

Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2012

Applied GCE 6958

Unit 8 – Managing IT Products

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General Comments

There were a large number of eportfolios moderated this series, with the whole spectrum of marks represented. There were some good examples of eportfolios in the high 40s and, indeed, into the 50s too. Many others had been realistically assessed and there were many centres which were evidencing the unit well.

There were a significant number of centres who are continuing to assess the evidence produced very generously. It is apparent that there are still centres who have not addressed the weaknesses highlighted in Moderator reports to the centre, or reacted to guidance given in past Principal Moderator's reports for this unit. It was also apparent that some centres had not taken on board the changes in the Revised Specification, which was issued in May 2009 with first assessment in June 2010. This issue also contains more detailed clarification and guidance on how to interpret the specification as well as the use of Quality of Written Communication.

In addition, centres are able to seek further guidance and clarification through the Ask the Expert service.

Most centres are using this unit to project manage the product created for units 10 or 11 with some using unit 12. There are also examples of a database product being produced as candidates are being prepared for unit 7. All these approaches are suitable. It was good to see that many eportfolios, although combined, had clear links to the evidence for each unit and 2 CDs were sent, one for each unit which is correct practice. It is essential that all evidence which constitutes evidence for 6958 is able to be accessed from 6958 links. Only 6958 files and links are moderated. There were a few examples of the product not being in the 6958 eportfolio, which is an essential requirement. Overall, there were fewer combined eportfolios presented this series.

Again, there was evidence of documentation for this unit being produced retrospectively which did not support a product as being planned, designed and implemented using project management methods to hand over the product and deliverables to an agreed deadline. Such an approach does not support the correct implementation of this unit and limits the marks that can be accessed.

All candidates are required to be a Project Manager and manage a small scale software project themselves. There were examples this series where group work had obviously been undertaken and evidence of the Assessor leading the group and chairing all meetings. Such an approach does not address this specification.

One of the recurring weaknesses observed is the lack of the use of a range of stakeholders. Many candidates appeared to only be liaising with a "teacher" and this does not enable them to access all the marks for this unit. Many candidates are still listed a range of stakeholders, but did not appear to use them. They merely existed as lists of attendees in meetings.

Stakeholders can be used in a number of ways. Many candidates did not use a Senior Manager and did not seem to understand the difference between the Senior Manager and the Client. There is a list of typical stakeholders in 8.2 of the unit specification.

Ambiguous evidence relating to dates is still being presented in many eportfolios. The handover date of the finished product and deliverables to the client should be agreed with the client and finalised in the Definition of Scope. This date should then be clearly shown in the initial plan drawn up before the project is implemented. This date should not change and the project should be managed to meet this end date. The date should be clearly specified to include day, month and year and not just a general date stating a month.

Most candidates used project management software which is a requirement for this unit and is clearly specified in the Revised Specification, Issue 2 May 2009. However, it was surprising to see there were more instances this series of centres still using spreadsheet software, which means that candidates cannot access all the marks in mark band 1 for Strand b. There were many instances where candidates had not converted the project management files to html or a PDF, or a screen shot included in a document in the correct file format. Project management files are not accepted file formats and cannot be moderated. This has an impact on agreeing marks awarded. Centres are asked to check that the evidence is in the correct file format so that candidates are not disadvantaged in any way. It is also important that screen shots are readable.

Although fewer in number, there were still some centres considering the financial aspects of the project. The Introduction to the unit clearly states: "Although – in real life – budgeting is an important factor in any project, you will not be expected to consider finance."

It was apparent that some candidates had not appreciated the way all the Strands for this unit are interlinked.

The following comments on the 5 Strands include much that has been stated in previous Principal Moderator reports for this unit.

Comments on Strand (a)

The majority of candidates produced a Project Proposal and Definition of Scope and the assessment was generally realistic. However, it is clear that many candidates do not understand the difference between these documents. It was also apparent that many had not produced the documents at the start of the project. There was evidence that more candidates are addressing the Impact on Personnel and Practices, i.e. how the implementation of the product may impact on existing jobs and the way they are carried out, but still a significant number of candidates omit this in the Project Proposal. Many candidates are still explaining risks to the product and not risks affecting the implementation and completion of the project. Dates were often confused with different dates being stated for the

same thing, i.e. different handover dates. The dates in the Definition of Scope should have been agreed with the Client and these form the basis of the Project Plan.

Some candidates are including a project roadmap in the Definition of Scope which should be a rough estimate of what will be delivered when. Others failed to include this and some included a copy of the project plan which is not correct. Few candidates included details of interim review points.

The Project Proposal should address 8.3 of the unit specification and the Definition of Scope 8.2 and 8.4. These documents should be presented in a suitable format for the audience.

There were fewer instances of writing frames being used, but some were still seen. Such an approach does not support A level candidates.

There were fewer examples of candidates trying to combine the evidence for this Strand with the product unit.

Many candidates concentrated on the product rather than the project itself.

Comments on Strand (b)

It was good to see that most candidates used project management software, which is a requirement if all the marks in mark band 1 and above are to be accessed. This is clearly specified in the Revised Specification. Most candidates had converted the plans to the correct file format so they could be accessed. However, there were still instances of files presented in project management format and assessed, which is not correct practice. Such files cannot be accepted as evidence. Some candidates converted the files to html or PDF, or included a screen shot in a correctly formatted document but then did not present the end result in a size that could be read, or cropped the evidence so that it did not include all that required.

Risks were usually included in the form of slippage in the plan/s but not always in appropriate places. Some candidates included this after the handover date as one chunk of time. This is not correct and, indeed, not even sensible. More thought needs to be given to where contingency time should be placed and how much time given. Again, many more candidates categorised the risks which is a requirement if accessing all the marks in mark band 2. It was good to see some better candidates demonstrating well how risks are used by a project manager by listing, ranking and describing them in a table and then adjusting them at each review meeting with key stakeholders and showing the results in the updated plans. This is very good practice.

Some candidates did not describe any risks to the project in Strand a, but only mentioned risks to the product which is not correct, then neglected to include any slippage time or contingency. At least 2 risks need to be identified and taken into account in the plan for mark band 1.

Some candidates annotated plans and explained where risks were allocated in the times given to each part of the plan which is acceptable, provided this was done before the project commenced. An example of this is if four days were given to do something, but one of these days was a contingency day.

Many plans were just lists of tasks rather than addressing 8.6 of the unit specification and clearly illustrating the phases and then ensuring the plan/s include the features listed in 8.7. It was surprising how many candidates did not actually state the handover date of the project to the client. Others were still including the evaluation and submission of the eportfolio, which is not relevant.

Most candidates included updates of plans but often the updates just showed the tasks ticked off at different intervals. Such evidence only addresses marks in mark band 1.

Some candidates appeared to think the handover date could be changed as the project progressed instead of managing the project to achieve the agreed handover date. This date should remain constant, but other activities and dates within the plan period can be adjusted to ensure the final deadline is met. When this was done, many candidates omitted to explain the changes made. Few produced progress reports explaining these changes which were then presented at the next Review Meeting, with the updated plan, to the relevant stakeholders, one of which should be the Senior Manager who would oversee the Project Manager's progress.

Some candidates produced diaries and progress logs explaining each version of the plan and changes which was good practice. Some diaries and logs also recorded all contact with other stakeholders which helped evidence informal communication well. The best diaries and logs included screen shots showing the before and after changes to the current project plan.

There was evidence this series of some centres appearing to give completed plan templates to candidates or candidates working in groups and producing identical plans. Such evidence does not address this Strand. There were a few instances of candidates using Excel and only producing a list of tasks. Such evidence does not enable Strands b or d to be addressed.

Comments on Strand (c)

Although more evidence is being offered for the 20 marks that are available for this Strand, it continues to be the Strand that is the most generously assessed. To access all the marks in mark band 1 there should be clear evidence that a range of stakeholders were used throughout the project which is one of the main features of managing a project. There should also be some evidence of communication with stakeholders (not just one other) and evidence of both formal and informal communication with different types of meetings held and at least one progress report. Very often the evidence was placed in too high a mark band.

Using a range of stakeholders – Often, the evidence just shows liaison with the Project Manager and Client and much of this evidence is no different to that normally shown between a student and teacher. Many candidates are listing the stakeholders in the minutes of the meetings, but there is no evidence of any contribution on their part at all. Many candidates did not mention or use a Senior Manager. It is expected that stakeholders are defined by the list shown in 8.2 of the unit specification apart from the Supplier which is not really relevant to this unit. The use of peer testers and reviewers was not well evidenced. Such contact could be documented in progress logs, diaries etc.

Informal communication - Some of the informal communication evidence was not convincing and, it was difficult to see if emails had actually been sent and received. The content of many just referred to dates of the next meeting rather than a range of issues related to the progression of the project. Candidates who kept diaries throughout the project and included reference to informal communication and sometimes screen shots of emails often evidenced this aspect very well. The candidates who produced evidence of testing with peer reviewers/testers and recorded emails and informal chats in corridors, telephone etc that did bring in a variety of relevant topics relating to the project did evidence this aspect well. Some candidates had used a variety of newer communication methods to keep in contact with their teams, e.g. Facebook, blogs which was an interesting slant and often worked well. Overall informal communication is still weakly addressed.

Formal communication - There was little understanding of different types of meetings, i.e. meetings using the different stakeholders in different ways. It is expected that there should be evidence of Review Meetings at strategic points in the project and these should be clearly stated in the Plan. The use of a Senior Manager was not always present and it would be expected that they would attend a Review Meeting. There should also be an End of Project Review Meeting with relevant stakeholders after the project has been handed over to the Client. There may also be a handover meeting with the client where the product and deliverables are handed over.

The presentation of agendas and minutes was often poor. The Revised Specification has included this under the ICT skills needed (8.12) and good presentation of these documents is required if candidates are to access all the marks in mark band 2. Some candidates used cut and paste with the result that the content was not always sensible and dates did not correlate. Too much emphasis was on the prototyping of the product rather than progressing the project against the plan and updates. Some candidates presented the documentation well but neglected to record much relevant content in the minutes. Some of the minutes were, in fact, agendas. Other minutes did not contain the date, venue, attendees. Just referring to attendees as client, reviewers, etc is not good practice; names of the stakeholders and their role should be clearly stated. It was not always obvious if the Project Manager was driving the project forward. Comments stating that this was the case on the esheet need to be supported by evidence in the eportfolio.

Verbatim reporting is not what is required.

Some candidates produced one long document for their minutes which does not support marks in the higher mark bands.

Many candidates produced evidence of several meetings held at the beginning of the project and then a large gap in the middle and perhaps just the final meeting. This does not support project management taking place throughout the implementation of the project.

Candidates often held an End of Project Review meeting but then neglected to document any feedback on the 3 aspects of Strand e for this unit. Very often the feedback was on the product and not the:

- success of the project
- effectiveness of the project methods used
- candidate's own performance as a project manager.

The feedback is essential in order for the candidates to address Strand e well.

Progress reports - Progress reports were not well evidenced by many candidates. These really should be presented at the Review Meetings and explain where the project is in relation to the current update of the plan. It is sensible to send a Progress Report prior to the meeting and then this is discussed at the Review Meeting and some candidates did this. Some candidates presented them in the form of PowerPoint Presentations at the meetings which is also good practice. Few minutes referred to the progression of the project against the plan. It was good to see some candidates explaining the current situation relating to risks and how they had been categorised at Review Meetings, which is good practice.

Some candidates presented progress logs which contained screen shots of the plan with comments. This is good practice and does demonstrate correlation between Strands b and c which helps evidence Strand d.

Much more detailed and explicit evidence relating to the how the project is being progressed against the plan and explanation of changes is still required in order to access more marks in this Strand.

Comments on Strand (d)

Many centres are still awarding marks based on the product which is incorrect. The emphasis of this Strand is on producing a software product in accordance with the project plan.

The comments written in previous reports are still relevant: "Many centres appeared to mark this Strand on the quality of the product, not taking into account whether it was produced using project management methods. The product produced needs to be included in the eportfolio and also needs to reflect A2 standards. However, the marks are determined if the product has been project managed effectively and is handed over on the agreed deadline. It is important that the date agreed with the client in Strand a

for the handover of the product and deliverables is met. There may be changes in the dates of some of the activities while the project progresses but these are changed to ensure the end date is kept to.

There was evidence of plans not being used and end dates changing. There was also evidence of products being handed over well in advance of the date with no explanation. Evidence such as this does not support this Strand.

There should be correlation of the progress against the plan. This should be evidenced by the updated plans and explanation produced for Strand b and the progress reports and other communication submitted for Strand c. Many candidates neglected to evidence this well. Many minutes contained no reference to the plan and, although there were often updates to the plans, the explanation of why the changes occurred was often not there.

Few candidates clearly evidenced the handover to the client and many neglected to clearly state this had happened in a handover meeting to the client or in the final end of project review meeting. Some candidates did evidence this well by producing a handover document which the client completed which included the date, signature and sometimes some feedback.

Some candidates produced evidence in their evaluations which addressed some aspects of this Strand, e.g. evaluating against the objectives stated in Strand a."

The evidence relating to dates was often very ambiguous and, in some cases, demonstrated that reverse engineering had taken place. There was evidence of dates changing and the product being handed over on a date not mentioned in the plan. Many candidates just produced updates of plans and each plan had the end date changed, which meant the candidate had not managed the project properly at all. Other candidates had stated a handover date and then proceeded to hand the product over several weeks in advance which, again, is not managing a project using project management methods. Such evidence does not address this Strand correctly.

More successful candidates provided some excellent evidence in the eportfolio, supporting the requirements of this Strand, which included:

- Comprehensive plans, updates and explanations
- Progress logs and diaries
- Review meetings which clearly documented the progression of the project against the plan
- Progress reports presented to stakeholders at the Review Meetings
- Handover documents (handover meeting, acceptance document) clearly stating the date the product and deliverables were handed over to the client
- Evaluation which provided further supporting evidence of the project management methods used to implement the project. Very often the evaluations reviewed the objectives set in the Definition of Scope

which helped evidence this Strand and also the success of the project which is part of Strand e.

Comments on Strand (e)

There were still centres where some candidates had not included the minutes of the End of Project Review Meeting which meant the marks available in this Strand could not be accessed. In some of these instances the Assessor had still awarded marks for the evaluation which is not correct. However, most candidates had produced some minutes of a final meeting although this was sometimes just a handover meeting with the client. Few minutes documented the feedback from the stakeholders which enabled candidates to evidence this Strand well.

Candidates need to understand the difference between a Handover meeting where the end product and deliverables are formally handed over to the Client and this is documented to that of the End of Project Review Meeting held with key stakeholders which should include the Senior Manager and reviewers/testers.

More candidates were producing separate evaluations for Units 10 and 11 (and also unit 12 in some cases). However, the evaluations for Unit 8 are still putting too much emphasis on the product rather than the project and project management methods used.

The evaluation for unit 8 requires candidates to hold a review meeting after the project has finished and feedback is obtained from relevant stakeholders addressing the 3 main areas listed for this Strand. The assessment guidance gives clarification on the exact requirements for each of the 3 mark bands. Many of the evaluations did not refer to feedback obtained, or if they did, the feedback was not obtained at a final review meeting. There was even evidence that some candidates held the final meeting prior to handing over the product.

The evaluations need to make some use of relevant feedback to address mark band 1, make good use of relevant feedback to address mark band 2 and mark band 3 requires extensive use made of relevant feedback. Often, the evaluations did not address this Strand well as the content was just the candidate's own opinions.

Candidates should prepare for this final meeting by thinking about what the meeting needs to achieve. A good agenda and preparatory documents can help.

Quality of Written Communication is assessed in this Strand and should be commented on in the esheet.

Comments on Administrative Procedures

Most centres submitted the CDs by the deadline but some submitted at least a week late.

Some CDs did not contain the requisite number of eportfolio and not the correct sample, i.e. normally 10 eportfolios to include the highest and lowest scoring candidates. Extra eportfolios may need to be sent if eportfolios selected by the system do not include the highest and lowest scoring candidates. Substitutes also need to be submitted for any candidates who have been withdrawn after selection.

Most centres named the eportfolios with the correct naming conventions, but many did not do so for the naming of the esheets. Most centres provided candidate authentication in the form of individual sheets scanned on to the CD or provided hard copy format of these. However, some centres had to be contacted to supply candidate authentication sheets. These are an essential part of the moderation process.

Esheets did not always contain feedback that actually explained the why the marks given were awarded but were general comments cut and pasted from the specification. In a few cases no feedback was given. There were also instances of centre marks on esheets being incorrectly totalled and sometimes, marks not corresponding with those online.

Some centres are still submitting evidence in incorrect file formats. The project management files have been commented on in Strand b. It was good see fewer word files being included. Word is not an accepted file format and centres are asked to ensure candidates convert to html or PDF formats.

Some of the eportfolios had links that did not work and folders had to be examined to see if the evidence was present. This was not always possible as there was sometimes poor adherence to standard ways of working for folder structure and file names. It is important CDs are tested prior to submission. It is also important that CDs are clearly labelled as stated in the above document. Some CDs submitted contained no identification.

Most centres had submitted a separate CD for 6958 which is correct practice. Most candidates had clear links to the evidence to support 6958. A few had combined eportfolios which were poorly structured.

Some centres submitted eportfolios on DVDs which is not correct. There were also instances of incorrect file sizes. 6958 eportfolios should be no larger than 20 mb or 30 mb if using multimedia.

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