

Examiners' Report Summer 2007

GCSE

GCSE Applied Business (2306)

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General Issues

This is the fourth annual report of this specification and many of the issues arising remain constant. The outcome of moderation is of some improvements since last year with work again showing better coverage of the specification particularly where Centres have had support or attended training sessions. However, assessment remains overall on the lenient side. There is still an issue with the use of certain case-study materials (notably "Richer Sounds") and assessors still appear to give Mark Band 3 for work that does not always provide analysis, evaluation or justification (where required) with such marks often given for factual statements or unsubstantiated opinions. Assessment was again generally better and more accurate within Mark Bands 1 and 2.

Once correct samples were received sampling and sub-sampling was relatively straightforward. In some cases, moderators reported a similar outcome to last year and even an improvement in the performance of candidates but there was still evidence of "over-marking" with some significant downward adjustments taking place. There was again limited evidence of under-marking.

As detailed last year, Mark Band 1 work will, typically consist of lists and descriptions with limited application and an over-reliance on theory with textbook and other non-attributed source extracts much in evidence. Mark Band 2 provides more in the manner of application with the beginnings of simple analysis and enhanced explanations, some of which are in context. For Mark Band 3, one would expect to see the candidate demonstrating the use of analysis, evaluation and justification at a standard appropriate to the level of the qualification; able to interpret and use data relating to the business organisations investigated and to give an impression of clear knowledge and understanding, together with considered use of business language.

Annotation of Portfolio Work

The minimum requirement for annotation of portfolios is laid down in the joint council instruction: identify where a candidate's evidence of criteria coverage may be found in the work. Many Centres provided this but there were still too many examples where little or no annotation was evident and moderators were left trying to identify where and how marks had been awarded. The recommendation to annotate by reference to "Mark Band" achieved and "Area" covered eg MB1a, MB2b etc is currently still only being followed by around 50% of Centres but it is worth emphasising again the importance of clear annotation for the benefit of candidates and internal standardisation as well as for external moderation purposes.

As each of the two internally assessed units follows a given pattern, best practice would suggest that whatever activities or assignments are used these should be done in the order of the unit coverage. There were a few examples where candidates had considerable material in Unit One (5306) eg on "job roles", "recruitment" or "customer service" that could have been better used in Unit Two (5307).

Unit 5306 - Investigating Business

General Issues:

In Centres where assessment practice allowed candidates to explore the required two organisations in an active and investigative manner and avoided the generic, theoretical approach (with the names of the organisations often appended) a better outcome was more likely. However there was still evidence of the latter in a significant minority of cases.

Again, candidates who had been able to visit their chosen organisations or where visits from representatives of these had taken place were more likely to have gained better information than where these had not taken place. As the specification is "applied" business the emphasis is upon an investigation of real firms and MB3 particularly is more achievable where a candidate has some "inside" knowledge. It was good to see some coverage in 2006/07 of "not-for-profit organizations as one of the chosen two.

(Also see note on "Annotation of Portfolio Work" above).

Standard of Portfolios c.f. 2006

Areas of the Specification:

- (a) Again, candidates appeared to understand this better than last year with often clear distinctions between "aims" and "objectives". "Activities" was still often too loosely covered, sometimes perhaps because candidates and assessors felt these would be obvious and marks were lost as a result. Some candidates were again somewhat fixated with "SMART" objectives and lost sight of the organisations under investigation. The link between "activities" and "aims and objectives" was often explicit and, as a result, Centres were better able to examine how organisations responded to change (for MB3) but many still continued to provide extensive histories of the business instead. Often, all that is required to move from Mark Band 2 to 3 is the addition of the word ... "because" ... together with some valid reasoning and a justified conclusion (not just an opinion).
- (b) The change in the specification from 2005 requiring coverage of "functional areas and communications" in only **ONE** of the organisations investigated is still not being followed in all cases. Thus, as in previous years, there was evidence of generic coverage with the business' names appended and considerable repetition where this was done for both organisations investigated. Candidates still struggled to link "communications" to "functional areas" particularly where little knowledge and understanding of the actual business was demonstrated. Where candidates had better knowledge of the actual organisation e.g. through a visit or talk, this was much better done. For Mark Band 3, the "detailed analysis" required was little in evidence; candidates preferring instead to describe or explain the methods of communication without linkage to the functional areas that was required.
- (c) There were still too many instances of candidates describing all forms of business ownership rather than just the two under investigation. (Whilst they need to be aware of other forms, these do not need to be included in the portfolios). As in previous years the notion of "liability" and its meaning was still frail. Candidates who chose multi-site organisations did not always make it clear whether it was the headquarters of the chosen business or one of its branches that was being "investigated". In MB3 the link between location and performance was still largely overlooked and again, the requirement to produce a "detailed analysis" of the suitability of the types of ownership and their implications for the organisations' liabilities rarely addressed. Often, all that was needed was for candidates to look at the historic reasons behind location and compare with what is current. As with other

criteria, candidates needed to go further than simple description and add reasons to their work.

- (d) Again, rather better done than last year with more of the facets considered. Where given, MB3 was not very well done and, in some cases, was more of a general "evaluation" of the chosen businesses than of their responses to external influences. Candidates need to be taught evaluation skills in relation to the aspects of the organisations under investigation. Where "good points" and "bad points" were listed by some candidates these could have been extended to produce a fuller evaluation. There were more of the "advantages and disadvantages" - style evaluations presented that could form the basis for an effective evaluation but these were not always linked to how the businesses responded to the external factors affecting them. Also, the requirement in MB3 to provide a "detailed assessment" should contain detailed coverage related to the organisations investigated and not be done simply in general terms.

Unit 5307 - People and Business

General Issues:

This year has seen another slight improvement in the quality of portfolios with Centres more clearly guiding candidates to produce evidence to match the specification.

However there were still Centres, some of whom have been moderated before, where candidates are not well guided and significant adjustments have again had to be made. There was still a trend was for lower marked candidates to be under marked and higher marked candidates to be over marked. The latter often due to the quantity of work produced rather than the quality.

As with 5306 above, the impression gained from moderation is again similar to last year with perhaps a better choice of organisation evident. There still appeared to be a distinction between candidates who had made some direct contact (perhaps through a visit to an organisation or from a representative) and those whose work was more "hands off"! Again, there was evidence of over-use of generic and theoretical materials and of the uncritical use of downloads and case-studies.

Successful Centres encouraged candidates to sieve through their research for relevant information rather than simply put everything in. It would appear that some candidates understand the requirements rather than being led by the nose by their teachers and this worked well. This tended to produce more insight and hence higher mark band marks through more originality in the approach and content.

A significant minority of Centres still leave in a whole range of versions of the same work making it difficult for moderators to discover the evidence. As has been mentioned before, only the final version of the portfolio is needed for moderation.

(Also see note on "Annotation of Portfolio Work" above).

Standard of Portfolios c.f. 2006

Areas of the Specification:

- (a) Again, this was usually competently covered at MB1 although not always applied but many candidates were able to access MB2 through explanations related to the chosen business. "Relative importance" (of stakeholders) still proved a stumbling block to MB3 with many candidates still stating that all stakeholders were "important" or providing unjustified rank orders. Better work demonstrated a reasoned "rank order" with explanations of potential conflicts between "stakeholders" to meet MB3. In a couple of cases, clever use of diagrams indicated the relative importance of the respective stakeholders. Better candidates showed that they had a good understanding of stakeholders and were able to explain these areas easily using their own words and language. Whilst it was common for candidates to look at the influence rather than the role of the stakeholder; few candidates went onto look at the possible conflicts which could occur between stakeholders' interests.
- (b) As with last year, most candidates were able to provide reasonable descriptions of customer service within context and many had carried out some sort of survey through questionnaires or observation. Unfortunately, the results of these were still not always analysed or used effectively to allow MB3 recommendations to be justified. Some candidates did not relate consumer law to the chosen business, some

covered all consumer-related laws whether relevant or not and some did not cover any at all!

- (c) Whilst many “job descriptions” were again offered, the notion of “key” job roles was still not always addressed. As a result, much theory was still in evidence, with abstract management structures investigated and “working arrangements” overlooked and there was often little analysis of the relative importance aspect at all. This was sometimes done better where candidates had some experience of employment but still continues to be an area requiring further development.
- (d) Much of the work was in context and more Centres had again covered this part of the specification better than last year. Most candidates managed to describe the process of recruitment. The weaker candidates tended to get information from textbooks while better candidates used the textbooks and based it on findings from research into their own studies of the organisation. Some Centres again directed candidates into copying job specifications and application forms etc and in some cases this made moderation difficult because it was difficult to distinguish what was the candidates own work and what was copied. Few candidates made recommendations as to how the process could be improved. However, this year candidates were better able to progress beyond generic descriptions of training types in MB2 and gave examples of the types of training provided. The “detailed evaluation” required for MB3 was rarely met although there was again more evidence of knowledge of working practices from within the organisations chosen.
- (e) The improved coverage noted last year had continued with many fewer gaps allowing access to MB3 in several cases. The use of generic material was less in evidence and candidates seemed better able to relate findings to the business investigated although candidates again often failed to understand sufficient about the chosen organisations to allow the MB3 “evaluation” to be met. The rights and responsibilities of employees were often better addressed, although some candidates became confused over employer and employee, and this sometimes resulted in their covering employer responsibilities and employee rights, thus omitting employee responsibilities. Dispute and grievance procedures were better covered this year with more candidates relating these to their chosen business. Fewer candidates went on to explore the role of Unions, ACAS and the courts in context. Again, the coverage of Health & Safety tended to be limited to HASAW Act, rather than the procedures and responsibilities within the actual organisation’s workplace.

Administration:

This was another mixed bag with again around half of all Centres using approved Mark Record Sheets duly signed and evidence of internal standardisation present whilst others relied on the ingenuity of the moderator to follow what had been done. Some Centres still do not automatically send the highest and lowest marked portfolios and many reminders regarding this and the authenticity requirement had to be sent. Annotation (see above) was likewise a mixture of clarity and confusion and, when not present, caused problems for moderation. Where Centres complied with all aspects of the required administration procedures they are to be complimented on the high standard of presentation and clarity of assessment practice.

There was some confusion as to how many portfolios should be sent. This is clearly laid out in the Guidance to Centres sent out well before portfolios are required (a minimum of 10 portfolios per Unit or all candidates where fewer than 10 have been entered) but should include the highest and lowest marked work (no zero-marked portfolios are needed) along with the asterisked work requested following submission of the Portfolio Entry Form for each of the internally assessed units.

Although much of the portfolio work received at moderation was easily accessible there were again instances of work being inappropriately presented - sometimes tightly packed into plastic wallets that split when pages were removed; in lever-arch files or in bound folders that were difficult to open. Centres are again reminded of the recommendation for candidates to submit treasury-tagged sheets that can be easily accessed and read although any suitable loosely-bound format is acceptable.

Centres are again reminded that each of the internally assessed units is marked out of 50 and there is no need to double these marks either on the Mark Record Sheet or on the "OPTEMS" forms. There were also a few instances where Centre marks on the Mark Record Sheets differed from those shown on the OPTEMS; (possibly as a result of internal moderation) but this was not always clear.

Centres are again further reminded to send the top copies of OPTEMS sheets to the address given. A small number of Centres sent all copies of the OPTEMS forms to the moderator, thus delaying the process as no record of Centre marks will appear on the system until the top copies reached processing.

5308 - Business Finance

General comments

This is the eighth paper, and the fourth June paper, for Unit 3 Business Finance. Centres know the two main approaches: the 'single business' and the 'single location'. This paper was based on a single business, 'Clarian Farm'. The Scenario proved accessible: once again it consisted of text supported by additional information (in recent series this has been an image, although on this occasion it was a text-based website extract). The volume of text was in line with that of past series. Previous reports have confirmed that the role of the Scenario is primarily to help candidates appreciate the context within which they are applying their answers. Future papers will still therefore give brief text-based information, and will continue to use supporting images in order to 'paint a picture' for candidates. Centres are now well aware that it is not necessary for candidates to memorise Scenario information, and that key information will be provided in question stems. However, the advice remains to ensure that candidates re-visit this Scenario several times during the examination, to remain familiar with it.

The paper was designed to assess candidates across the full GCSE ability range, and achieved this. Past Reports have identified the influences on the question paper (see January 07 and earlier reports) that inform question and paper construction. The paper again tested all Specification areas, and this practice will continue. There were ten questions and the demands made on candidates were similar to those in past papers. The published mark scheme contains information concerning the specific mark allocation to topic areas - target mark bands are also given - and shows the marks awarded against each of the Assessment Objectives.

The 90 minutes again seemed sufficient. Gaps appeared to be due more to lack of knowledge than lack of time. The paper differentiated well, and all questions were answered as expected with no major misinterpretations. June 2007 is now the sixth series of on-line marking. Centres have taken full account of previous advice, ensuring candidates do their best to answer question parts in the space allocated. On the relatively few occasions where this was not so - for example, due to deleting a wrong answer in the answer line section - most candidates indicated the location of the corrected answer on the paper (eg 'see next page' or 'my answer is on the last blank page'). This practice is again strongly encouraged.

Candidates' mean performance was higher than that of Summer 2006. Although the paper contained variations on past questions - for example, in 2(a) calculation of actual figures in 2 (a) and in 2(b) comparison of these with given budgeted ones - candidates coped well with these. It was pleasing to note that many less able candidates found the more challenging questions (10(b) for example) slightly more accessible, which also led to the improved mean.

A noted area of weakness in recent series has been in candidates' failure to answer questions that required specific application: for example, questions 6(b)(ii) and 7(b) on this paper. The continuing trend towards basing questions on 'this' situation again caused difficulty for some candidates, although there is evidence that centres are managing to get their candidates to apply their answers rather more effectively to such questions. This specific application will remain a key theme of this paper, and centres are therefore once again encouraged to work closely with their candidates to ensure this particular challenge is met.

Comments on individual questions

Question 1

This style of question has been set many times before, and was for most candidates an easy four-mark start to this paper. Parts (c) and - in particular - (d) proved the most challenging.

Question 2

Budgeting is a topic that candidates have often found difficult. It will continue to be tested using various approaches, including the new approach used in this series. Candidates coped well with (a), with the majority being able to calculate the budgeted figures accurately. Virtually all followed the instruction to compare actual against budget, although there was a great variation in the quality of this comparison. Weaker candidates were content to compare totals, although a number - having calculated that actual was £7.75 over budget - failed to make a clear statement to the effect that the Farm was not successful. Others mentioned that actual exceeded budget but did not support this statement with calculated figures. Stronger candidates either started or concluded with the overall position, supporting this with a breakdown of individual items (description and numerical difference) and thereby gained all five marks available. Centres need to be aware that questions that focus on information (or documents) containing figures or requiring calculations normally expect candidates to quote from these figures or refer to their calculations in order to gain full marks.

Question 3

This was very well answered. Candidates seem to like document completion, although in this instance there was often a failure to update the document number or to include the name of the recipient.

Previous reports have mentioned the importance of 'business realism' in the context of document completion. Although calculations tended to be accurate, there were still many candidates who failed to record pence appropriately, rounding £58.80 and £49.20 to £59.8 and £49.2 respectively. This would typically not appear on a business document, and so marks were lost as a consequence. Centres are again encouraged to work with their candidates on this aspect when calculating and recording figures.

Question 4

The Farm's context was developed in this question, and in general candidates interpreted it correctly when answering (a) and (b). Many scored full marks for identifying the correct start-up and running costs, and most were then able to select relevant examples of fixed and current assets: computer and café/building were roughly equally popular as examples of fixed assets, and (stock of) food was the most frequently selected current asset. In terms of answering "tick-box" type questions, the paper is moving to a style where candidates will be asked to mark a small cross in the relevant box (which will contain the outline of a small blank cross, which the candidate inks in) rather than tick a large blank box as in this series.

Part (c) proved very difficult, with many candidates believing the cost to be variable rather than fixed. Centres have done well in educating their candidates as to the key difference (ie, change/no change in cost as output changes), but the given context proved difficult. Better answers identified that the cost was fixed because it did not depend on the number of customers as indicated in the stem ("... if there are no customers ...").

Part (d) also proved challenging to most candidates. There were a lot of rather vague statements about saving time, and inevitably some answers were of the 'quick and easy' variety. The more able candidates did clarify that, for example, staff time would be saved in terms of labelling/recording, and other candidates argued clearly that the monitoring of sales figures would save costs in terms of reordering, or of not restocking items that did not sell well and which might therefore otherwise have taken costly storage space or have been sold at a loss.

Question 5

This question was typically well answered, with many candidates scoring most of the marks as a result of accurately recording the assets and liabilities. The item that caused the greatest confusion was, as expected, "Customers who owe money".

Question 6

Centres are familiar with the full cash flow forecast template. As a variation, this question concentrated on totals rather than individual receipts and payments. As a result, many candidates found this a difficult question. Although many scored full marks in (a), others added the £2000 to either the total receipts or to both total receipts and total payments. Balancing the net inflow/outflow also proved problematic for many, tending either to balance horizontally (using July and August balances) or to simply retain the given balance. Centres need to be aware that variations on the existing template (such as in this series), or a focus on one aspect of the template - for example, on receipts only or payments only - will continue to feature in some future papers.

Part (b)(i) was well answered by some, although the temptation remains to refer to positive cash balances as 'profit' and to negative ones as 'loss'. This is mentioned regularly in these reports, so centres are again encouraged to continue clarifying the difference between cash and profit. Part (b)(ii) required candidates to consider what the owners should do in the present situation. There were some strong answers here, with reference to the reason for the decision (outflow greater than inflow so the need to cope with the cash deficit) and an appropriate decision, for example to consider postponing the repair work, or the need to borrow short-term. The use of questions that focus on 'this' forecast, 'this' profit and loss (etc) will continue to feature in future series.

Question 7

The profit and loss template used in (a) is well known now, and candidates in previous series have also met other (columnar) ways of displaying expenses and revenues in order to calculate profit. Candidates were generally comfortable with it, although a number failed to provide a correct date to start with. The cost of sales figure proved problematic for some - who often positioned it in the profit & loss section rather than in trading, or added rather than subtracted it from the sales figure - and others failed to state 'Net profit', using more generalised terms such as "Total profit" or "Profit/loss", which have not been accepted in the past and were not accepted this series.

Part (b) was often not well answered, with very few candidates accessing the third mark in both sections for a clear reference to "this" profit & loss. In (i) the stronger candidates picked up the fact that Mary Fairbanks's bank has loaned money to the Farm, so she would be interested in the extent to which the Farm's profits indicated their ability to repay the loan. However, some did not read the question with sufficient care, seeing the word "manager" and assuming that Mary managed the Farm. Answers to (ii) often concentrated on the potential competition, with stronger candidates arguing the case that Doug may be interested in either buying or selling land to the Farm, with the account indicating the likelihood of this. However, a number of candidates seemed to be unclear as to the difference between a stakeholder and a shareholder, or assumed that all stakeholders such as Doug would of necessity have a direct investment in the Farm, so this is an area where centres should continue working closely with candidates.

Part (c) was generally well answered. Candidates focused on the potential problems arising from errors in the formula or in figures/amounts entered, and others mentioned correctly that omission of information would also lead to incorrect results.

Question 8

The topic of methods of payment has often proved difficult, and candidates generally found this a very hard question. Part (a) asked for a brief description of what happens when a credit card is used, so those candidates who made (at least) two brief statements - for example, describing the use of card reader and the pin number - received the marks. A number of others, however, answered their own question about the advantages of credit cards. Centres are again asked to continue working with candidates to ensure the correct interpretation of trigger words such as 'Describe'. There was also the inevitable confusion between credit and debit cards, with many candidates suggesting that payment by credit card is instantaneous as far as the credit card user is concerned.

Answers to (b) were often better, with reference to Vidor probably not having sufficient money in his bank account (rather than not having sufficient cash with him) and therefore wishing to avoid the cheque 'bounce', being commonly made. Some answers were less clear, failing to recognise that payment by cheque also takes time to come out of a bank account: the point made by the stronger candidates was that, although it does take time, this is less than when payment is made by credit card. Centres will be aware that questions on methods of payment often ask for a comparison between two methods, and it is proposed to continue this practice.

Part (c) was again not well answered. It is another example of where candidates must be careful to differentiate between a seller and a buyer, in this case the Farm and Vidor (the customer). Some answered the question from the wrong viewpoint, providing disadvantages to the customer rather than the supplier of the service. Some other answers were vague, referring in general terms to credit card payments not going into the Farm's account immediately: although correct, the question focused on the disadvantages of paying by credit cards compared with paying by cheques, which also take time to be entered (and cleared) in an account.

Question 9

Two types of break-even questions tend to be set. This paper asked for the construction, rather than the interpretation, of a break-even chart. Part (a) started by asking for a simple calculation: most candidates gained the marks, although some stated the answer as "£25" whereas others failed to follow the given formula correctly. Those candidates who could put the figures correctly into the form of a calculation, and then miscalculated the answer, gained 1 mark for the appropriate method. There were many correct answers to (b), with the stronger candidates not only making the point that the breakeven point will move to the left, but also clarifying that fewer pets will be needed for the Farm to break even.

Part (c) was, as has often been the case with this topic, not well answered. Labelling in particular was a weakness, with few candidates gaining the mark available for correct labelling of the axes together with an appropriate heading. The most common error here was to label the Y axis as either costs or revenues - but not both, which is the requirement - or to use an inappropriate label such as "money". A number of candidates displayed the lines correctly, but provided only limited (or even no) labelling, therefore losing marks even though they had 'done the hard bit'. The weaker candidates struggled to score more than one mark, typically for an accurate and labelled fixed cost line. In this series abbreviations were allowed for the labels, but it is also policy for the Applied Business paper's assessment to reflect good business practice, so there will be no generosity allowed in future series to candidates who use abbreviations. In future, candidates must write full labelling, and centres are therefore strongly encouraged to work closely with their candidates to ensure that full labelling of lines - 'Fixed costs' "Total costs (not "Variable costs") and "Total revenue" - and full labelling of the breakeven point will be made.

The use of ICT in business is one of the themes of this Unit, and will continue to be examined using a variety of approaches. Questions similar to 9(d) have been set before and have been typically well answered, and this was the case here. Most candidates selected B7, and many were then able to provide a reasonable and acceptable formula together with an accurate

reference to calculation of total variable costs. Weaker candidates often referred to column A rather than column B, or failed to describe with sufficient clarity the purpose of the formula. Part (e) has also been tested in various guises, although here the reference to formulas in the stem of the question was designed to eliminate reference to them in answers. However, many candidates ignored the question phrase and therefore lost marks by referring to features or functions associated with the use of formulas. Many of the stronger candidates gained both marks for clear points relating to storage and/or printouts.

Question 10

As always, this question was targeted towards the highest achievers, and - as in previous series - required decisions to be made and justified. Part (a)(i) proved relatively easy for many candidates who understood that budgeting is associated with factors such as planning and control: stronger answers used the context of the play area. Part (ii) was less well answered. Although some candidates seemed perfectly aware of the nature of profit and loss, they either referred vaguely to "money" - a reference to a cashflow forecast rather than a profit and loss account - or ignored the word 'Forecast' and described matters in the present tense: for example, "It shows what profits are being made" rather than "It will show the profits Clarian Farm think will be made" (reference to a forecast profit and loss account in general terms or one focused on the proposed new play area were both allowed). The paper has a history of asking for clear differentiation between cash and profit, and this standard was again applied.

Having struggled with part (a) it is pleasing to report that many candidates produced some very solid answers to (b). The selection of using the savings from one of the owners was the slightly more popular option, but points were well made concerning the pros and cons of both methods. The idea of opportunity cost was often included in context - for example, if future profits are used for the play area, they cannot be used for other expansion or investment - and many candidates built their answers effectively on perhaps the more obvious points (savings are £3000 short; there is no guarantee that future profits will materialise). The context was particularly well used here and centres are to be congratulated on educating their candidates effectively in this aspect of answering the final 'extended answer' question.

Statistics

5306	Max	*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Raw Mark	50	44	38	32	26	21	16	12	8	0
UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	0

5307	Max	*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Raw Mark	50	43	38	33	28	23	18	13	8	0
UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	0

5308	Max	*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	U
Raw Mark	90	75	65	55	45	39	33	27	21	0
UMS	100	90	80	70	60	50	40	30	20	0

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