GCSE

Business and Communication Systems

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

Business and Communication Systems (J230)

EXAMINERS' REPORTS

Chief Examiner's Report

This was the first assessment period in which substantial numbers of candidates were entered for each unit and achieving an aggregated outcome for the qualification itself, as well as individual unit grades.

Centres have generally adapted well to the requirements of this qualification. For unit A265 it was pleasing to note that the candidates were able to answer all the questions set. Candidates generally performed well on those aspects of the unit which were also a feature of the legacy specification (1950) and they also had sufficient knowledge in order to be able to answer the 'business' content introduced for the first time in this unit. Where more able candidates struggled, however, was in developing analytical responses to the 'six mark' questions: responses were often based on assertions, such as 'action X is good because it will result in higher profit', rather than analysis, in this instance of *how* profits will be affected.

For unit A266 candidates generally performed well and centres were able to provide suitable local or national contexts for their candidates to investigate. Centres are reminded of the 2000 word limit contained in the specification and the requirement that the submitted work should be that which was written under controlled conditions – copies of research evidence (for example, completed questionnaires) are not required.

Unit A267 was assessed for the fourth occasion and most centres and their candidates have adjusted well to this practical examination. Most candidates were able to attempt all of the tasks in the time allowed, and the candidates complied with the requirement to add their name/candidate number to all documents before printing. Despite the question being divided into sub-tasks, the extended response task, Task 2(a), was answered by many candidates as a single piece of text. It was judged that this potentially had an impact on the quality of responses and so, in consequence, it is planned that from the January 2012 series onwards the candidates will be supplied with a pre-formatted document in order to enable them to provide a more structured response. Centres will be provided with further details regarding this change through a Notice to Centres which will be forwarded in the autumn of 2011.

A265 Businesses and their communication systems

General comments

This was the second year in which this unit has been assessed and, compared with 2010, saw a much larger candidate entry.

Candidates were, in general, well prepared for this examination. Most candidates attempted all of the questions and could generally offer relevant responses.

Some candidates failed to address the context in the question and so failed to gain marks – for example, if a question requires candidates to describe two drawbacks to a business then no marks can be awarded for a response which describes two benefits to the business, or even two drawbacks to customers. There was some evidence from the pattern of responses to these types of questions that some candidates were more easily able to discuss issues from a customer's perspective than from that of a business.

Weaker responses tended to overstate their case – often because the candidate confused their own worldview with that of the business organisation which was the context for the question. For example, the cost of purchasing keyboards and batteries was described as expensive by some candidates, which may be true from their perspective but would not be true from that of the business. Similarly, some responses tended to overstate the impact of business actions – it would not be true, for example, that an incorrectly worded letter would result in a dramatic loss of income for a business. There have been many instances in recent years of poor corporate communications and other well-known 'PR disasters', but generally speaking the businesses concerned have all survived and recovered from the relatively minor consequences of these events. On the other hand some recent studies have suggested that badly presented business websites containing obvious misspellings and other inaccuracies do cause some customers to choose not to buy on-line from the businesses concerned.

On the 'six mark' questions, candidates are required to provide relevant analysis for Level 2 (3-4 marks) to be awarded. Some candidates attempted to offer analysis but where this only consisted of assertions (eg cutting prices will result in increased profits), then Level 2 marks could not be awarded. To achieve Level 2 candidates needed to offer analysis – either in the form of a detailed explanation of the rationale for the assertion or, in the case of questions where a comparison between two alternatives was required, by the use of an analytical framework in order to compare the two alternatives. Level 3 marks can only be awarded to candidates who are able to offer a reasoned judgement based on their analysis of the benefits and drawbacks, or an analysis which covers the two alternatives. In other words a candidate achieving Level 3 would have achieved the highest mark possible in Level 2 if their response did not contain a valid judgement.

Comments on individual questions

1(a)   Most candidates could identify at least four of the five mistakes. Some thought '50' was a mistake but it is a common house-style feature to spell out all numbers between one and ten and to use figures for numbers of 11 or greater.

1(b)   Most candidates gave two different, valid responses to this part of the question.

1(c)   Many candidates knew that the next stage would involve a written warning but few could explain what the stage involved.

1(d)*   Most candidates could offer some benefits and/or drawbacks and so gained a Level 1 mark. Few, however, offered any valid analysis of their impact on the organisation, instead offering unexplained assertions such as the impact on costs or profits.

2(a)(i) Nearly all candidates offered some knowledge of a shareholder, such as they may receive a share of any profits made, but only a small majority explained the role of a shareholder in a limited company.

2(a)(ii) Most candidates gave the correct response to this part of the question.

2(b)   Most candidates gave the correct response to this part of the question.

2(c)(i) Most candidates gained full marks on this part of the question.

2(c)(ii) Most candidates gave a correct response to this part of the question. Those who failed to gain a mark usually did so by overstating the case – for example, by asserting that action would result in the bankruptcy or forced closure of the business.

2(d)   Most candidates gave three correct responses to this part of the question but there were some ambiguous responses. Centres are reminded that the Health and Safety Executive publishes an information leaflet which summarises the legal responsibilities of employers, as well as the latest medical knowledge of the health implications of working with VDUs.

2(e)   Most candidates could offer at least one reason why organisations are required to comply with data protection legislation but this was often not developed. Very few offered two valid responses to this part of the question.

3(a)   Most candidates offered a valid reason which they were able to develop and score full marks on this part of the question.

3(b)*   Most candidates were able to argue for one option over the other, but very few were able to offer convincing analysis of the reasons for their choice. Most candidates asserted that a drop in price would increase profits without explaining why. Most candidates who argued for advertising stated that this would increase customers and, hence, profits without again arguing why. Consequently, having failed to offer balanced analysis of both issues very few candidates achieved Level 3.

3(c)   Most candidates explained how secret shoppers could be used to obtain information on levels of customer service, either in the business' stores or in those of its competitors. Very few, however, explained why being 'secret' was significant in terms of the validity of the information obtained.

3(d)(i) Many candidates failed to address the context of the question – usually by discussing the implications for customers, but some candidates discussed drawbacks or confused customer service with selling products on-line. Good responses to this part of the question explained how a reduced need for specific types of staff would impact on business costs.

3(d)(ii) Most candidates gave two valid responses and so scored full marks on this part of the question.

4(a)   Most candidates could offer two valid drawbacks but often these were not explained. Candidates need to do more than assert that a particular drawback is 'time consuming' because this, of itself, is not necessarily a drawback for a business – the implications of the additional time would need to be discussed.

4(b)   Nearly all candidates gave the correct device when responding to this part of the question.

4(c)   Many candidates failed to score marks by failing to respond to the 'process' implications of the question – candidates who described the problems of storing or using the output of this process gained no marks. Candidates who gave explanations as to why the business might suffer negative consequences of the activities undertaken during the scanning process scored well – but there were very few such candidates.

4(d)   Nearly all candidates gave the correct device on this part of the question.

4(e)   Most candidates offered at least one valid drawback but many candidates incorrectly stated that such devices and their batteries would be expensive to purchase. Whilst this might be true from the perspective of some candidates, it would not be true from the perspective of the business organisation in this examination paper.

4(f)   Most candidates could offer some valid points about how this technology works but many responses lacked the precise use of technical language needed to award marks (eg it is incorrect to state that a user would 'speak into the computer' or even 'into the software' when a specific input device such as a microphone would be required).

5(a)(i) Most candidates gained full marks on this part of the question for recognising that DVDs could be lost or damaged.

5(a)(ii) Very few candidates had sufficient knowledge of this aspect of the specification to score marks. Some candidates had knowledge of using on-line data storage services but this was often insufficient to gain marks on this part of the question.

5(b)(i) From the evidence of the responses to this part of the question, nearly all candidates had the knowledge required to be able to use passwords effectively.

5(b)(ii) On the other hand, very few candidates appear to know how a firewall works in order to protect computers from unauthorised access.

5(c)   The responses to this part of the question revealed that most candidates had very little understanding of how anti-virus software and anti-phishing software work. It appears that many candidates offered responses based on their own understanding of computer-security software, which is often installed as a suite of protection devices. For this qualification candidates need to have more than a vague awareness that a computer security-suite will protect the system; instead they need to know the specific threat(s) which each component of the suite is designed to protect against, and then how each specific component works to mitigate those threats.

6(a)(i) Nearly all candidates gave the correct device when responding to this part of the question.

6(a)(ii) Nearly all candidates gave the correct item when responding to this part of the question.

6(b)   Very few candidates appeared to know what an internet service provider is. There were many references to the features of either routers or web-browsers (these items were the correct responses to the previous two questions).

6(c)(i)   Most candidates were able to offer two valid benefits to customers when responding to this part of the question.

6(c)(ii)   Most candidates were able to offer two valid drawbacks to customers when responding to this part of the question. Incorrect responses failed to appreciate that, unlike the scenario in question 3(d)(ii), customers would have a choice of whether or not to order products on-line. Thus, not having a computer would not prevent customers from being able to order products.

6(d)   This part of the question was incorrectly answered by a number of candidates who discussed the implications for customers and not the business. Of those who gave valid responses, most gained marks in Level 1, often because the attempted analysis consisted largely of unexplained assertions.

A266 Developing business communication systems

This was the second assessment of this unit of the new Business and Communication Systems GCSE. The controlled assessment is aimed at candidates at all levels and the breadth of marks awarded suggests that it was accessible to all candidates.

Both scenarios were of equal popularity. Where candidates chose the Scenario 1 they tended to look at the larger on-line recruitment agencies which were available to them then the school library or a small local library for Scenario 2. Both scenarios gave candidates adequate resources to carry out their investigations.

Since this is a controlled assessment, centres should bear in mind that only the work which was completed within the time limit should be submitted, additional work which was completed as part of the research element is not necessarily required for moderation but needs to be used when writing the report. There is a recommended limit on the number of words within the report, 2000 words, and centres should refer to pages 28 and 29 of the specification and the Guide to Controlled Assessment for details on how to present and administer this unit. Furthermore, the work has to be that of the candidate and therefore, structures for report writing and letter structure should not be provided. Candidates need to be able to complete the task in a way which enables them to show their own knowledge and skills.

Most centres completed all of the paperwork accurately and the required samples were dispatched quickly. Centres should make sure that controlled assessment cover sheets (CCS309) are checked for arithmetic errors so that candidates are not accidentally penalised. These cover sheets give an indication of where marks have been allocated for each part of the tasks and are as important for work submitted via the repository as by post. In addition to these marks, it is always useful to see additional annotation by the assessor on each individual piece of controlled assessment, as this indicates where centre assessors allocated the marks and also the reasons for the band awarded. Some centres completed this but it would help the moderation process further if it was a policy adopted by all centres in future series.

For Task 1, the application of the assessment criteria by individual centres was generally good. Some centres, however, did err on the lenient side and award marks at the higher end of each band, in particular Band 3. To obtain the highest marks in Band 3 candidates must analyse, assess in detail and justify comprehensively. Centres should also bear in mind that each section follows from one to the other. Recommendations for an improvement must come from the analysis of the current system along with opinions of the stakeholders and their recommendations gained through, for example, completed questionnaires. It should not appear that the recommendations have been thought of by the candidate without reference to the stakeholders.

For Task 2 centres are reminded that in order to obtain the highest mark then the letter or leaflet should be of a near professional quality. It should be virtually error free and be very convincing in communicating the proposals and not just a list of recommendations with no obvious attempt at persuading the stakeholders to accept the changes.

A267 ICT skills for business communication systems

General comments

The paper was deemed a success. Time management did not seem to be an issue, with the higher ability candidates being able to work through the paper attempting all questions and gaining high marks. Many candidates were able to gain good marks on Task 1; others need to develop their skills in relation to this aspect. It might be helpful for centres to make use of the past papers available in order to familiarise their candidates with the style of the paper so as to prepare candidates for examination. In addition to the past papers available some centres have produced additional mock examination papers following the style of previous papers for use with their candidates. With regards to the printing instructions, the vast majority of candidates followed the instructions to ensure that their name was part of the printed document, and therefore, very few candidates documents omitted these details. Where submitted candidates do omit these details we are unable to identify the work as their own and therefore, no marks are given for that work.

Candidates demonstrated good skills when using the spreadsheet. Candidates were able to enter and edit data, create simple formulas and create a chart. Candidates were able to format the spreadsheet to a high standard, create a professional looking chart and use absolute cell referencing. Some centres have taught a notice of meeting and agenda to a very high standard with lots of candidates gaining full or very high marks, having obviously taken note of last year's report. There was occasionally confusion between this document and a memo; despite this candidates were still able to gain some marks even if they did create an incorrect document. Task 2(a) differentiated well. Most candidates started well and demonstrated some excellent knowledge of diary management software (DMS) and were able to state features and discuss the advantages and disadvantages. This sub-task required candidates to evaluate the impact of DMS on either Jane, or the business, and therefore, differentiated effectively between candidates in terms of their relative abilities to analyse.

Comments about individual questions

Task 1

(a)(i)   Candidates were awarded a mark for editing simple details. Most candidates did this successfully on this part of the task.

(a)(ii)   Candidates were awarded up to two marks for adding basic details to the spreadsheet. Most candidates, again, did this successfully in relation to this part of the task.

(b)(i)   Candidates were awarded one mark for adding a label. Most candidates did this successfully.

(b)(ii), (iii), (iv) Candidates were awarded up to three marks for creating a basic formula. Most candidates did this successfully, but some candidates did not print out in formula view when instructed to in (c)(iii) and, therefore, did not provide evidence of this sub-task.

(b)(v)   Candidates were awarded one mark for adding a label. Most candidates did this successfully on this part of the task.

(b)(vi)   Candidates were awarded another mark for creating a basic formula. Most candidates did this successfully, but again some candidates did not print out in formula view when instructed to in (c)(iii) and, therefore, did not provide evidence of this sub-task.

(c)(i)   Candidates were awarded one mark for putting the relevant cells into currency format. Most candidates did this successfully – again some candidates did not print out in formula view as instructed to in (c)(iii) and, therefore, did not provide evidence of this sub-task.

(c)(ii)   Candidates were awarded up to two marks for printing the spreadsheet landscape in formula view. Most candidates did this successfully, but this is an area for development within some centres.

(d)(i)   Candidates were asked to sort the data. Most candidates did this successfully.

(d)(ii)   Candidates were asked to print their document in the normal (non-formula view). Most candidates did this successfully.

(e)(i)   Candidates were awarded up to five marks for producing a pie chart. Most candidates were able to do this, but the legend and percentage labels were sometimes omitted.

(e)(ii)   Candidates were asked to print their chart on one sheet. A number of candidates printed as part of their spreadsheet document and so did not access this mark.

(f)(i)   Candidates were awarded one mark for adding a label. Most candidates did this successfully.

(f)(ii)   Candidates were asked to use absolute cell referencing in order to create a formula to calculate the journey costs. The ability to perform this task varied and, therefore, this was a good question to differentiate the higher ability candidates.

(f)(iii)   Candidates were awarded up to two marks for creating a basic formula. Some candidates did this, but still some candidates then failed to print out in formula view when instructed to do so and, therefore, did not provide evidence of this sub-task.

Task 2

(a)(i)   Candidates were awarded up to four marks for stating or describing features of diary management software. There was clear evidence that most candidates knew what this was and were able to state or describe a few features. Candidates who did achieved high marks were those who did not make general statements which could have been features of a hand written diary.

(a)(ii)   Candidates were awarded up to four marks for the benefits of using diary management software. Again candidates were a bit too general and needed to be more specific. The best candidates stated a feature and then stated the benefit of that feature to the business/Jane and, therefore did not provide responses which were too generic.

(a)(iii)   Candidates were awarded up to four marks for the drawbacks or disadvantages of diary management software. This part of the task was generally done well with most candidates able to state at least two drawbacks of the software.

(a)(iv)   Candidates were asked to evaluate whether the advantages of using diary management software are greater than the disadvantages for Jane. This part of the question was levels marked. Candidates accessed Level 1 marks by comparing the advantages of the software to the disadvantages and *vice versa*. Level 2 marks were awarded for

evaluating the impact on Jane or the business. Although many candidates attempted to evaluate the impact on the business with statements such as 'it makes the business more professional' or 'Jane will be on time', more was needed in order to access these higher level marks. To get good marks on questions of this nature a statement explaining, for example, why/how it will make the business more professional or what impact it will have on Jane being on time is required .

A number of candidates this session responded to all four sub-parts of Task 2(a) in a single answer. Although this was accepted by the marking team this series, this practice is to be discouraged. Therefore, it is planned that, with effect from the January 2012 series, candidates will be provided with a Word document which will include boxes in which they will need to provide their answers to the relevant sub-tasks. Centres will be provided with further details regarding this change again through a Notice to Centres which will be forwarded in the autumn of 2011.

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