

Examiners' Report Summer 2008

GCSE

GCSE Business & Communication Systems (1504)

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Summer 2008

Publications Code UG020011

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GCSE Business & Communication Systems - 1504/01 & 02 (Foundation and Higher)

General Comments

Once again, it was pleasing to see an overall improvement in the standard of ICT skills exhibited by the candidates. On the other hand, it remains disappointing to report that many candidates are not giving themselves the opportunity to gain the full range of marks. This is mainly due to lack of attention to detail, especially in terms of failure to follow all instructions carefully and to check their work for accuracy errors.

Though many centres complied with the request to encourage candidates to attach their printouts to scripts with string or treasury tags, there are still some scripts being sent to the examiners which do not have the printouts attached in any way. It would also be appreciated if, as well as securing them, the printouts could be put into task order. It should also be noted that candidates are expected to produce a printout not a screen shot for database and spreadsheet answers.

Centres are reminded that it is a requirement that a hard copy of the pre-prepared files **must** be included with the scripts when they are sent to the nominated examiner. This is to ensure that candidates are not unfairly penalised as a result of incorrect data entry in the pre-prepared files.

Foundation Paper - 01

Comments About Individual Questions

Question 1 - Information sheet

Practically all candidates attempted this question and it was generally well answered, with many candidates presenting a well-organised information sheet, which gained them full marks. The procedural instructions were well followed in the main, though some candidates who decided to elaborate on the information given, frequently missed some of the details of the instructions.

Question 2a - Spreadsheet

A small minority of candidates did not attempt the spreadsheet. Instructions were not carried out so well on this question, with many candidates failing to justify the columns and having difficulty formatting columns to 2 decimal places. Once again, many candidates were clearly not using a formula to calculate the total column, because the answers were frequently a mixture of correct and incorrect totals. It is disappointing that so many candidates do not appear to understand one of the basic benefits of using a spreadsheet.

Question 2b - Bar chart

Most candidates produced an accurate and correct type of chart. However, many failed to gain the mark available for a title, because they had not thought carefully enough about what the chart was representing. Many candidates also failed to follow the instruction for a fully labelled chart and did not label either of the axes.

Question 3 - Database

There seemed to be fewer candidates who did not make an attempt at the database question this year than in previous years, and many gained the majority of the marks available. The main problems that were experienced were not manipulation of the database itself, but with inaccurate input of data. As always, candidates need to make sure that they check their work carefully. Instead of doing the search, some candidates opted to type the required information out again and this was obvious because of making different errors in the second input to those made in the first parts of the question.

Higher Paper - 02

Comments About Individual Questions

Question 1 - Database

Many candidates scored highly on this question at the higher tier, most following instructions carefully and completing all the database functions successfully. However, a significant number either printed out too many printouts or too few (at the incorrect points).

Question 2a - Spreadsheet

Most candidates found this question well within their scope, and many produced a correctly headed and calculated spreadsheet, though there were a significant number who failed to realise that one guest was staying for 3 nights not 1. There were a few problems with justification of the columns as the instruction was not always followed, and few understood that the £ sign should not be included next to the figures.

Question 2b - Invoice

The invoice was completed successfully by many of the candidates, with correct transfer of required information from 2a. Calculations were well done for the most part, though working out VAT at 17.5% proved difficult for some. The most common error was that a great number of candidates do not appear to know how many days there are in April, giving the second date as 31/04/08.

Question 3a - Letter

Despite comments made in previous reports, one of the most basic forms of business communication, the letter, continues to produce disappointing results from the candidates. Although some presented well constructed, faultlessly laid-out and accurately spelt work, these were in the minority. Many candidates still do not appear to know what is meant by fully-blocked and open-punctuated style, or where the various components of a letter should be placed on the paper. Evidence for this included, not giving the name of the addressee, the use of a superscript 'nd' in the date, a failure to match the salutation and complimentary close, and punctuation used outside the main text of the letter. Candidates should also be encouraged to use a spell-check and carefully read through their letters before printing.

Question 3b - Advertisement

This question was successfully completed by nearly all the candidates, many of whom seemed to enjoy finishing the paper with a flourish and produced some very attractive and appealing work. It was pleasing to see attention being paid to style, layout and suitability for purpose by the majority of the candidates.

GCSE Business & Communication Systems - 1504/03 & 04 (Foundation and Higher Tier)

General Comments

The context was well received and there was much evidence of centres having used the context effectively and used the issues flagged up there to prepare candidates. However, judging by the lack of knowledge of some topics, which had been flagged up, some candidates had not prepared sufficiently for their examination and consequently had no or superficial knowledge.

Some candidates are answering questions from a generic point of view and not applying their answers to the context. Too many candidates are also not expanding or developing, especially when asked to 'analyse', 'suggest', 'assess' their answers which means they are not being awarded the higher marks.

As centres are aware, these papers are marked online, therefore please encourage candidates to write in black ink only as blue or green ink is very difficult to read after the script has been scanned. In addition it would be very much appreciated if candidates did not write below the last dotted line provided for their answer or in the side, top or bottom margins or on blank pages in the answer book. Additional sheets should be used for any extra writing.

Foundation Paper - 03

Comments About Individual Questions

Question 1

1(a) (i) order (ii) job sharing and (iii) equal opportunities were the best answered, with (iv) agenda (v) BACS and (vi) file, the least well done.

(b) This question was not particularly well answered, demonstrating the weak subject knowledge of many candidates.

(c)(i) Many candidates were awarded 1 mark as they described time rate as being paid for the number of hours worked but made no reference to any hourly or set rate.

(ii) This question was not answered well with too many candidates offering 'easy' with no expansion or qualification.

(d) Generally well answered by many candidates who understood why personal data needed to be protected with some referring to the Data Protection Act. However, some candidates misread or misunderstood the question and discussed ways to keep the data safe.

Question 2

2(a)(i) Many candidates did not answer this question well because they simply stated features of questionnaires ie that open and closed question should be used and/or that people can fill them in quickly, rather than giving examples of how CGH would benefit from using a questionnaire.

(ii) Some good answers seen which had been related to the previous question and the collection of data with many candidates realising that the use of 'why' required some evaluation. However, still too many answers containing 'easy', 'clear' with no expansion.

2(b)(i) Candidates who selected database answered well and were able to give examples of the functions of these eg sort/search. Word processing was reasonable with candidates identifying its use for letters and reports. DTP responses mainly consisted of being able to create posters and leaflets. Some candidates selected two types of software. Many candidates listed the basic uses of their chosen software and did not link this to CGH despite being asked to in the question.

(ii) Generally not well answered with many candidates simply stating that it would improve efficiency because it would be quicker and/or easier with very little explanation or expansion.

Foundation Paper - 03/ Higher Paper - 04

Comments About Individual Questions

Question 3 / Question 1

3(a)

1(a) Candidates often confused span of control and chain of command which was disappointing because of the fact that there was an organisation chart in the pre-issued context, which candidates should have studied together with the related theory surrounding internal organisation of a business.

Whilst candidates did use the chart and indicate names and levels, that is all they did with no explanation or analysis.

3(b)(i)

1(b)(i) Where candidates had read and understood the question it was well answered with valid and sensible purposes of communication explained. However many candidates misread or misunderstood and explained two methods of communication eg telephone, email.

(b)(ii) Many candidates talked about how poor communication would occur, rather than the effects. Candidates who did identify effects provided judgements eg work would not be completed, wrong message being passed and the consequences, the need for training in use of equipment and health and safety issues.

(b)(iii) This question was generally well done with many candidates providing sound evaluation about why a meeting was a good way to inform, feedback, discuss, motivate etc.

Question 2

2(a)(i) The majority of candidates explained how questionnaires could be given to guests to complete at check out or could be left in hotel rooms so CGH could see what improvements or changes would need to be made to the hotel. Too many explained the purpose of questionnaires in general and did not apply this to CGH.

(ii) Some candidates explained how Simon could use a database to provide lists of guests, could search and sort for specific information quickly and the fact that it is easier to use than a paper based system etc. Where candidates failed to gain marks it was because their answers were too brief - 'quick', 'easy' with no comparison to perhaps a paper based system or further explanation.

(b) Some candidates related the use of DTP to CGH and the fitness and leisure facilities and provided excellent judgements on the benefits of using DTP. Many candidates though, as already stated above, gave short answers with no explanation or expansion.

Question 3

3(a) The most popular methods of payment were cash, debit card, credit card and cheques. Some candidates did confuse debit card and credit card and some explained how BACS could be used which was not acceptable here. Some candidates explained how members could pay monthly or annually and whilst this could have been awarded marks if they had gone on to explain how these payments might have been made, but in general they did not.

(b) Generally well answered by the majority of candidates with anti virus software, user IDs, passwords, levels of access and encryption as the most popular measures offered.

Some candidates misread the question and rather than concentrating on the system and data, they went on to explain how to protect the hardware and equipment which, whilst usually good, was not what was asked.

In general, candidates need to be aware of the marks awarded to each question and the buzz words used and answer accordingly. Depending upon the buzz word candidates need to expand their answers otherwise they are not availing themselves of the higher marks available.

On a general point, candidates are advised, especially with the longer essay-type answers, to prepare some kind of answer plan. This concentrates thoughts and ideas and enables candidates to offer sensible, well-planned and logical answers. In addition, reiterating and emphasising what was said earlier, unless a question asks candidates to 'state', 'list', 'identify', 'give', 'name' then it will be expected that answers should be expanded upon and usually applied to the context.

GCSE Business & Communication Systems - 1504/05

General Comments

The majority of coursework seen were Communication pieces with the security systems piece the next popular. Many candidates used their own schools or their work experience for these pieces with some very impressive results.

Once again most candidates were given access to the full range of assessment objectives usually through a structure. Some very high quality work was seen particularly those which were based on real organisations which consequently meant there was not an over reliance on textbooks and the Internet. However some adjustments were made to marks where assessment was very generous because it would appear assessment objectives were not understood.

Most of the work seen was very well presented with 100% use of ICT.

Annotation / Centre Admin

Authentication statements remain a problem, with many E6 forms having to be sent to centres. Failure to include work of the top and bottom candidates is also a continuing problem. Though many excellent examples of beautifully presented work with clear and helpful annotation were seen, there were other examples of total disorganisation on the part of candidates with some pieces not even fastened together.

There still remain the following problems:

- marks awarded on record sheets not annotated on work and vice versa
- incorrect totalling of marks awarded
- incorrect transfer of marks from record sheets to OPTEMS - centres are reminded that it is their responsibility to inform Edexcel if marks are incorrect in any way
- annotation at the top or bottom of pages (or sometimes no annotation at all) makes moderation very difficult so annotation at point of award would really help the process
- work in plastic wallets or bulky folders/files is not necessary - one plastic wallet or a treasury tag is acceptable and sufficient.

Criteria Specific Comments

AO1 - Generally well completed, but as usual there were many cases where AO 1.2 had been awarded without the required named evidence - textbooks without name and author, businesses/organisations without names, unnamed individuals and evidence of a vast number of web sites having been used but no other type of source. At the risk of being repetitive - an information log of sources included with or in the action plan would gain AO 1.2 - a bibliography is not sufficient as this is only one source - textbooks.

AOs 1.6/1.7 require consideration of influences/alternatives - a list is not sufficient. In addition AO 1.9 cannot be awarded for lists that are presented as comparisons with no development.

AO2 - There is still awarding of marks for the multiple and plural criteria when the evidence had only been presented once, which is disappointing when it is obvious candidates know what they are doing and are presenting sound evidence but not always enough evidence.

AO 2.4 causes particular problems as too many candidates are merely lifting passages from textbooks and from the Internet with no application to the organisation concerned.

AO 2.7 requires candidates to recognise at least two strengths, two weaknesses and then make at least two decisions. The use of SWOT and PEST would achieve this but decisions also have to have been made.

The use of a structure, as mentioned above, meant action planning was evident and appropriate.

AO3 - 3.4 still remains overlooked usually on basic low-level work - candidates can be awarded this for using graphs, charts and tables as this is organising and using data and information. AO 3.7 is usually generously awarded because there is not always evidence of all four sources having been used. Referencing, footnotes and a comprehensive information log showing where information was taken from would show systematic gathering.

AO4 - Depth of understanding and evaluation when discussing outcomes, improvements and justifications was still often lacking but was frequently awarded. At the risk of being repetitive, as in previous years, a lack of information gathered on which to base evaluative comments or indeed make recommendations or work of a purely descriptive nature, limited access to both AO3 and AO4. Where there was a clear structure candidates' work followed a logical sequence which assisted the award of AO3 and AO4.

Grade Boundaries - June 2008

1504/01 - Foundation Tier

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Raw boundary mark	45	33	28	23	19	15

1504/02 - Higher Tier

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D
Raw boundary mark	45	41	37	33	29	25

1504/03 - Foundation Tier

Grade	Max. Mark	C	D	E	F	G
Raw boundary mark	63	25	21	18	15	12

1504/04 - Higher Tier

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D
Raw boundary mark	63	43	37	31	26	20

1504/05 - Coursework

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Raw boundary mark	76	69	59	49	39	31	23	16	9

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme.

Boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade.

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