

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

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GCE Applied Business (6916)
Paper 01

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GCE Applied Business 6916 Investigating People at Work

General Comments

Following the style and format established in previous series, this question paper had the same Assessment Objective (AO) and Mark Band (MB) weightings. It was the fourth assessment for 6916 to be based on the revised specification Issue 2 – May 2009 which introduced the assessment of the quality of written communication (QWC) in papers for this unit. Questions which carry marks for QWC were indicated by an asterisk (*) shown next to questions 1d and 2a and a statement on the front of the question paper. The structure of the paper also matched the sample assessment material issued June 2009, which included exemplars for the extended writing questions that are now an integral part of the assessment for this unit. In every other way the requirements of the question paper should be directly comparable with previous series.

Examiner reports are a valuable resource for helping prepare candidates for external assessment. In addition to reading and taking any notes or advice from this report, it is recommended that Examiner Reports for previous series are read also, as they contain lots of general advice that is still relevant and likely to be useful for centres and candidates in preparation for future papers.

My own general observations, supported by reports from all examiners who worked on this paper, are as follows:

Learners need to be reminded that this is a written paper, within an Applied Business qualification, so it is essential that candidates are able to communicate their answers in the written form – this means making sure that examiners can actually read the handwriting. From reports, my own marking experience and from samples sent to me for 'review' I can attest that the handwriting of many candidates is extremely poor, this is despite the fact that candidates are expected to demonstrate a reasonable level of QWC. The issue of poor handwriting does not appear to concern the candidates themselves, or they would attempt to improve matters. Many clearly assume that it is acceptable, and no disadvantage, to produce handwriting that is hard for others to read. All examiners will make an effort to decipher handwriting, but there is a danger that candidates may miss vital marks if the handwriting is so bad that it cannot be read.

The danger of producing answers in poor handwriting is that it is sometimes impossible to mark some answers, and marks may be lost as there is no way of reading the knowledge or application that they may contain.

The problem could be exacerbated by a tendency to rush at the paper and write as fast as possible, with the inevitable deterioration. Please reassure

candidates that there should be sufficient time for them to complete the paper without the need to rush. As part of the production process the paper is sat and completed by reviewers who make sure that the paper can be completed within the time allowed, 1½ hours. Candidates need to remember that despite the widespread use of keyboards, screens and electronic communication, there is still a requirement for clear and legible hand writing in the workplace. In addition, it is important to inform candidates that quality of written communication (QWC) now carries marks in this paper, marks that will be lost if the handwriting is indecipherable. Please see the revised Issue 2 specification dated May 2009 for full details.

Another issue that was apparent in this paper was the tendency for some candidates to provide generic, theoretical answers rather than apply their answer to the given scenario or the situation described in the question. As a result, some answers may have been accurate in terms of general business practice, but were totally inappropriate for the given situation, and consequently missed out on marks.

As noted in previous reports, some candidates seem to treat this paper as a general knowledge quiz, and assume that general answers, peppered with a few business terms, concluding with '...to make a profit', will suffice for an answer. Please inform candidates that the insertion of the word 'profit' into every answer is not the way to gain additional marks, and although important, profit is not always the answer. In fact it would be useful if candidates were clear what is meant by 'profit' in a business context – some candidates seem to believe that the terms 'profit' and 'sales' can be used interchangeably.

Understanding of basic business terms remains low, with many candidates mixing limited and unlimited liability, as well as the features of private limited and public limited companies, in Q1c.

Candidates should also be told that just stringing together a few business terms such as '...this will increase...profit, turnover, sales, employees, savings, motivation...' is not an answer and markers will not pick out the appropriate word on behalf of candidates in some kind of multiple choice exercise. Candidates also need to be reminded that this is an AS level examination and most answers are expected to show some development and application. This means that unless specifically asked for, simplistic answers at the level of single words such as 'easier', 'cheaper', 'quicker', 'faster', etc. are not really acceptable and unlikely to score any marks.

Many candidates were again wasting time and potential marks by not adhering to the requirement specified in the question. If a question asks for 'one way' or 'one example', marks will only be available for one way/example – no matter how many other ways or examples the candidate crams into their answer. This means that markers are put in a position of having to choose which examples to mark from a long list provided by the candidate, inevitably some correct and some incorrect.

The difference between 'how' and 'why' needs to be explained to some candidates. This is an Applied Business unit and questions 1f, 2d, 3a, 3b,

3c, 3d, 3f, and 3g all asked 'How...', providing candidates with the opportunity to demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge to the given business situation. Many candidates missed marks by giving reasons 'why' such and such a thing occurred, rather than answering 'how' a business would respond in the given situations.

Most of these issues can be overcome to some degree by preparing candidates' exam technique, which is very important.

I am pleased to report that questions where the candidates could choose your own business worked well in this paper. As in previous papers, candidates who choose smaller, local businesses tend to produce better answers than candidates who choose large national or international 'famous name' businesses. It was also obvious, from the depth and quality of answers, where a candidate had work experience - the answers were much more applied, and somehow 'in the business' rather than just based on theory. Also, it seems that studying small/local business tends to give candidates a greater understanding of the 'real life' of the business and provides them with more opportunities for real application in their answers. Whilst large organisations may be high profile and provide a wealth of information on their websites, much of it tends to be aimed at PR or publicity. Although this may provide an impression of the business it is often too general to be of much use when trying to answer questions based on specific issues that affect the business.

This report is designed to help future teaching and learning, and I hope that it does not come across as unduly negative. Judging from the many papers and answers that I have seen, most candidates have indeed worked hard on their studies and the paper is just designed to give candidates the opportunity of demonstrating, within the terms of the Assessment Objectives for this Unit, just how much they have learned. I offer my congratulations to all candidates, whatever grade they may ultimately achieve.

The theme of this paper is based on various business activities that affect Shoreside Steels Ltd (SSL) a private limited company that has been going through tough times as a result of the current economic climate. Despite the focus on one business in one sector, none of the questions needed specialist subject knowledge, and the use of a traditional, heavy manufacturing business as the subject does not appear to have caused any problems for candidates.

Comments on individual questions

1a. Following the introductory scenario, this question asked candidates to simply give two reasons why survival was the main objective for SSL. Most candidates gained marks here by picking up on decline of sales and also the loss of jobs or income, as well as other general economic factors.

1b. Candidates were asked to examine another objective, other than survival, that could be set for the business. Answers were sometimes too generic, just defining different elements of SMART, but the majority of

candidates managed to state one basic objective. Better answers pick an objective which they could develop such as improving sales, leading to more revenue and so on. Some candidates lost marks by just listing out alternative objectives rather than concentrating and examining one clear objective, which would have helped their overall mark.

1c. Asked to give two features of a private limited company should have been a chance for candidates to earn a couple of marks for basic knowledge. It was a surprise to see that quite a few candidates missed up 'unlimited liability' with 'limited liability'. Also there was mixed understanding on publishing accounts. This basic knowledge of a common business term should have been well known to all candidates, and is the sort of knowledge that could be refreshed during revision in preparation for the external assessment.

1d. The first extended answer question on the paper, which also included marks for QWC. Pleased to report that candidates do not appear to have any trouble answering this style of question, most providing a full page answer, differentiating well, showing the full range of levels. Candidates were asked to analyse the responsibilities of management in a business that is fighting for survival. Weaker candidates focussed just on descriptions of the generic role of management. Stronger candidates applied their knowledge and understanding of management to the situation of a business fighting for survival and gave good account of what management could be doing in this situation. Some candidates tended to digress into motivation aspects of employees and describing processes rather than concerning themselves with the management responsibilities which could be applied and then taken further.

1e. Candidates were asked to outline the work of one functional area in a business that they had studied during their course. Most candidates could recognise a functional area/department. Weaker candidates could list some of the work carried out in the functional area that they had named. Stronger candidates provided better answers by giving thorough descriptions of the function that they had named. HR, sales, finance and marketing seemed to be the most familiar functions; few candidates gave production or any other function. Candidates sometimes gave roles within a function area rather than the functional area. The choice of the business did help – larger organisations having a range of distinct functions to select from, whereas it was difficult to separate out functions if a smaller sole trader was used as the chosen example.

1f. Understanding how business aims influence a business or its products has always been a difficult concept/part of this specification for some candidates. However, this question seemed to provide candidates with a way of communicating what they knew about the aims: product relationship. There were lots of good answers, although answers from weaker candidates tended to be muddled and repetitious. Stating the aim was easy enough but how this influenced the product/service was not well expressed by many candidates. Lots of aims given as 'increase profit' or 'maximise profit' – answer then proceed to talk about increasing sales/turnover. Candidates need to be clear that increasing profit and

increasing sales/turnover are not the same and are achieved in quite different ways. Some of the comments almost came by default and it seemed that where candidates chose an 'environmental' type aim, they could pick out the influences more readily. Also, answers tended to focus on 'why' rather than 'how' which was what was asked. It would be helpful to candidates to see examples of how the aims of businesses manifest themselves in the end product, using case studies or direct contact (visits/visiting speakers) with real businesses.

2a. This was the second extended answer/QWC question. Candidates were asked to analyse the advantages of exit interviews for SSL (the business) and its employees. Most candidates knew something about exit interviews, and the stronger candidates started to relate the principle and process of using exit interviews when dealing with mass redundancies. An awful lot of candidates seemed to think that exit interviews would be used as the selection process for whom to make redundant, and that it would give employees a 'last chance' to impress employer or to state why they should not be made redundant. Stronger candidates understood the positive aspects of exit interviews for both the employee and the employer.

2b. Question focussed on the rights of employees who are may be made redundant. Candidates were asked to outline two rights. Lots of answers were very general and not related to the situation described in the question. Candidates often guessed at what were rights and did not read the question enough as well. So we had a variety of 'supposed rights' and a lot related to outstanding pay or still more obscure comments on discrimination on disability, maternity leave and so on. Candidates are advised to read a question through, full, before starting to write their answer.

2c. Although knowledge and understanding of trade unions are a part of the specification for this unit, candidate knowledge appears to be low. Understanding of the role of trade unions and the range of services that they provide for members was even lower. Lots of guess work, drawn from newspaper reports of trade unions, many answers ignored the reference to trade unions and were about what the business could do to help employees who had been made redundant. Trade union membership is still a vital part of employment for many people and learners should really know more than is suggested by many given answers to this question.

2d. Candidates were asked to discuss how their chosen business advertises for new employees. Question produced good answers in general. Some candidates missed the 'for new employees' part of the question and focussed on internal advertising to employees already within the business, which was not what the question was asking. Other candidates did not read this question properly at times and digressed into recruitment and selection. Again, candidates are advised to read the question thoroughly before starting to answer, then to check their answer to make sure that it actually answers what has been asked.

2e. Training within chosen business is understood well, with candidates producing good/realistic descriptions of different ways that businesses train their employees. Some candidates just used generic answers for 'on the job'

or 'off the job' with no application to their chosen business. Those that knew the chosen business well picked up on H&S training or induction training and were able to apply the training method and describe what happens. Some candidates clearly used their own work experience or Saturday jobs on their answers, gaining marks from their own experience of training.

3a. Most candidates have some knowledge of motivation, but the question acted as a discriminator as some candidates just listed out different motivation techniques, some of which would not have been appropriate to a workforce that had been halved, as described in the scenario. Stronger candidates recognised the situation and gave examples of motivation which would be appropriate to the workforce that remained in the business. Some candidates got bogged-down with financial and non-financial methods of motivation and forgot to state any motivational method. The usual 'employee of the month' and bonus rewards type of answers indicated that candidates did not take into account the actual question context. If they had taken the context into account they would have realised that a manufacturing environment would not suit some of the motivational schemes proposed. Job enrichment was recognised by many as being motivational as well as appraisals whereas 'piece-rate' was also thought possible. To help candidates and broaden their learning, teachers could use exemplars based on manufacturing environment in addition to retail or service-based businesses. One centre had clearly had taken candidates to a printing company where recycled paper was used for newsprint, as a result answers from these candidates were much more realistic to the situation described in the question

3b. As we have seen in previous series, candidates show good knowledge of Maslow's theory. It was good to see that many candidates could also relate their knowledge of Maslow to the situation that redundant employees find themselves, as described in the stem of this question. Candidates picked up on basic needs, security and self esteem, in the main. As a slight aside, candidates at this level really need to understand that there is a difference between psychological and physiological – we saw a lot of answers referring to 'psychological needs' then describing physiological needs, which is presumably what they meant. Candidates were not penalised by the misuse of the words, but precision in the use of specialist terms should be encouraged.

3c. Candidates were asked how nationally recognised training schemes could assist SSL to develop its business in the future. Those that had studied training programmes knew about IIP, NVQ's, apprenticeships and qualifications and could apply this to see how the company could benefit in the future. Those that had no syllabus cover of this aspect tried guesswork and some left this blank, losing valuable marks, which goes to show how important it is to cover the full specification when teaching this unit.

3d. Question asked how cost reduction in the business could affect employees. Candidates could nearly all see that wages would be reduced or hours cut and some recognised the lack of security. Marks were therefore usually gained for this question and they could relate the effect to the employees, although some extended this to the business rather than read

the question properly and recognised it was answers related to the 'employees' that were sought.

3e. Candidates were asked to suggest why SSL may need to recruit new employees in the future. This question was well answered, most candidates basing their answer on retirement or increased sales/demand or future expansion as the economic conditions improve. A few candidates mentioned maternity/paternity leave as a reason to need more employees.

3f. This question asked candidates to describe how their chosen business implements legislation that protects the wellbeing of employees. Legislation is an important part of this unit, featured in section 1.3.1 of the specification, but as in previous papers, and previous reports, candidates' knowledge of legislation is generally extremely low and inaccurate. Few, if any candidates could give the correct title of a piece of legislation, and descriptions of how their (inaccurately named) legislation protects the wellbeing of employees was a mixture of guesswork, hearsay, assumptions and pure fantasy. H&S was often the legislation used to answer this question, and it was then possible to state how the business implemented this. Candidates who knew the working time regulations well could easily give examples and outline the protection issues. However a lot of candidates stated a list of legislation with little comment on how even one piece was implemented by their chosen business, restricting marks. Candidates need to be reminded to read the question and all the scenario information question first, and then choose the business and activity that is appropriate for their answer.

3g. Asked to outline how their chosen business encourages internal promotion caused confusion for some candidates. This was as a result of misunderstanding the difference between 'promotion' in a career sense and 'promotion' as in advertising. Those that read the question fully could relate the organisation structure and hierarchy to promotional opportunities and did this well. Generally candidates could see promotion aspects and motivational opportunities given in their chosen businesses.

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