to get another job", "...but the suppliers probably weren't making much profit from them anyway as they are not successful shops" and "the loyal customers may be inconvenienced and have to travel further to get the toys they want". These were all instances of candidates using the case material to demonstrate one of the higher level skills.

A small number of candidates still equate 'stakeholder' with 'shareholder'. As a shareholder is indeed a valid stakeholder in a company these answers were not 'wrong' by any means but such an approach was likely to limit the opportunities for analysis and evaluation.

As ever, the number of candidates reaching Level 4 was rather low. Yet again all of the examining team reported that on a 14 mark question, after some excellent analysis, a huge number of candidates simply stopped without any attempt at an evaluative conclusion. This meant a maximum of 10 marks. Those who did take their answer a stage further

made reference to which stakeholder(s) were affected the most, or/and how the time period under consideration might affect their fortunes following the closures.

Some candidates had obviously been prepared for a different question. It was not "Discuss whether STL should close the two shops", it was a question explicitly about the effect on the business' stakeholders. Those who do not read the question properly do so at their peril.

- 3) Answers here were of three types. There were those candidates who wrote a few words and who picked up two easy marks, those who wrote a huge amount and picked up the marks but wasted valuable time, and those who had no idea at all – and the latter sometimes demonstrated this at length. On a unit whose title is "Businesses, their Objectives and Environment" it is not unreasonable to expect candidates to know the difference. There were some very bizarre answers, such as "with a strategic objective you know what you want to do but with a tactical one you don't" or "strategic is an internal objective and tactical is external".

The question had been set before and really candidates should have been able to gain both marks through a quick consideration of the differences; for example via the time period or who sets them.

- 4) This question had not been asked before but candidates were, in the main, able to tackle it fairly confidently. Most knew that a SWOT analysis is basically an audit which is undertaken so that a business can identify its desired direction in the future.

Some answers were very theoretical and, needless to say, those whose answers were in the context of STL scored more highly. The use of a SWOT analysis by STL would mean a consideration of its strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats and would show whether there actually is a market for outdoor clothing – *and, therefore, whether the objective of diversification was appropriate*. It would indicate whether this is a relevant and achievable objective for STL to pursue or whether some other objective (eg Helen's) should be considered.

Many candidates interpreted the question as "Do a SWOT analysis of STL" and, as stated above, this in itself was tangential to the actual question. Marks could still be scored but answers of this type were firmly lodged in Level 2. For analysis the candidates had to make a clear link to the setting of objectives at STL. Without this link it was not possible to access the two top marks.

Examiners were prepared to accept references to any aspect of 'the setting of objectives at STL'; strategic or tactical.

- 5) A significant minority of candidate failed to read the question properly and answered as if it had asked "how might the success of Paul's idea be judged". These answers made reference to the amount of profit made, the number of customers visiting the shops, etc, and unfortunately these were not relevant.

For the majority of candidates it was a straightforward question which discriminated well. Candidates could answer from either - or all three - of the following sections of the specification; 1 ("What businesses need"), 5 ("External influences") and 6 ("Other influences").

It was hoped that with such a wide variety of possibilities (from competitors to cash flow, from economic factors to ethical trading) candidates would be led towards an evaluation of which factor(s) would be the most significant in determining STL's success. However, the same problem which occurred on Question 2 often appeared again here; many candidates

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analysed well but then stopped short of an evaluation. For those who did understand what was required to reach the highest level of the mark scheme, it was relatively easy to make a comment on the relative significance of the factors or/and how “success” might vary in the short and long run.

Less able candidates produced a list of factors with little or no attempt to analyse any of them. Some of these were not always directly relevant to the question - which was specifically about the launch of the sportswear range. Long lists of “things which might affect STL” were only ever going to score at Level 2 at best. Comments such as “the staff don’t know anything about sportswear” or “their current suppliers don’t sell sportswear” were valid so far as they went, but would have scored more highly if they had been analysed by explaining the *consequences* of these for STL

Examination technique (or the lack of it) was a significant factor in determining the mark awarded on this question.

2872: Business Decisions

General Comments

While on the whole candidates coped well with this paper, it is also the case that there were key issues which arose yet again. Lack of basic knowledge of key areas will let a candidate down and this was particularly evident on the first question. However, while the demonstration of a sound theoretical understanding of business studies is pleasing to see, it will not in itself guarantee success. The issue of a lack of use of the context remains a barrier to many candidates achieving in the higher levels of the mark range. Too many weak answers were general in nature and failed to acknowledge either the product being sold by the business and/or the nature and features of the business itself. Merely copying sections from the case is not sufficient to provide suitable application and does waste valuable time which could be better invested in developing a relevant point. A small number of candidates used other business examples that they have learnt about to illustrate their points. However, such an approach leads to answers which lack relevance and again are a poor use of a candidates' limited time in the examination.

However, good use of context in itself is not enough – candidates must ensure that they develop their answer using the data provided to consider the implications of the points that they have made. Evaluation can be improved in many ways, such as questioning the validity of the data, weighing up different viewpoints to reach a judgement, looking at the impact of time or considering the impact of the external environment. As has been stated in previous examiners' reports, the teachers' guidance notes for this specification, as available on the OCR website, indicate a wider variety of ways in which candidates can show evaluation in their answers.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) A significant number of candidates were unable to demonstrate even basic levels of knowledge of this area of the specification and not only failed to state the names of two investment appraisal techniques but provided a range of answers that had little to do with finance. Once again the point needs to be made that candidates must cover the entire specification and cannot afford to leave out any section when preparing for the examination.

However, many candidates were able to identify payback and make a reasonable attempt at providing an explanation of this technique. There was much less success in both identifying ARR and explaining this technique. Vague references to profitability were not sufficient to move into the higher level of the marks available. Good answers were precise in their definitions of the terms.

- 2) Given that the question clearly asked about production methods it was disappointing that many candidates failed to identify and name batch and/or flow as production methods in use by this business. Weak responses failed to answer the question as they focused on capacity, HRM and distribution issues and, therefore, gained little reward. Candidates must be reminded to answer the question which the examiner has asked and not the one that they would have preferred to have been asked.

There were many descriptive answers which focused on issues such as waste and boredom. Better answers picked up on the features of batch and flow production as used by the business and were able to comment on their advantages and disadvantages in relation to a business producing milk products, thus creating a context for their answer. Those candidates who went on to make some assessment of the production methods in

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use were able to show evidence of the evaluative skills of judgement needed to reach the highest levels of marks.

- 3 a) This part of the question was generally well answered with very many candidates gaining full marks. It was very pleasing to note that most were able to show all their workings allowing examiners to use the own figure rule to reward answers as fully as possible.
- 3 b) Weak answers demonstrated a lack of understanding of the stages of the product life cycle and the marketing techniques appropriate to that stage. However, most candidates were able to make a good attempt at answering this question with many suitable suggestions about extension strategies which could be used.

It is encouraging to note that while some responses made use of the Boston Matrix this tended to be in conjunction with their comments on the product life cycle and so supported the points which were being made.

More successful responses were able to look at the nature of the business which provides branded dairy products. Candidates who were able to grasp this in the context of a business operating within a market which competed with supermarket own brands were able to reach the higher levels of the mark scheme. Good responses also grasped the notion that although maturity was approaching, there were still substantial prospects for growth in the market and that, perhaps, there was no need to panic.

- 4) There was a great deal of evidence available for use in the text but just copying out sections was not sufficient to gain good marks. However, most candidates found it relatively easy to apply their comments to the business. There was often a good use of theoretical models of motivation to support the comments being made with Maslow and Herzberg being the most popular choices. Candidates do need to be reminded that McGregor's Theory X and Y is concerned with management and leadership. Very few used Taylor to challenge whether financial rewards have any importance.

However, many candidates limited their marks by their inability to analyse the points which they had made. Better answers considered the cost implications of the non financial motivational tools used to provide analysis in their answers.

The best responses were able to identify that the data provided came from staff in management positions and were then able to question whether staff in other (possibly less well paid) positions in the business would feel the same way. Consideration of financial versus non financial methods of motivation was surprisingly rare but would have been a straightforward route into evaluative comments.

The standard of written communication remains consistent with issues as raised in previous sessions. It is disappointing to note a significant number of candidates still do not structure their answers to aid the ease of the reader. Failing to use paragraphs, the use of inappropriate listing and bullet points and basic spelling errors continue to be evident in the work produced by some candidates.

2873: Business Behaviour (Written Examination)

General Comments

As is normal at this time of year, the entry numbers for this examination were quite low, with most entries being retake candidates from last June. This business was an accessible one to most candidates, with clear language in the case study which enabled good discussion and use of the material by candidates. There was no indication of candidates being short of time to complete the paper.

Candidates who scored well were able to make good use of the case study. However, an inability to identify relevant and appropriate context on which to base analysis and ultimately evaluation, led to many generic answers which scored towards the bottom of Level 2. Candidates need to be more selective in choosing appropriate context about the business in the case study, to help justify the suggestions made in an answer.

The quality of written communication seems to be in further decline; poor spelling, 'loosing' for losing; 'brake' for break; their/there confusion; 'aging' for ageing. Abbreviations such as the use of an ampersand for 'and' and 'i' for 'I' seem to be further creeping.

Once again, there was some evidence of candidates not taking a calculator into the examination.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 a)i) The vast majority of the candidates got this part of the question correct. A small number divided by seven instead of five, even though the business is clearly only open Monday to Friday.
- 1 a)ii) A surprisingly large number of candidates got this wrong given the simple nature of the calculation. Some candidates gave the difference between maximum and actual capacity as the answer and some got into a muddle with weeks and days. A few failed to realise that the answer should be expressed as a percentage.
- 1 b) This was generally well understood by plenty of candidates, with many realising that operating below capacity would allow maintenance to take place, thereby increasing the life of the machines or allowing further orders to be met. Discussions about disadvantages centred around the inefficiency of working below full capacity and the fact that fixed costs would be spread over a smaller output and that revenues and profits would be reduced. Some candidates wrote about working at full capacity, rather than discussing the issues involved with working below 100%, as the question required.

Unfortunately, a large number of candidates answered a different question than the one on the paper, either 'How LGL could reduce the number of mistakes made' or 'What are the causes of poor capacity utilisation at LGL?'. The use of the word 'implications' in the question was ignored by many candidates.

Better answers considered the impact on customers if sales increased and orders could not be met, whilst the best responses pointed out that the utilisation level was not an issue until LGL had orders to meet the unused capacity.

- 2) This question gave candidates a lot of scope for using the case study. Unfortunately, many candidates failed to make effective use of it, ignoring the specific issues of employing 'older' workers at LGL, rather than any company in general.

For example, many candidates identified the issue of David Piper not using modern methods of communication, but few considered what impact the poor communication may have on sales for LGL. Better answers considered the positive impact on the older target market of employing older workers and also the possibility that 'Benidorm leave' was quite advantageous to LGL as the winter might be its quietest time of the year.

A significant number of candidates seemed to have misread the case study. Some argued that 71% of LGL's **workers** were over 40, when in fact line 63 is referring to its **customers** and others discussed the hiring of older workers, rather than realising that the older staff had been at LGL for some time, not consciously recruited.

On a lighter note, many candidates did not disappoint in their assessment of 'aging' people, who 'start to lose their mentality' and 'don't lead the lavish lifestyle of a younger employee', though it may be considered a tad harsh to be referred to as a 'deadweight, pulling the business lower and lower'. Other comments made by candidates:

- ... older staff become unreliable. As they receive their free bus passes they will tend to move to public transport and be late for work
- ...as you get older the mortgage has been paid off so what they get paid doesn't really matter. They just want something to do with their spare time
- ...as Luddites, they want to stick to good old fashioned techniques like letters and memos
- ...additional facilities may need to be constructed to cater for those 'weakened' over the years, such as a stair lift
- ...elder workers are more likely to make mistakes as they may lose their memory
- ...they won't be able to work for as long as the younger workers as they have a greater chance of death
- ...lack of eyesight means they will have to be retrained
- ...most elderly are on medication so it is vital to remind them as memory loss starts to hit them
- ...the elderly may need Benidorm leave but not maternity leave
- ...they may die in the workplace leading to demotivation and counselling for grief which is expensive.

- 3) As seems to be becoming standard practice, the marketing question showed generally poor marketing knowledge and an inability to select appropriate marketing techniques. It seems to be the trigger for candidates to launch into a description of every method they can think of, heavily supplemented by quotations from the case study. There were a significant number of candidates who talked about above and below the line promotion but who had no idea what differentiates them. Some candidates also talked about pricing issues such as destroyer pricing. Only pricing which was clearly linked to promotion was accepted.

There were a worrying number of answers which completely ignored the nature of the market that LGL is in. A lot of answers took the website idea from the case study but failed to discuss whether or not it was suitable for a local company like LGL; some went as far as saying that websites were good because they had a global reach! Others wrote about radio, television or newspapers, without making it clear in any way that these must be local for a business of this type. It was often not realised that repeat business in this type of business is rare, because once windows have been replaced, that is it. There were often vague references to 'local media', putting advertisements in shops or doing an advertising campaign. Offering a follow-up professional service to clean up the mess was often

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suggested as a promotional tool, or having fitting included in the price. Most customers would be somewhat disappointed if these were not included in the price!

- 4) Given that the concept was clearly 'flagged up' in the case study, a very large number of candidates had no knowledge **at all** of break even. This problem was largely centre specific. Far too many candidates confused break even with 'payback' and, therefore, discussed various methods of investment appraisal for which no credit could be given.

Many candidates showed understanding but did not make reference to the case study, limiting the answer to Level 2.

There were some very strong answers which discussed the changing costs of LGL, the production of customised products, the wide product range and delays in production, all of which would make break even ineffective. As long as any decision was justified, these answers scored nine or ten marks.

Summary

- Use of context to make answers non-generic is vital. Using the case study is not the same as copying it out.
- Most candidates seemed to have sufficient time to complete the paper.
- The instruction in the question must be followed. Does it ask for "implications", "advantages and disadvantages", "consequences" or "factors"? They all have a different meaning which must be understood by the candidate.
- Question 4 was the least well answered, with many candidates not knowing what break even is.
- Some good Level 3 answers still lacked the judgement necessary to move them into Level 4 answers.
- The standard of written communication remains generally poor.

2874: Further Marketing

General Comments

The use of a jewellery store was, in the view of the examining team, accessible to candidates. Better candidates were able to apply their subject knowledge to the context of the case in an effective way. Many of the same issues witnessed in previous series remained problematic. In particular, candidates' lack of ability to use the case evidence was still a factor in a high proportion of candidates.

Overall, the average mark achieved by candidates was in line with previous years. I feel that candidates should be developing this much further. Candidates are often failing to fully develop arguments and there is still reluctance by many to use the material given.

Many would feel that this paper was clearly rooted in the heart of standard marketing. There was nothing in the nature of the questions which had not been tested in previous papers and many of the favourites (pricing, promotion and market segmentation) were clearly in evidence. Weaker candidates were still failing to apply the information given. As Principal Examiner, I take great care in writing the case material carefully. It is, therefore, somewhat frustrating when candidates do not make an attempt to use it.

Another difficulty lies in the ability of the candidate to carefully read the question before putting pen to paper. It is really quite difficult to award high marks when candidates are essentially answering a different question.

There was a positive approach by candidates in that most made some attempt at every question. Evaluation of answers, however, tends to remain the major issue. Too few candidates are giving value judgements based on the evidence that has been presented.

Time did not appear to be an issue for candidates and the quality of written communication remains, in the main, very good.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 a) This tended to be answered quite well. Better answers considered the actual question set ie "meeting the needs of customers". A large number of responses tended to focus too much on different ways of segmenting. Whilst credit was given for this, an extended response scored higher.
- 1 b)i) This was an interesting question. Responses were quite varied and every possible mark from zero to four was given across a variety of answers. It remains the case that many candidates are unable to cope with the demands of a percentage-based calculation. Every possible variant using the correct numbers was seen. The question differentiated very well.
- 1 b)ii) This was not well answered by many candidates. It was interesting to note that many of the candidates who had answered part (i) correctly were unable to score highly on this part of the question. Strangely, the reverse was also true. Some candidates thought that -1.6 was inelastic because it was less than 1. Most candidates failed to notice the final three words in the question "in setting prices". Very general, 'what elasticity is all about' type of answers were commonplace.
- 1 c) Pricing questions often generate 'all I know about' types of answers. Every possible pricing method is developed whether they are even remotely relevant or not. Better answers tended to focus on methods which related well to the context. The context must be used and there must also be an attempt to evaluate as required by this type of question. Listing

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methods of pricing and simply saying that one would be more appropriate than another is not really evaluation, unless, of course, there is strong argument to back it up. This argument must be case related. Avoiding a 'one size fits all' approach has many benefits. Better answers tended to suggest that some products could be priced one way and others in a different way.

- 2 a) This was clearly a difficult part of the question for many candidates. Many candidates had little or no idea what are product portfolios. Better responses tended to focus on links with product life cycles and the Boston Matrix. Too many failed to relate the ideas to the context of a small jewellery store in a North Worcestershire town. There was very little attempt to actually consider the products and services provided by the store and this made achieving higher level responses very difficult. Evaluation of the advantages was often not considered despite being the actual question set. It would have been nice to see more attempts which focused on positive changes to the marketing efforts resulting from understanding of product portfolios.
- 2 b) The main issue in this part of the question was the failing of some candidates to distinguish between above and below the line promotion. There was the tendency, yet again, to write down lots of methods of promotion in the hope that some of them might be relevant. Candidates seemed to find it hard to use the case study in an effective way. As with the pricing question, better answers tended to consider different approaches that might be used by the firm for the different products/services provided. The case mentioned the use of a website. Very few candidates developed this idea. Those who did, as part of an overall strategy, scored higher.

Overall, the two 'strategy-based' questions caused most concern. Candidates are failing to write the answers using a strategic approach. It is becoming more noticeable that those who write with a wider strategic view are more likely to achieve higher level marks. The gap between the centres who do this and those that do not is widening.

2875: Further Accounting and Finance

General Comments

The paper proved an effective discriminator of candidates. Most candidates were able to make a meaningful attempt at all the questions. The more able candidates displayed good analytical and evaluative skills. The overall quality of work was similar to previous years. The examiners are pleased to note that an increasing number of candidates are showing confidence in using data as a means of supporting their answers. However, a minority failed to make sufficient use of the information available in structuring their responses. Teachers might like to draw the following to the attention of their candidates:

- calculations should be set out in a logical and coherent manner;
- assumptions made should always be stated;
- following the command word in the question is essential in order to gain high marks;
- answers should not be of a generic kind but need to be applied carefully to the context of the case;
- close reading of the case is always necessary so that the circumstances and situation of the business are properly understood.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 a) This part of the question proved surprisingly difficult for many candidates. Most were able to calculate the value of sales in 2007 as being £168million. A not insignificant number gave this as being the net profit of the business. A common error was to calculate the direct costs as being 35% of the revenue in 2006. There was also confusion in the minds of some candidates between gross and net profit. The correct answer to the question was £59.2m.
- 1 b) Most candidates were aware of the different methods of allocating overheads between products. This allowed them to describe the likely impact on the profits of a product created by different methods of allocation. Better candidates were able to analyse the impact by the effective use of the data provided. Under the present method of allocation the recorded profits of Mint Cremes is £10m. If overhead allocation was carried out on the basis of percentage of sales revenue then the overheads accounted for by this product would be reduced from £12m to £10.4m. This reduction in costs would result in a rise in recorded profits to £11.6m. A number of candidates failed to reach a Level 3 answer by a reluctance to use and interpret the financial data provided.
- 1 c) The vast majority of candidates were able to write, often at length, about sources of funds available to a business. They, therefore, demonstrated skills of knowledge and understanding. However, many failed to apply their knowledge sufficiently closely to the circumstances of the business. The context was of a private limited company needing finance to fund the acquisition of a new factory. Thus to suggest that it could finance this by issuing shares on the stock market or by arranging an overdraft was unacceptable. More astute candidates looked at the possibility of increasing long term debt and calculated gearing ratios. Others analysed the likelihood of retained profits as a contributor to the funds. The best candidates analysed the options in terms of feasibility and suitability. Too many answers given were of a non analytical type and lacked critical awareness of the needs and circumstances of the business.
- 1 d) This part of the question was often well attempted. Many candidates showed a good awareness of the issues involved in making this decision. They recognised that the issue

was about an increase in potential profits compared to the associated risks. Better candidates handled the data effectively and were able to calculate the potential profit which the acceptance of the supermarket order was likely to generate. Most recognised that without an increased capacity it would be impossible to supply the new order and satisfy the needs of the existing customer base. The best answers looked at the financial and non-financial factors and included consideration of the wider issues involved, such as the possibility of being left with excess capacity in the future and perhaps, an over dependence on one large customer. There were often good evaluative comments on the desirability of these outcomes. A number of candidates found it difficult to make valid inferences from the financial data given. A common line of thought was to suggest that the order might not be profitable because although it would generate £120m sales revenue, the business would have to deduct direct costs and overheads and the cost of building the factory. This shows a lack of understanding of the construction of profit and loss statements. Overall, though this part of the question produced a good level of business studies decision making.

- 2 a) Generally, well handled. Most candidates were aware that different methods of depreciation would have an impact on the accounts of a business. They were thus able to describe the situation. Better candidates were able to demonstrate why the impact occurred. Thus they were able to show that a declining balance method would depreciate assets faster initially and this would have the effect of reducing their value on the balance sheet by more than the straight line method as well as showing as a higher cost, in the short run, on the profit and loss account.
- 2 b) This part of the question posed quite a few problems for some candidates. The main task presented to the candidates was to undertake an investment appraisal of the two machines. This process is clearly not well understood by many candidates. A very common error was to attempt to discount the capital outlay over time. Thus in the case of machine x the £160000 outlay cost was discounted over four years. Candidates must realise that the process involves discounting the net cash flows. This entails identifying both the timing and the levels of cash movements into and out of the business. Without this basic level of understanding the figures that emerge from calculations are meaningless. Better candidates correctly calculated pay back periods, average annual rates of return and present day values. They concluded that machine Y looked potentially more attractive, assuming that the extra £60000 capital cost could be financed. There were thus great variations in the quality of answers given to this part of the question.

2876: Further People in Organisations

General Comments:

As previously mentioned in several other reports, many candidates' performance was affected as a result of their inability to offer a correct answer to the question testing their ability to use numerical data from the text/tables in the case study. In this particular instance, many candidates forfeited the opportunity to gain what should have been a relatively straightforward four marks.

Another particular issue in this examination was the inability of many candidates to use the context of the case study in their answers. As a result, they offered answers which could apply to any business anywhere, rather than to Morley Motors. Candidates who scored well did so because they did not make the afore-mentioned mistakes. Overall, this examination revealed that a great many candidates had a sound knowledge of relevant theories and concepts, but all too often poor examination technique and insufficient use of the case study proved to be the undoing of many of them.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 a)i) As previously mentioned, many candidates failed to get any marks at all for this part of the question. Those who did invariably completed the whole calculation correctly and arrived at the answer of £36,078. Some candidates would have been well advised to check their final calculation when offering answers which suggested that he would be paid an enormous and unrealistic amount.
- 1 a)ii) There was one very important word in this part of the question - salary. Unfortunately, many candidates chose to ignore this and either wrote about profit sharing or hourly rates of pay. Candidates who used the context of the case study and actually answered the question invariably scored high Level 2 or Level 3 marks. Better candidates used the calculation from question 1a(i) as part of their reasoning. Too many candidates also focused on the advantages to Bob and not to MML.
- 1 b) The key word in this part of the question was "evaluate". Candidates who did not wasted the opportunity to access any of the top mark band allocated to this skill. For many this turned out to be an expensive omission. However, there were a few better candidates who were able to consider the pros and cons of the two methods of recruitment with some judgement which clearly used case study evidence/justification. More common was the ability to demonstrate some analytical skills of a relevant nature, but not to progress any further, therefore, leaving their answer somewhere in the Level 3 mark band.
- 1 c) Many candidates struggled with the negative factors which might mean Bob would still not be an effective supervisor despite any training he was offered/given, and were, therefore, unable to get to grips with how this might affect his performance. Those who understood that there were indeed pros and cons with regard to training Bob, and that training would not necessarily be the "magic wand" which instantly turned him into a better supervisor and used the case study material well, often then made a judgement as to how effective training might be, and, hence, achieved Level 4. These candidates were, however, very much in the minority.
- 2 a) Many candidates chose to ignore the fact that the focus should have been on MML, and chose to describe how health and safety issues might affect any business, anywhere, often giving quite detailed generic descriptions. Better candidates, who recognised that it was

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indeed a garage, and used the case study material to draw conclusions/illustrate their answers achieved the top mark band.

- 2 b) Once again the keyword in this part of the question was “evaluate”. This skill was not evident in many of the answers. Furthermore, many candidates failed to identify the fact that the question was not just focused on “all I know about motivation” but actually required a focus on the mechanics at MML. A lot of answers identified methods which could be used to enhance motivation theoretically, without any particular focus on mechanics, specifically at MML, and, therefore, only managed to achieve a mark in Level 2. Better candidates used the case study material well, offered relevant ideas relating to methods of payment, ways of organising tasks, enhanced methods of communication, and particularly ways of reducing resentment about Bob’s promotion.

Hints on improving candidate performance in future examinations:

1. practice developing examination technique by using previous 2876 case studies, questions and mark schemes;
2. teach students, in more detail, about the different skills being assessed;
3. focus on ensuring that candidates can cope with any type of question requiring calculations based on human resource concepts.

2877: Further Operations Management

General comments

I am pleased to report that the case study seemed accessible to the candidates and there was frequent evidence in candidates' scripts of material being used in support of points being made. This is very encouraging, helps focus candidates' answers more clearly and gives them the opportunity to examine issues in context. However, there are still a small number of candidates who disadvantage themselves by simply writing a generic answer to a question, so limiting themselves to the lowest marks in Level 2 - a crucial error especially with the high mark questions. As examiners it is much easier to award marks in the higher levels when candidates clearly refer to issues mentioned in the case study.

Generally, candidates displayed a sound knowledge and understanding of the operational areas of business assessed on this paper. Topic areas such as location, environmental issues and production methods provide most candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their skills and the marks gained on all the papers seemed to show the paper differentiated well. On a small number of scripts there was still the tendency for candidates to pick up on a particular term in the question and then just trot out a textbook style answer. A good example of this was the question on switching production from batch to flow. A number of candidates seemed to read this as a question which just required a list of the advantages and disadvantages of flow production, without any reference to the context of the business.

It was again encouraging to see candidates managing their time well. There was little evidence of excessively long responses to the lower mark questions. The quality of written communication was again generally very good, with many candidates gaining the two marks. Handwriting continues to be a problem in a small number of cases. Candidates do not always help themselves; a small number of candidates continue to write their responses as one long paragraph or use bullet points. This is particularly the case on the questions requiring extended responses. This must be avoided. The small number who continue to present their responses in this way fail to structure their answers and may lose quality of written communication marks as a result.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 a) This short answer question asked candidates to analyse the operational benefits to BCL of having locally sourced raw materials. Most candidates wrote correctly about quicker delivery, minimal transport costs or the stock implications. However, the main weakness was that they failed to analyse how these factors benefit operations at BCL - a good answer might link the closeness of suppliers to not having to hold high levels of stocks, which is useful for a perishable product such as potatoes, and the savings that this might bring or the possibility that the firm might be able to use a just-in-time method of stock control. Some candidates also analysed marketing benefits - not what was asked for, especially as this is an operations paper.
- 1 b) A question very similar to this was set last June and the responses from candidates were very disappointing. Again, many candidates simply saw the reference to flow production and proceeded to write about the pros and cons of this method. The question was quite specifically about switching lines from batch (which was currently used at BCL, principally due to the size of the firm but more especially to the product it was making) to continuous flow. There were many points in the text which could be explored, eg rising demand, the need for flexibility in manufacturing different varieties of premium priced gourmet crisps, and, from the diagram, the method that was used to produce the goods. One or two candidates thought clearly about the strategy and suggested one flow line alongside the other batch lines or looked at the production method and suggested a partial flow system

up to the addition of the flavours. A few even concluded it was not a sensible strategy for BCL to follow given the nature of the product and their market. Needless to say these candidates scored high marks. In answers to longer questions it is important for candidates to produce a balanced response pointing out the implications of changing production methods and then drawing a conclusion on whether this is a sensible strategy for the business to follow.

- 1 c) For many candidates this was a relatively straightforward question and they discussed the various factors which might influence the choice of location for this business such as proximity to its local suppliers, the possible new markets that might open up, the labour force (current and future employees), the land and premises required and transport links. Good answers covered a range of such factors and then highlighted what they considered to be the most important, often concluding that it would be most beneficial to locate close to its current site if possible. However, some candidates simply listed factors with no real explanation of how each might affect the business or wrote at length about the implications of relocating, so missing the point of the question completely.
- 2 a) The calculation question was straightforward and the vast majority of candidates correctly calculated Y at £60 000 and X at £39 000.
- 2 b) Given that the calculation Question in 2 a) gave many candidates a way into this part of the question it was really surprising how many simply ignored this useful piece of information and also the data in Table 1. However, there were some excellent answers which discussed the issues raised by the table and also added other relevant factors, such as the locally sourced materials and the organic potatoes produced on BCL's own farm. The packaging was also discussed by a number of candidates and some very perceptive answers mentioned the increasing pressure to conform to higher environmental standards which governments are imposing on business and how this will increase in the future. The best answers used the case study material and discussed the advantages and disadvantages of adopting more environmentally friendly operations, even discussing the implications for other functional areas of the business, such as marketing, which this question allowed them to do. Weaker candidates just wrote in general about environmental issues and added anything they thought might be broadly relevant such as better quality control - including TQM - work study and motivation.
- 2 c) Many candidates wrote about purchasing economies but for the majority this seemed to be the extent of their knowledge of internal economies of scale. Another weakness was the failure to put the response in context, eg investing in a new flow production line for crisps should reduce unit costs of production which might enable BCL to reduce the prices it charges for its crisps or if they keep prices the same then increase its profits. A number of candidates who did know their economies of scale ignored the operational aspect, ie increasing the scale of operations, which limits relevant economies to risk bearing, technical, purchasing and managerial. It is difficult to make a case, given the context of the question for financial economies of scale being gained.

2878: Business Project

Introduction

The number of centres entering candidates for this unit continues to fall but it is no surprise that the rate of change to the Theme has slowed down. In general, the centres offering this unit are experienced in its presentation and in its marking. However, there are always some exceptions in centres where teachers are going through the process for the first time.

The Nature of the Work Presented

The way in which projects are undertaken continues to have a major influence on both the marking process and its effectiveness. In a large number of cases, candidates do not devote enough attention to the nature and title of the project they undertook. It is also the case that too little time and care is devoted to the foundation stages in which the problem is both defined and set in the context of its business reality. This is particularly true when the project is drawn from human or marketing aspects of business studies and these are the two most common areas of investigation.

A good Human Resources project has to both define its problem very carefully and to demonstrate its existence and significance in the context of the business. A good marketing project has to be investigated both in terms of those who are customers and those who might become customers.

Poor motivation needs to be proved in terms of indicators such as absenteeism, lateness, poor productivity or labour turnover. Labour turnover has to be investigated in terms of those who left, the part of the business they worked in, their gender and their length of service. Labour turnover problems and motivation investigation should be avoided unless concentration can be upon full time employees.

Marketing needs a focus on the market rather than internal aspects of the business and needs to have some basis for the title chosen. For example, it cannot be assumed that the problem is one of promotion - this has to be clearly demonstrated.

The Nature of the Process

Too much of many of the projects were devoted to long descriptive or theoretical writing about the processes. Often this was theoretical aspects such as human relations theory, ratio or SWOT analysis. These were correctly described and showed understanding but were not very well used. In some cases they were not used at all.

In some instances there were long discussions about questionnaire design which added little to the project. However, the stage of piloting the questionnaire was often ignored. The result was that some data collected could not be sensibly collated or interpreted and other data was insufficient or unsuitable for the intended purposes.

The most common and crucial weakness was in the size of sample. Often this could not be determined from the project or was far too small. In other instances the method of sampling was not mentioned or was inappropriate. A sample sensible for the intended purpose and for the business structure from or for which it is undertaken must be selected and the method justified. This does not require a long discussion of all available methods.

The Marking Process

It is good to be able to stress that the majority of centres marked very carefully and rigorously against the nine criteria. This a particularly heavy task in large centres where the work of a team of markers has to be internally moderated before being sent to the Board. Teachers have faced an even more difficult task when candidates have not written a report, especially the early stages of it, in line with the criteria. The process can be helped if candidates are aware that:

- problems cannot be assumed but have to be demonstrated in the context of the chosen business;
- theory is not rewarded for its own sake but for the extent to which it is used constructively within the report. This is best achieved if discrete chapters are avoided and theory is only written about in the context of its actual use;
- where samples are used an appropriate method should be chosen and the sample should be statistically sufficient;
- questionnaires are of little value unless the information they produce can be quantified and collated;
- the presentation of data is not to show computer or design skills but to make the data clearer to the reader and more usable for further analysis;
- problems do not always develop as expected and neither do solutions. It is imperative that titles which have been rendered inappropriate by the way the experience develops are changed to fit what the candidate has in fact done.

Lessons from the Moderating Process

Criterion 1:

This is designed to test how well the candidate has done three things:

- defined the problem and shown an understanding of it;
- shown that, in the context, it is a problem;
- shown that the business needs to solve the problem.

Where moderators felt that this criterion had been over-assessed it was usually because good performance in terms of one or two of the three requirements was offset by ignoring the other. The criterion was almost never under-assessed.

Criterion 2:

Setting objectives which are intended outcomes for the investigation and not methods of working is just the first step and is not better than Level 2 however well it is done. If the candidate has used them as a framework for the investigation and the report then the mark should be at Level 3. Level 4 comes into play when there is a critical awareness of the effectiveness of the whole process and the extent to which objectives have been achieved.

Criteria 3 and 4:

These are about the quality and appropriateness of the three kinds of evidence gathered. This may be primary, secondary or subject based. They are also about the effectiveness of the ways in which this evidence has been gathered, collated, displayed and understood. The final consideration is about the sufficiency of the evidence for the problem being investigated. These criteria were over-assessed most commonly in situations where candidates had shown lengthy but accurate understanding of theory and process.

They were under-assessed where theory and process were often sufficiently considered and the evidence gathered was impressively appropriate.

Criterion 5:

The regularly recurring problem; candidates who use theory effectively thereby demonstrate their understanding of it in circumstances where they have not written very much about the theory. Those who wrote at length about it were often over-rewarded.

Criterion 6:

The crunch question here is whether the candidate has turned all the information into evidence by anyone of a range of processes. The issue is often one of appropriateness. The demonstration of numerate skills and the use of cost and revenue figures is not always necessary, but becomes absolutely crucial in many situations. Phrases such as "lots of money" or "it will be expensive" are not a substitute for real figures and calculations in these circumstances. On another level merely explaining linguistically what has been demonstrated in a diagram is not analysis. Neither is it analysis to depict the same information in more than one way.

Criterion 7:

Decisions have to be centred on the problem and its solution, to be reasoned about and to be made rationally, if they are to obtain marks for evaluation. An unsupported judgement or an unreasoned choice is not evaluation because there is no evidence to support them. Evaluation to be worthy of Level 3 or better also has to demonstrate business realism in relation to recommendations made.

Criteria 8 & 9

It was good to see that an automatic three marks were not awarded to candidates and there was much greater use of the criteria ranges. However, this was rarely downwards and there were instances where moderators thought that two or one should have been the mark awarded. Usually such work had been carelessly undertaken and the candidate had not used the opportunity to proof read and amend their work.

Some cases of being over-generous in awarding five and five on both criteria were also commented upon by moderators. There are, of course, occasions when full marks are entirely justified but they are not as easily earned as some assessments suggested.

Administration

A pleasing high standard this time with few occasions when additional communication with a centre was necessary. Where it was necessary, it could have been avoided in most cases. The problems in these instances were:

- failure to include the centre authentication sheet;
- moderators unable to read the mark sheet which was sometimes unreadable;
- arithmetic or transposing errors;
- internal moderation had not been effective enough.

There was an increase in the number of scripts which had been annotated. I remind you that for this unit the Board has asked that teachers do not put any marks or comments on the scripts. However, comments on the front sheet in support of every mark given are very helpful and we are thankful for the care which most teachers put into making them.

Conclusion

Over many years now comments have been made in every report about the same issues which adversely affect candidate performance. I prefer to think that the continuance of the same problems is not because they are insoluble. It is apparent to moderators that the majority of candidates could improve the quality of their work by at least a grade if they paid more attention to the advice given in these reports.

2879: The Business Thematic Enquiry

Introduction

The paper this year was accessible to virtually all candidates. There were only a very small number who produced very weak responses and a larger number than usual who performed well. The paper was easier than many of its predecessors but there is strong evidence that the standard is also rising. Candidates coped well with the three options with which they were presented and with the issues which surrounded them.

The Plan

The plan is designed to meet the requirements of Criterion 1, to meet all of those for Criterion 2 and to set a framework of objectives and assumptions within which the report will then be written. It is a preparatory exercise. If well executed it will make it more likely that a good report is written. The most common mark on Criterion 1 was four and there were a pleasing number of candidates who obtained all five marks.

There were three or four candidates who ignored the requirements of the plan entirely and more who wrote poor plans because they did not follow the requirements stated on the question paper. The most common error was to write nothing about the context in which the problem must be solved.

There were still a significant number of plans in which objectives were confused with methodology. In other cases the objectives of the firm were discussed, despite the requirement for candidates to write about their objectives in writing the report. Many of the objectives listed were obviously pre-learned and were generic with little or no reference to the issues in the case.

The assumptions made were much more realistic than they have been in recent sessions but often there were far too many of them. Some were statements of fact or of method rather than assumptions.

There was an increased tendency to write overlong plans which included discursive material which should have been part of the report.

The Report

The fact that a report was required and that the approach should be within a framework which was clearly a report format was much better understood by candidates. There were many fewer responses which were essays and most stuck effectively to the required structure throughout. Marks of one or two for Criterion 8 were, therefore, rare. However, a larger number of reports were unbalanced in one of a number of different ways:

- one option was sometimes dismissed intentionally with a statement to that effect in the plan. That is never sufficient. All options must at least be given some consideration;
- one option, usually the preferred one, was argued extensively whilst the other two were visited in a very limited fashion;
- candidates got their timing wrong and spent too much time on the plan or on the procedures for writing a report;
- there was a lot of evidence of outside research. Few candidates used it well. Most spent a large part of the report describing the visit which had been made and the features of that business;

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- many candidates saw what they considered important externalities but spent so much time on those that the three options were not visited until the later stages of the report. In this case reports were often unfinished.

Meeting Criteria 3 and 4

This was largely well done. At least seven and commonly eight was achieved on Criterion 3 and at least six and commonly seven on Criterion 4. There were many candidates who introduced secondary research, but very few who used it well. The weakness which was the most obvious was failure to select and use the numerate evidence. Words such as “costly”, “expensive” and “unaffordable” and phrases such as “lots of money” and “unlikely to finance it” replaced selection and the use of the figures in a large number of reports.

Meeting Criterion 5

It was not always as obvious as it should have been that the writer was a business studies candidate. On the other hand the tedious and time consuming repetition of theory, without use, was less common than it has been.

Most abused by candidates on this paper were SWOT analysis and motivation theory. SWOT in particular went into two or three pages. In most but not all cases, this was of little value. Candidates must remember that marks under Criterion 5 are for using knowledge in a way which focuses on the problem and its solution.

Meeting Criteria 6 and 7

The range of marks earned by the demonstration of these higher skills was, as usual, wide but there was a tendency towards polarisation with one group of candidates obtaining marks below six on one or both of these criteria and another group scoring 12 or more. These high level performances tended to apply to both criteria. Candidates found a variety of good basis for analysis and evaluation of all the options. Although the choice of Option 1 was most common and choice of Option 2 the least common, there were many good and balanced arguments for all three options.

It was also good to observe that there were very few candidates who strayed away from the discussion and the need to select one of the options. Virtually all candidates made and justified a choice.

There were minor confusions occasionally. The most common was comparing QS with the larger producing companies, when it is very clear that QS is a small service offering company. The other confusion was writing as if the training offered in Option 2 was general service training when it was presented as training to enable the direct marketing of the products of the shop.

Conclusion

The overall standard was better than some cases in the past. Evidence extraction and its use and analysis and evaluation were notably better.

2880: Business Strategy

General Comments

The context of the case study, a small chain of book shops, proved to be one which the majority of candidates seemed to feel comfortable with. As has been the case for several sessions, few candidates missed out a question and, similarly, few failed to achieve some marks for all of the questions. This combination means that there are very few candidates scoring extremely low marks. Similarly, and at the opposite end of the mark range, few candidates achieve very high marks due to their inability to consistently score high marks across all four questions.

The main reason preventing a candidate getting high marks on any question is the extent to which they use the case data. The very best answers will be focused on the question set and will marry a good grasp of the subject material and the case evidence to offer a convincing answer. That many candidates can do this for one of the four questions suggests the standard required by the marking team is reasonable. The disappointment for all; candidates, teachers and markers, is that this is not seen more often. On this paper most candidates scored their highest mark on Question 3, with Question 1 often being the weakest.

It was suggested in the last Principal Examiners Report that there is no requirement for candidates to write lengthy answers in order to achieve high marks. That message seems to have been misinterpreted at this session. Many candidates gave answers which were inappropriately brief, with the staple of a 16 page answer booklet never being seen. The risk of a short answer is the lack of depth of reasoning to show how the candidate arrives at their view. This process, the essential chain of argument, was neatly put by a colleague at a recent INSET as providing "footprints in the snow".

The quality of handwriting continues to deteriorate and with it the quality of written communication. Some in the examining team feel that candidates now only write in the examination, thus never practicing this essential examination skill. If it takes several attempts to read a sentence in order for the meaning to become clear, then the candidate is failing to adequately communicate.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1) It is clear that candidates know what a SWOT analysis is and have a similarly good grasp of objectives. Consequently there were many answers which effectively applied SWOT to the setting of objectives, gaining a mark toward the middle of the mark range. To get higher marks, it was expected that the usefulness of SWOT would be addressed. Far too many candidates seemed not to have read the question with sufficient care and so did not offer a judgment. Rather, many gave quite pertinent critiques of the SWOT presented in the case, the majority being able to pick quite substantial holes in it! A favourite was to question "liquidity" as a strength given an acid test ratio of just 0.39. Similarly, it was felt the SWOT was inadequate simply because David, the Managing Director of ABC, had drawn it up.
- 2) A question which required candidates to consider how a business would respond to an external change is an established feature of this paper. It was, therefore, disappointing that so many candidates focused more on the impact of the change rather than suggesting what the business might do by way of response. Better answers suggested ABC needed to establish a unique selling point which served to differentiate itself from the supermarkets. Suggestions ranged from improved customer service, newspaper delivery to an exploitation of a niche and so on. Some answers gave a convincing analysis of the nature of competition from supermarkets to argue that competing on price simply was not

applicable. The more pessimistic argued that the end for ABC had arrived and that it was time to place the business in voluntary liquidation, put the capital in the bank and live off the interest!

A failure to adequately read the question will always lead to a poor mark. Hence, those candidates, and there was quite a sizeable minority, who focused entirely on shop W, found gaining marks a real challenge.

- 3) This was a clearly anticipated question, yet it nonetheless served to differentiate between centres and candidates. Many candidates chose not to use the data in the decision tree. That is entirely their prerogative; however, choosing to ignore a substantial item of evidence does make constructing a contextualised answer more challenging. The examining team had no preconceived idea which option was the best and were instead looking at the reasoning employed to support the candidate's view. Many of the best answers recognised that, although the tree suggests the Halloween market is the one to go for, the modest benefits it offers means it would have a negligible impact upon ABC's fortunes. Similarly, phones and the internet merely mean ABC competes with other established players, even if these are not supermarkets. As such, there is a very strong case for ignoring all three suggestions.

It is clear from many scripts which did seek to use the decision tree that some confusion exists between actual costs/benefits and estimated monetary values. Similarly, the absence of working made it difficult for the examiner to credit an unexpected value (and there was significant evidence across centres that candidates had "remembered" an incorrect value, the conjecture being that a commercial case analysis contained an error).

Colleagues preparing candidates for the replacement unit under the new specification (first teaching September 2008) should be aware that the change in rules about synopticity means that a discrete question on a numerate technique/analytical tool can (and will) be asked.

- 4) It is clear that many candidates enjoy a good understanding of the issues surrounding centralisation and decentralisation. The disappointment was that few could then analyse the case to suggest which route was best for ABC. For example, a key consideration for devolving power to the shops would be the capability of the managers. These, being family members, are there by blood rather than talent. As such, whilst they might be keen to be given more say, David might be entirely right in fearing the consequences should the business decentralise! A line of argument surrounding the nature of the change in the external environment can similarly be used.

The majority of candidates favoured a fudge. Allow Samantha to do her own thing, yet keep the other shops under central control. This "experiment" could then be used to assess the whole issue.

Grade Thresholds

Advanced GCE Business Studies (3811/7811)
January 2008 Examination Series

Unit Threshold Marks

Unit		Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
2871	Raw	45	32	29	26	23	21	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2872	Raw	45	27	24	21	18	16	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2873	Raw	60	39	35	31	27	24	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0
2874	Raw	60	37	33	29	26	23	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2875	Raw	60	41	37	33	29	25	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2876	Raw	60	40	37	34	31	28	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2877	Raw	60	38	34	30	26	23	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2878	Raw	90	72	63	54	46	38	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2879	Raw	90	69	64	59	55	51	0
	UMS	90	72	63	54	45	36	0
2880	Raw	80	56	51	46	41	36	0
	UMS	120	96	84	72	60	48	0

Specification Aggregation Results

Overall threshold marks in UMS (ie after conversion of raw marks to uniform marks)

	Maximum Mark	A	B	C	D	E	U
3811	300	240	210	180	150	120	0
7811	600	480	420	360	300	240	0

The cumulative percentage of candidates awarded each grade was as follows:

	A	B	C	D	E	U	Total Number of Candidates
3811	8.1	29.0	60.3	86.4	96.9	100.0	396
7811	6.7	42.2	77.8	95.6	100.0	100.0	46

442 candidates aggregated this series

For a description of how UMS marks are calculated see:

http://www.ocr.org.uk/learners/ums_results.html

Statistics are correct at the time of publication.

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