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Examiner's Report Principal Examiner Feedback

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Pearson Edexcel GCSE Business
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Business Communications

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Introduction

The structure of the paper this year was consistent with previous years. Command words used in questions have not changed and allow students to answer questions using a variety of techniques. However, a number of expectations are always required from students. Question 1, as always, was generic and not based on a specific business. All other questions were based on real businesses and required students to apply their knowledge. Many students continue to struggle to do this and therefore cannot score full marks in many of these questions. This issue has been raised numerous times in previous examiner reports but it still remains the biggest problem with student technique.

The ability to write answers in context is a vital skill that students must display. Answers to levelled questions continue to show improvement. Students used clear structure in answers and good evaluative content was often seen in responses. However, the quality of conclusions this year was once again weak. A significant number of students included a conclusion that added little value and simply repeated points made earlier in the answer. The aim of a conclusion should be to arrive at a supported judgement and focus on the key points that allowed this judgement to be made. In many cases students simply added a summary statement with little understanding of the issues covered in the question.

A weakness that was again apparent this year was poor knowledge of business terms. The paper aims to assess student skills and knowledge of Business Communications. This cannot be done without an underpinning knowledge of business terminology as outlined in the specification. Centres are not focusing on many of these areas and as a result some students could not access any marks on some questions because they clearly had insufficient knowledge to do so. This was particularly apparent in the definition questions where an understanding of the terms was vague and could not be awarded full marks.

Question 1 (b)

This was a very straightforward question aimed at testing student knowledge on an area of the specification that is frequently covered on this paper – the communication model. The question was well answered but some students did not have possess the basic underpinning knowledge of the specification and gave wrong answers.

One additional point on this type of question is that the command word is 'identify'. There is no need to write the answer in a sentence. Some students still insist on writing too much detail in this type of question and potentially create time issues for themselves later in the paper.

Question 1 (c)

'Outline' questions are worth two marks and therefore require the student to include one point of development in responses. A significant number of students gave an advantage that was equally applicable to other organisation charts eg 'employees know who their boss is'. This type of answer could not be awarded marks as the question specifically asked for an advantage of having a flat organisation structure. Those students that were able to identify an advantage of having a flat organisational chart often did not achieve the second mark struggled to provide a development point as to why this was a benefit to the business or why the advantage occurred.

Question 1 is generic so there was no requirement for context in order to achieve the second mark.

Question 1 (d)

This was the first 'explain' question on the paper and it should be noted that it has not been asked in the context of a particular business. Therefore no context was required in the answer to score full marks. Students were required to give one benefit of using a slogan when advertising a product and then to develop this with two linked strands of explanation. This question was well answered with many good examples of concise and effective structures to answers that allowed all three marks to be awarded.

Use of key connective words such as 'this leads to' and 'because' helps in structuring answers to explain questions and should be encouraged when preparing students exam technique.

Question 2 (b)

This was a 'state' question aimed at assessing the basic knowledge of the students. In this instance they were expected to name three ways that The Boardroom could use to measure the success of its website. A wide range of methods were accepted but it was important that students did not give repetitive answers. Therefore answers that mentioned 'surveys', 'questionnaires' and 'customer feedback' were essentially giving the same answer three times. This was also seen in answers linked to measuring the sales of the website.

Question 2 (c)

As in previous series, from Question 2 onwards each question was based on a business scenario. Therefore the majority of answers required students to apply their knowledge to the business scenario. Question 2(c) was an excellent example of this. It was an 'explain' question worth 3 marks. Application/context comes from relating the answer specifically to the business in the scenario. In this case, as the business was The Boardroom context should have made reference to skateboarding or clothing, for instance. This often prevented three marks from being awarded as many students could identify and explain a disadvantage of using a website to sell products but did not apply the answer through the use of context. This led to two marks being awarded rather than three.

Question 2 (d)

This was an accessible question as long as students were aware of two things. Firstly they could not use a legal obligation as a factor to consider when creating the website – this was clearly stated in the wording of the question. Secondly, centres should make good use of the specification to identify the type of acceptable answers such as this. The section in Topic 4.4 gives a clear list of key factors in creating a website. Centre should refer to this when teaching content to students.

Question 3 (b)

When discussing Q1 (b), this report covered how 'outline' questions are expected to be answered. Q3 (b) is another 'outline' question so the same rules apply. However this question is linked to a specific business (No.4 Café Bistro)) and therefore also needs the answer to be written in context to be awarded the maximum two marks. This is something that students rarely do with 'outline' questions. Many excellent answers, with development, are confined to just one mark because there is no specific reference in the answer to the business.

Question 3 (c)

This question focused on a benefit to the business of using DTP to produce documents (in this case the menus to be used in the bistro). This made the question specific and required the students to develop the answer to explain the advantage it brings to the business. Many students could not fully develop the advantage in relation to the business and often referred to generic points such as 'it would be cheaper' or 'looks more professional' without explaining why.

Question 3 (d)

'Describe' questions allowed students to achieve marks in a number of different ways. This could be done through including up to four different ways that the local community would be affected by extended opening hours or by identifying one way and then developing this point to say how it would affect the community. This could have been both positive and negative answers. A mark is also available in 'describe' questions for providing a definition of the key term – in this case 'local community'. A key issue with this question was that students often discussed the local economy/competitors rather than the local community. There are far fewer 'describe' questions than 'explain' questions on the paper. The technique required to answer the two questions are different but many students are often briefed well by centres on the technique required to do well on 'explain' questions and therefore also apply it to 'describe' questions. This will limit the chance to gain all four marks. One consistent requirement is to answer the question in the context of the business.

Question 4 (b)

Comments for Q4 (b) are very similar for those made on Q3 (b). However this question asked students to identify a communication method that could be used specifically to motivate employees. Whilst it is true that a wide number of methods could be used, it was not enough to simply state the method. Students had to link the method to motivation. Therefore an answer such as 'meeting' was awarded no marks – it was necessary to give an answer such as 'a meeting to give praise to the employee' for a mark to be awarded.

Most answers, with development, were confined to just one mark because there is no specific reference in the answer to the business.

Question 4 (c)

This question showed a common gap in the literary skills of students. Most students could give a benefit of using a letter, but struggled to explain why this was a suitable method of communication. Development was often included and the implications of students was clear but they could not explain in such a clear way for further marks to be awarded. As in other explain questions, the use of context was very poor.

Question 4 (d)

Question 4(d) was the first question on the paper to be assessed using levels. In these questions, marks were awarded based on assessing which level the answer is in, ranging from Level 1 up to Level 3. As mentioned in the introduction students were responding much better to these levelled questions, although there were some issues with 4(d). One area that needed to be developed further in this question is when answers move between the two options provided. Far too many students simply explained the advantages of posters rather than comparing it to word of mouth advertising in order to make a judgement of what was the most suitable option. This only results in a one-sided answer that does not answer the question.

It should also be noted that answers that include a lot of non-specific information and do not answer the question will be awarded 0 on levelled questions – even if there is a lot of content in the answer.

In order to get into Level 3 both evaluation and context were needed. Evaluation could be seen where a student offered balance in their response and considered both the positive and negative aspects of their opinion or judgement. Context has already been explained within the paper but also needed to be present in order to be judged a Level 3 answer.

Question 5 (a)

Q5 (a) was the first of the three definition questions. Students need to learn the definitions of the key terms contained in the 'What students need to learn' column of the specification. Many students displayed good knowledge of the term in this question but few had the necessary techniques to extend their answer to two marks. Responses that showed some understanding of the term but were not written in a totally accurate way were awarded 1 mark – which was by far the most common mark on this question.

Question 5(a) required students to demonstrate their understanding of the term 'business objective'. Students often made reference to 'aims' and 'targets' – but struggled to be specific enough to be awarded two marks. Many students made good use of examples to gain the second mark – which is a good technique to use if struggling to write a perfect definition.

Question 5 (b)

This was an 'identify' question worth one mark and was answered very well by students. Most were able to identify drawbacks of Lush being environmentally friendly, particularly with answers relating to increased costs.

Question 5 (c)

Question 5(c) was a relatively straight-forward question and was well accessed by students. It followed a theme used many times before in previous papers. However the issues already mentioned previously about context also affected this question. As a result most candidates scored two marks rather than three.

Question 5 (d)

This is the only 'state and explain with context' question on the paper. It proved to be a fairly accessible question with many students being aware of the benefits and drawbacks of using handwritten signs in Lush stores. Many students who did focus on the advantages and disadvantages were also able provide sufficient linked strands to score well for each section, but failed to include context in their answer for all four marks to be awarded.

This question is marked as two separate four mark questions as per the mark scheme.

Question 6 (a)

Question 6(a) was the second definition question on the paper and was well answered. The majority of students had a good understanding of the term 'flipchart'. Despite being a method of communication which is not used as much in modern business it was clear that most students must have seen flipcharts in schools. However some students still give answers which merely repeat the term in the definition, eg 'A chart which you can flip over'.

Question 6 (b)

This was the worst answered 'outline with context' question on the paper. This was mainly because students often discussed the quality of the content in the training rather than the equipment being used. The question was about the equipment being used rather than what it was being used to deliver. Many students gave answer such as 'employees will get bored during the training because it is not practical'. This was not accepted because the answer was to do with the content of the training and not the equipment.

Question 6 (c)

This was the second 'describe' question on the paper and exposed some gaps in the coverage of the specification within centres. It was clear that students struggled to answer the question, and as a result there were a lot of vague answers that did focus on specific issues with the nature of the audience that could affect the quality of a presentation. The question did not require a great deal of technical knowledge but it did demonstrate that students often need to be flexible and apply knowledge to a scenario or context. Many students struggled to do this and ended up scoring one or two marks by giving generic answers.

Question 6 (d)

This question had the command word 'assess'. This meant that a student needed to write an evaluative response to reach 5 marks or more in the mark scheme. Some students saw the phrase 'assess the impact' and this led them to write a one-sided response of holding appraisal meetings three times a year. One-sided answers could only score 4 marks in total. To enter Level 3, students had to have sufficient development in their response and then also provide evidence of balance and contextualisation. It was pleasing to see that many students were doing this and providing Level 3 responses. A significant number of students also picked up on the frequency of the meetings and built this into their answer. Once the response was placed in Level 3, the quality of the evaluation and the conclusion determined whether it was awarded 6, 7 or 8 marks. As mentioned earlier, the quality of conclusions tended to be poor and is a clear area that centres should be working on.

Question 7

This was the final definition question on the paper and followed a similar trend to the other two questions. It can be difficult to provide a perfect definition and many students struggle with the levels of literacy to express their ideas into words. The term 'the web' also proved to be slightly ambiguous and difficult for students to give a clear, concise definition. As a result answers often demonstrated understanding but were not written well enough to gain both of the marks available.

Question 8

The final outline question on the paper concerned factors that need to be considered when using technology to communicate with customers. Students demonstrated a good understanding of factors and there was a much better use of context in this answer. The only issue with the question was when students wrote answers outlining the benefit to customers when the question asked for benefits relating to the business, Disney.

Question 9

A major issue with Question 9, as in previous series, was that candidates did not respond to the command word in the question. This was a 'discuss' style question which required candidates to consider both sides of an issue in the answer. The question asked for candidates to discuss the impacts of using emails to confirm guest bookings at Walt Disney World. In previous years students have often only given one-sided answers on this question, struggling to get into Level 3. There was some improvement this year with regards to this with a greater number of balanced answers seen.

In order to access Level 3, candidates should have also considered possible negative aspects in order to make a judgement as to the issues concerning revenue as a measuring tool. This could be done through considering other factors that are more important. Where candidates only considered the advantages of using email they could score no higher than 4 marks.

Question 10

Despite this question being worth 10 marks the principles of answering it are the same as explained earlier in question 4(d) and question 6(d). The command word is 'assess' so a balanced answer is expected which is written in the context of Walt Disney World or theme parks/hotels. There was a better quality to the evaluative comment included in this answer with an increased number of candidates using the context of the question when providing their opinions. This meant that a large number of candidates gave answers that were judged to be in Level 3. However, for reasons already mentioned in this report, the quality of conclusions tended to be poor and as a result not many candidates scored more than eight marks for this question.

Paper summary

Based on their performance on this paper, students are offered the following advice:

- Always include the correct level of detail in answers. Use the space allocated on the exam paper as a guide to help you – it has been allocated to allow all of the necessary detail to be included.
- Do not neglect to develop technique for shorter questions. Although they are worth fewer marks individually, collectively they can have a large influence on the final grade.
- Writing answers in context is vital. If a business is referred to in the wording of the question, then some part of the answer must be applied to that specific business.
- Always include balance in levelled questions. This allows evaluative comments to be made and therefore marks in the higher levels to be accessed.
- Develop skills for writing effective conclusions. A conclusion must not simply repeat what has been said earlier in the answer. It must add value to the answer by focusing on a key point that has had the largest influence on opinion/decisions.