

CAMBRIDGE TECHNICALS LEVEL 3 (2016)

Examiners' report

BUSINESS

05834–05837, 05878

Unit 1 January 2023 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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Unit 1 series overview

This series has shown a marked improvement in candidates' understanding of the legal forms of business (as illustrated by responses to Question 29). Examiners have also seen some improvement in candidates' understanding of economic factors (as illustrated by responses to Question 31). However, yet again, LO7 appears to be an area of the specification for which candidates are not fully prepared. In particular LO7.2 (sources of finance) as highlighted by responses to Question 23 and LO7.3 (business plans) as highlighted by responses to Question 6. As ever, those candidates who showed a sound understanding across the breadth of the specification, coupled with an ability to analyse and evaluate, did well on this paper.

<i>Candidates who did well on this paper generally did the following:</i>	<i>Candidates who did less well on this paper generally did the following:</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> researched a wide variety of businesses, targeted to the research brief (for Section B) demonstrated numerical skill (in Questions 7, 14 and 30) and the ability to interpret a market share pie chart (Question 18) answered questions contextually (in Sections B and C) made judgements supported by justified reasoning (Section C extended response questions). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> left answer spaces blank (including multiple-choice questions and the table in Question 30) showed little evidence of studying the topics indicated in the pre-release research brief (particularly evident was a lack of knowledge of trade credit as a form of finance) ended extended response questions abruptly, without making an overall judgement demonstrated little, or no, knowledge of the functional areas of business (specification reference TC2.1) and the contents of business plans (specification reference TC7.3).

Section A gives time for candidates to settle into the exam. This section of the paper was generally well answered by most candidates. Once again, a minority of candidates lost marks because they ticked two responses, say B and D. Such hedging cannot be awarded. Candidates should be instructed not to take this approach. Where a candidate indicates an answer and subsequently changes their mind, they should clearly cross out their original tick. In addition, some candidates lost marks by leaving an MCQ entirely blank. This is poor examination technique. Candidates should be encouraged to indicate a response to all 20 questions

Section B was still not as well answered as might be expected, given the clear guidance on areas to focus on in the pre-issued research brief for this examination. Some less-successful scripts showed no evidence at all of research for Section B, the one area of the paper where candidates can prepare in advance. Centres are advised to devote adequate time to the preparation of candidates for Section B of this paper, the research brief for each series is specific to that series and is issued well in advance of the examination.

How the research brief linked to the questions in Section B

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working as a marketing assistant.
 • Short-term sources of finance and their impact on the business.
 • Meeting the needs of external stakeholders.
 • The ever-increasing importance of sustainability.
 • SWOT analysis in practice. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question 22 Describe two tasks which are part of the job role of a marketing assistant in a business that you have researched.
 • Question 23 Explain one advantage and one disadvantage to a business that you have researched of using trade credit as a source of finance.
 • Question 24 Analyse one benefit and one drawback to a business you have researched of meeting the needs of its customers.
 • Question 25 Describe how a business you have researched has responded to the ever-increasing importance of environmental sustainability.
 • Question 21 Using SWOT analysis, identify one strength and one weakness of a business that you have researched. |
|--|---|

The wording of Questions 21, 22 and 25 linked extremely closely with the wording of the pre-issued research brief, but some candidates still showed very limited knowledge or understanding. Centres are advised to emphasise to candidates the importance of focussing their business research on the topics indicated in the corresponding series' research brief.

Evidence suggests that those candidates who chose to answer all five questions in Section B on the same business did less well than those who selected a business according to the question. Candidates should be encouraged to select the business they use depending on the question i.e. to choose a specific business for which their understanding is suitable for answering the question. This was especially important for Question 23 where the business needed to use trade credit, and Question 25 where the business needed to have responded to the ever-increasing importance of environmental sustainability.

As always, Section C contained three high tariff, extended response questions. These questions were level of response marked. Candidates needed to demonstrate the skills of analysis (Level 3) and evaluation (Level 4) to gain the highest marks.

Analytical skill (Level 3)

Analysis requires candidates to develop their responses to include impacts on the business (or, as in Question 29, specifically to an identified business stakeholder).

It should be noted that phrases such as 'this will change the firm's reputation' (Question 27), 'this will affect the owners' stress levels' (Question 29) or 'this will impact on costs' (Question 31), cannot be given marks because the direction of the impact is unclear. Candidates need to make explicit the direction of the impact i.e. a worse reputation, lower stress levels, increased costs.

Evaluative skill (Level 4)

Evaluation requires a reasoned decision that answers the question. E.g. the worst disadvantage of automation from the company's perspective (Question 27), the greatest advantage to business owners of operating as a private limited company rather than a partnership (Question 29) and a judgement as to which economic factor would be most harmful for First Class Luggage Limited (Question 31).

Candidates should be encouraged to reach decisions and give detailed justification to support their argument using contextual information. While an accurate judgement that applies to most businesses would achieve a Level 4 mark, a response which argues using the particular circumstances of the business scenario, in this case a high-end suitcase manufacturer, was more highly marked.

Areas which caused most problems on this paper were the resource requirements section of a business plan (Question 6), the functional areas of business (Questions 11, 22 and 26) and trade credit (Question 23). On the other hand, Question 21 on SWOT analysis, Question 25 on responding to the ever-increasing importance of environmental sustainability and Question 29 on business ownership, were extremely well answered.

Section A overview

The vast majority of multiple-choice questions were well answered. Those that were more problematic are discussed below.

Question 6

6 Which of the following would **not** be included in the 'resource requirements' section of a business plan?

A Essential equipment

B Location of premises

C Skills of workforce

D Unique selling point

[1]

This question was testing knowledge of the contents of a business plan, and more precisely the resource requirements section of a business plan. Responses were fairly evenly split across all four options. This appears to indicate that candidates' understanding of the term 'resources' is not robust.

Question 10

10 Parsley plc supplies a professional video camera to TVbox Ltd.

As a supplier, one of Parsley plc's main objectives is to:

A agree a low selling price

B be paid as soon as possible

C increase its break-even point

D reduce its net cash flow

[1]

This question tested likely stakeholder objectives, and in particular the objectives of suppliers. Only half of candidates selected the correct response B to 'be paid as soon as possible'. By far the most common incorrect response was C. An increase in the supplier's break-even point would be detrimental to the supplier, so would not be a supplier objective.

Question 11

- 11 An administrative assistant for a bakery makes an urgent call to an electrician to repair a faulty oven.

Which two functional areas of the bakery are working together?

- A Business support services and customer services
- B Customer services and finance
- C Finance and operations management
- D Operations management and business support services

[1]

This question was testing knowledge of the interrelationship between the functional areas of a business. Answer D was the correct response, with response A being the most commonly selected. This appears to indicate that many candidates understood that the administrative assistant provides business support services, but were unable to link the faulty oven to the operations management function. In a bakery operations management is the functional area responsible for making its bread, cakes and pastry products.

Misconception



Operations management is the functional area that deals with the core operation of a business. For a bakery this is production. Examples for other manufacturing businesses would include producing a kettle, building a house or baking a cake. However, in the tertiary sector, the activities of operations management are far more diverse. For example the core function of a hospital would be the treating of patients or in a school the teaching of the children.

Question 20

20 Which of the following is a correct definition of the term 'demographics'?

- A Benchmark data relating to industrial standards
- B Numerical data relating to carbon emissions
- C Research data relating to cultural beliefs
- D Statistical data relating to the population

[1]

'Demographics' is listed on the specification as one of the social factors that candidates need to be familiar with. This question was testing whether candidates understood what the term 'demographics' means. Just over half of candidates correctly identified D as the answer i.e. 'demographics' relates to the population. The most common incorrect answer was C, indicating possible confusion between cultural and social factors.

Assessment for learning



Centres are advised to allocate plenty of time for students to gain a firm understanding of all specific terms mentioned in the specification. It is useful to remember, that anything in the unit content which follows an i.e. details what must be taught as part of that area of content. A direct question may be asked about unit content which follows an i.e. Anything which follows an e.g. is illustrative and a direct question will not be asked about that example.

Section B overview

The questions in Section B should be answered with direct reference to candidates' personal research, as directed by the pre-released research brief available in advance of the examination. How each question in this section links to the research brief is tabulated in the Series Review section of this report.

For each question in this section, candidates are advised to select the most appropriate business from the ones that they have researched, rather than answer all questions about the same business. Evidence suggests that choosing a specific business on which to answer each question leads to better focused responses and higher marks.

Question 21

21 Using SWOT analysis, identify **one** strength and **one** weakness of a business that you have researched.

Name of business

Activity of business

Strength

.....

Weakness

.....

[2]

Question 21 was generally well answered with most candidates gaining full marks. Where full marks were not achieved the most common error was to suggest a threat rather than a weakness, e.g. high levels of competition. In a SWOT analysis strengths and weaknesses are internal i.e. they are derived from within the business. Opportunities and threats come from external sources, e.g. economic, social or political factors and changes in level of competition.

Question 22

22 Describe **two** tasks which are part of the job role of a marketing assistant in a business that you have researched.

Name of business

Activity of business

1

.....

.....

.....

.....

2

.....

.....

.....

.....

[4]

Most candidates scored at least 2 marks on this question. The most common correct responses to this question included researching customers' needs, creating advertisements, organising promotional events and setting prices. Those that did less well tended to repeat the term 'marketing' in their response. Answers such as 'market the business' or 'run a marketing campaign' could not be credited.

Question 23

23 Explain **one** advantage and **one** disadvantage to a business that you have researched of using trade credit as a source of finance.

Name of business

Activity of business

Advantage

.....

.....

.....

Disadvantage

.....

.....

.....

[4]

Despite the pre-issued research brief indicating that candidates needed to research short-term sources of finance, many candidates did not score any marks on this question. Most responses were vague and those that were more specific tended to be incorrect, e.g. referring to paying by instalments or suggesting high interest rates are charged. Candidates need to have a clear understanding of what trade credit is. Those candidates with an accurate understanding expressed this as 'buy now pay later'. The most commonly credited advantage related to improved cashflow. The most commonly credited disadvantage was high interest penalties if the payment deadline were to be missed.

Assessment for learning



The specification lists several sources of finance in Section 7.2. Centres are advised to make sure students have a robust understanding of each of these methods.

Question 24

24 Analyse **one** benefit and **one** drawback to a business you have researched of meeting the needs of its customers.

[6]

Name of business

Activity of business

Benefit

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.....

.....

Drawback

.....

.....

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The vast majority of candidates were able to suggest a benefit to the business of meeting customer needs. Candidates did far less well when attempting to explain a drawback of meeting customer needs. Candidates need to understand that despite meeting customer needs being beneficial it does come with costs – be they financial costs, opportunity costs or time-/workload-related costs. Some candidates explained the drawbacks of not meeting customer needs rather than the drawback of meeting customer needs. Such responses did not answer the question on the examination paper and could not be credited.

Those candidates who did well on this question were able to suggest a benefit/drawback, and provide an analytical and contextual response. By far the most common benefits related to increased numbers of customers/greater customer loyalty, with analysis linked to increased revenue or increased profits. The most commonly credited drawback related to the expense of meeting customer needs, with analysis linked to increased costs or a higher break-even point. To gain full marks the response needed to be contextual.

Question 25

25 Describe how a business you have researched has responded to the ever-increasing importance of environmental sustainability.

Name of business

Activity of business

.....
.....
.....

[4]

Most candidates showed an understanding of the concept of environmental sustainability and were able to suggest how a business they had researched had changed its activity in recent years. Examiners were looking for practical responses as the command word in the question was 'describe'. By far the most common correct responses related to the hospitality industry, e.g. McDonalds switching from plastic straws to paper straws to reduce the use of plastic or Costa Coffee using recyclable cups for takeaway sales to minimise waste sent to landfill. For full marks the response needed to be contextual and descriptive.

Section C overview

All of the questions in this section link to the business scenario and should be answered contextually.

Question 26

26 The skills of First Class Luggage Ltd’s production operatives are well respected in the industry.

Identify:

- whether the production operatives are internal or external stakeholders of the business
.....
- on which level of the company’s organisation chart the job role of production operative is likely to be found
.....
- **one** way the production operatives might attempt to stop the automation going ahead
.....
- the business function that deals with redundancies.
.....

[4]

Most candidates were able to gain marks for their responses to the first three bullet points. The final bullet point relating to business functional areas appeared more problematic, with less than a quarter of candidates indicating that redundancies would be dealt with by the human resource function/personnel. Incorrect responses covered the full range of choices with finance, operations management and administration being the most common. This appears to show that many candidates do not have a robust understanding of the key activities of the business functions listed in TC 2.1 of the specification.

Assessment for learning



The specification gives a list of the functional areas of business in TC 2.1. Centres are advised to make sure candidates have a robust understanding of each of these functional areas. Reinforcement of this learning point could be done on a frequent basis, say as a lesson starter or plenary, using a card sorting activity (or electronic equivalent) by providing business function cards and a range of activities to be matched to the correct business function.

Question 27

27 The shareholders are aware that there are disadvantages to automating the company's production process.

Evaluate likely disadvantages to First Class Luggage Ltd of automating its production process. **[12]**

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As with all 12-mark questions on this paper, the question is level of response marked. The type of response examiners were looking for is shown in the exemplar response in the published mark scheme. This question centres around the disadvantages of automation for First Class Luggage Ltd. There were plenty of disadvantages to choose from.

By far the most common negative impact was 'damaged reputation' (Level 1). In addition, many candidates were able to explain the reason, e.g. suitcases no longer handmade (Level 2) and move through to the consequence to the business, e.g. reduced sales revenue (Level 3), scoring 7 of the available 12 marks solely for discussion of this one impact.

Other commonly cited impacts (i.e. Level 1s) were 'high cost', 'loss of unique selling point', 'employees going on strike' and 'lower job satisfaction'. Many candidates were able to develop their responses through a chain of argument to the impact on the business, gaining extra Level 3 marks.

Once Level 3 had been achieved, a selection of one impact with appropriate justification as to why it was the worst was given Level 4. Those candidates who gave a contextual justification achieved a minimum of 11 marks.

Few candidates attempted to make such a decision i.e. which would be the worst impact on First Class Luggage Ltd. Those who did, and also gave a valid reason for their choice, were given a Level 4 mark.

Question 28

28 Using an example from the business scenario, explain what each of the following financial terms means.

- Variable cost

.....

.....

- Fixed cost

.....

.....

[4]

Examiners were looking for an accurate explanation of these financial terms coupled with an example of each from the business scenario. The key to understanding these terms is that a variable/fixed cost changes or does not change in relation to output. Many responses incorrectly referred to changing/not changing over time. This is incorrect and could not be given.

Candidates did better at citing examples than at explaining the meaning of the terms themselves. Marks for citing the examples were given independently of the marks for explanation to reward candidates for applying their knowledge to correctly identify these examples.

Misconception



There appears to be a common misconception that fixed/variable costs do not change/do change year on year or month on month. This shows an incorrect understanding of the term 'fixed costs'.

The 'fixed' element relates to the cost not altering with output i.e. whether the business is very busy or relatively slack, the level of cost remains the same, common examples being business rates or insurance.

Likewise the 'variable' element of 'variable costs' relates to the level of costs changing with output levels i.e. the greater the output the higher the cost. Usual examples are raw materials and packaging.

Neither term relates to how frequently (or infrequently) costs change.

Question 29

29 Evaluate advantages to Shanti, Kareem and Zayn of operating First Class Luggage as a private limited company rather than as a partnership.

[12]

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

As with all 12-mark questions on this paper, this question was level of response marked. The type of response the examiner was looking for is shown in the exemplar response in the published mark scheme. This question required candidates to evaluate advantages to the owners of First Class Luggage of operating their business as a private limited company rather than a partnership.

Candidates did well on this question, with the majority being able to accurately identify and articulate the benefit of limited liability. Those who were able to link their suggested advantage to the personal benefit to the owners, e.g. cannot lose their house/expensive car or lower levels of anxiety/stress moved swiftly to Level 3 and a minimum of 7 marks. Other commonly seen valid suggestions included greater availability of finance (be it from private share issue or banks being willing to lend), business continuity in the event of an owner's death and the business (rather than the owners) being sued in the event of legal action being taken.

To access Level 4 candidates need to form a justified judgement as to which advantage would be greatest for the owners. There are no right or wrong responses here, any advantage can be selected so long as the argument is justified. Those candidates who gave a contextual justification were rewarded, gaining a minimum of 11 of the 12 marks available.

It is good practice to re-read the question before attempting to write the conclusion. This hopefully avoids writing an incorrect type of judgement. For this particular question an incorrect type of conclusion would be arguing why a private limited company is better than a partnership or arguing that the benefits of a private limited company outweigh its disadvantages. It is the advantages of being a private limited company that need to be 'valued' for this question, so candidates need to argue which is the greatest/most important advantage to them and why.

Many good responses ended abruptly after the final advantage had been analysed. To improve their responses candidates should be encouraged to add an evaluative conclusion.

Question 30

30 The automation of First Class Luggage Ltd's production process is now complete. During its first four months of automation the company made 52 800 small suitcases. The variable cost of producing these suitcases was £3.3 million.

Complete the table below to show First Class Luggage Ltd's actual performance during the first four months of automation against the objectives set by the shareholders in **Table 1**.

Objective	Actual performance during the first four months of automation	Objective for the first four months of automation	Objective met/ Objective <u>not</u> met? (Please circle the correct answer)
1. Monthly output of small suitcases suitcases suitcases	Objective met Objective <u>not</u> met
2. Variable cost of producing a small suitcase	£	£	Objective met Objective <u>not</u> met

[6]

Marks for this question were equally spread from 0 to 6, with the majority of candidates scoring 3 or 4 marks. Power of ten errors were fairly common showing that candidates did not use estimation to check the likely magnitude of their numerical responses. For some calculations a quick check would have indicated that the suggested response is incorrect, e.g. suggesting that the variable cost of producing one small suitcase could be £62.5 million.

Some candidates who had clearly struggled with the calculations left the right hand column of the table blank. This is poor examination technique and may have cost the candidate 2 marks.

Question 31

31 Analyse **three** economic factors that are likely to have a negative impact on First Class Luggage Ltd.

Which one of the three factors would harm the company the most? Justify your answer.

[12]

.....

.....

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.....

.....

As with all 12-mark questions on this paper, this question was level of response marked. The type of response examiners were looking for is shown in the exemplar response in the published mark scheme. This question centres around economic factors. Candidates needed to discuss the impact of three economic factors that have the potential to harm First Class Luggage Ltd.

By far the most common correct Level 1 responses were inflation, high interest rates, taxes and high unemployment. For a list of all creditable factors, please see the published mark scheme. To gain marks the factors themselves must be clearly identified, rather than the overall condition of the state of the economy.

To move through the levels of response candidates needed to explain (Level 2) and analyse (Level 3) how the economic factor negatively affects the business. One common chain of argument was 'high interest rates (Level 1) will make the company's overdraft more expensive (Level 2) increasing business costs (Level 3)'. Another was 'inflation leads to customers having reduced spending power (Level 2) resulting in lower sales revenue for the company (Level 3)'.

In an attempt to encourage all candidates to make a justified judgement for Level 4, the question demanded this explicitly. The majority of candidates, therefore, wrote a final paragraph which selected their chosen economic factor. Those that gave a valid reason for why this choice would cause the greatest harm to the company were given Level 4. Those candidates who gave a contextual justification achieved a minimum of 11 marks.

However, many candidates performed less well than expected on this question. Some candidates suggested factors that were not economic and could not be awarded even at Level 1. Common incorrect responses included Covid-19, a change of government, equipment maintenance costs and high electricity prices. Some suggested economic factors but not ones that would have a negative impact on the business, e.g. low interest rates or high employment.

Candidates need to take particular care if suggesting exchange rates as their economic factor. For this question, in order to show a negative impact on a company that imports, responses need to make clear that they are referring to a weak pound (or a strong foreign currency). Responses such as 'an increase in exchange rates' are too vague to be given marks.

Candidates who did well on this question laid out their response clearly. They wrote in paragraphs each beginning with a different economic factor and ending with its negative impact on the company. Finally they added a conclusion selecting one of these factors and justifying why it would have the greatest impact on First Class Luggage Ltd. Those who included context, e.g. a reference to holidays, the company's overdraft or importing leather, etc were given a minimum of 11 marks. To gain 12 marks the evaluation needed to be comparative i.e. it needed to explain not only why the chosen factor is worst but why another factor is of lesser negative impact.

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