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Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2015

Pearson Edexcel GCE Applied Business
Unit 1 Investigating People at Work
6916 Paper 01

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GCE Applied Business 6916: Investigating People at Work – Principal Examiner Report June 2015

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. This was the ninth 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 1c 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 staff and students in preparation for future papers.

My own observations, supported by reports from all examiners who worked on this paper, will sometimes repeat problems or advice that has been raised in previous reports. However, any repetition is because these issues continue to reappear in papers and have not been resolved or even show signs of improvement. Based on the work seen from candidates in June 2015 the main issues are as follows:

Handwriting. As reported in past series, the handwriting produced by many candidates continues to deteriorate, to the point that some papers were barely readable. This is an 'applied business' paper, and candidates should be reminded that a certain standard of written communication will be expected. Candidates are also asked to demonstrate a reasonable level of QWC in this paper, lettering is often formed badly, words spelt incorrectly (even words which are copied from questions or a given scenario); answers are scribbled quickly and consequently making them difficult to read.

All examiners will make an effort to decipher poor 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 and therefore marks may be lost as there is no way of reading the knowledge or application that they may contain.

Generic answers. Another issue that was apparent in this paper was the tendency for some candidates to give generic statements about the topic of a given question, 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. Generic answers are a particular issue with the 'own business' questions – 1d), 1e), 2d), 2e), 3f), 3g) – where candidates gave answers which could have been applied to any business rather than a business that they claim to have studied, and named before they started their answer. It is good

practice for candidates to read back their answer to confirm that a) it is actually answering the question asked, and b), that the answer actually makes sense in the context of the question or scenario given.

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 maximise profit', will suffice for an answer. Candidates need to understand 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 use the terms 'profit' and 'sales' interchangeably, assuming that an increase in sales will inevitably mean an increase in profit. Linked to this is a tendency in questions which ask for 'one example...' to give a range of examples and expect the marker to select – what? – the correct one? the one which produces most marks?

Candidates should also be told that just stringing together a few meaningless business terms such as '...this will increase...profit, turnover, sales, employees, savings, motivation...' is not an acceptable answer, and markers will not pick out the correct answer or 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.

Choice of organisation for 'business you have studied' questions – 1d), 1e), 2d), 2e), 3f), 3g)

There were instances where the business chosen was inappropriate, candidates just writing what they know about the subject of the question with no application to named business ignoring the context that a 'chosen business' should provide, and just basing answers on the subject of the question. As a result, these answers were not appropriate to the chosen business. Using the same business for all 6 x 'own choice' questions rarely works in the candidate's favour, as quite often the business is not appropriate for every question, so candidates struggle to try to make the business fit the question, usually resulting in a response that does not answer the question. This is an applied paper and the spec states that candidates should cover a range of different businesses:

'It is, therefore, important that learners study the nature of work within a wide range of business types and environments. This range should include businesses in or from public and private sectors, primary, secondary and tertiary areas, profit-oriented and not-for-profit environments and the main forms of private sector ownership (sole traders, partnerships, franchises and limited companies). It is important that learners consider business aims, objectives and organisation in context, and they should, therefore, be encouraged to study real businesses.'

It has been observed that 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.

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 students, whatever grade they may ultimately achieve.

The theme of this paper is based on the work involved in the running of a charity shop, and the management of people who work in the shop. Candidates were given information which explained how the charity shop was set up and run. Despite the focus on one type of business in one sector, none of the questions needed specialist subject knowledge, and the subject does not appear to have caused any problems for candidates.

Comments on individual questions

Question, 1a. Papers started with a relatively straightforward question, which stated that it is recommended that all business should set objectives, and asked for two reasons why objectives are set. Question was answered well in general, but some candidates missed marks through repeating the same reason twice, just writing it in a different way, rather than giving two distinct reasons. Some candidates did not read the question and actually gave objectives, rather than reasons for setting objectives, which is what was asked.

Question, 1b. Candidates were told that whilst a charity shop is sometimes considered as operating in a not-for-profit environment, this is not really the case. They were then asked to outline two reasons why a charity shop must make a profit. Most candidates could give at least one basic reason, some two, such as - pay manager, pay overheads, raise money for the charity - but without much development. This question could have generated up to 6 marks if the basic reason given had been outlined or explained in more detail.

Question, 1c. This was the first of the extended writing questions on this paper, and it asked candidates to assess the potential for conflict between the employed managers and the volunteer staff in the charity shops. Money was perceived to be the root of all conflict for the majority of candidates, which is fair enough. Candidates who give other reasons in addition to 'money' were likely to have written answers that moved them up to the higher levels. There tended to be a lot of focus on paid manager vs. unpaid volunteers i.e. re-writing the information given in the stem of the question across a whole page, which tended to limit marks to L1 or L2.

Question, 1d. The actual 'how' method, the focus of this question, was often missed by students by telling the story of supervision purpose. Sometimes the answers were based on Manager to Supervisor communication, or even Employees to Supervisors, which made things a little more difficult to interpret whether there were any viable marks. Candidates who appeared to have part-time jobs answered this question well - actually describing how supervisors communicate with employees. Basic answers tended to be somewhat abstract or theoretical answers, based on what is communicated rather than the 'how'.

Question, 1e. Many answers tended to be generic, answers which could be applied to any business, rather than the named business. Lots of repetition - having stated an area of responsibility, the descriptions were sometimes very similar, rather than distinctive for the responsibility stated.

Question, 2a. This was the second of the extended writing questions on this paper, and it asked candidates to suggest a recruitment process that would be appropriate for finding and selecting professional retail managers. Most answers were very generic, listing the steps in the recruitment process that could apply to any organisation. To get into the higher levels, answers need to focus on the particular needs when recruiting a retail manager, and for the top level answers should make some reference to the difference between recruiting professional manager and for recruiting volunteers for the charity shops. Candidates were using the steps in recruitment interchangeably with steps in selection, showing a lack of clarity in candidates' thinking. Candidates need to be reminded that the imprecise use of terms could lead to misunderstanding in the workplace. Some of the suggested recruitment and selection methods included role play or the use of psychometric testing and aptitude testing. The biggest problem for candidates seemed to be equating that a charity (even if a charity) needed a professional manager and not someone necessarily who was local and knew retail, which resulted in quite a lot of suggestion that internal promotion of volunteers was appropriate. Better answers brought in use of head hunting or specialist agencies. Many candidates seemed to ignore the fact that this question (and Q1c) had a SPAG component; many markers reported that these longer answer questions (and often entire papers) produced some terrible handwriting, which made it difficult to see where marks should be applied.

Question, 2b. In this question, lots of answers made statements about the role of a volunteer in a charity shop, which may be factually correct, but were not related to the difficulty of retention, the focus of this question. However, in general, there was some good understanding shown by candidates, many of whom seem to write from experience of unpaid volunteer work. Some students mixed up 'retention' with 're-training' and even 'redundancy' by not reading the question and so 'it was about letting the volunteers go by dismissal'.

Question, 2c. Question generally answered very well, candidates clearly know the value of qualification in a CV. For some, however, the actual effect on the CV was often missed or stated more than once; to 'stand out', look good and professional were the usual effects given, as well as improve. Most recognised that the qualification was national and might give that person a slight advantage compared to those without due to training costs.

Question, 2d. Little precision in answers to this question. Candidates confusing 'mentoring' with 'monitoring', and lots of descriptions of 'work shadowing'. Marks could only be given for answers which were based on 'mentoring', no matter how well they describe other methods of training. 'Mentoring' is mentioned explicitly in the Specification, and candidates should be taught precisely what this means, in an employment context. The lack of precision or understanding of the distinct nature of 'mentoring' suggest that it is being used interchangeably with other methods of induction training.

Question, 2e. Lots of answers tending towards the generic, just listing areas of potential discrimination, rather than really describing how the (named) business

guarantees equal opportunities. Other answers described interview procedures or the use of CVs to select people for employment, but did not link these with how this process ensured equal opportunities. Even if the basis of equal opportunities was stated, often candidates did not describe how the business guarantees this. Others referred to following the legislation for discrimination and often gave the addition of disability facilities as a sign of equal opportunities, rather than it being a legal requirement in public buildings.

Question, 3a. Candidates really seem to know how motivating a bonus can be, and stronger candidates are relating this to the information given in the stem of the question. Most candidates linked the offer of a financial bonus to increased enthusiasm and productivity, which in turn should result in higher sales and consequently higher income being generated for the charity.

Question, 3b. Some good answers were seen for this question, candidates seem to know a lot about motivation and can relate this to the situation of unpaid volunteers; volunteers not being paid seemed to strike a chord with many candidates, who then produced good answers.

Question, 3c. Most candidates had a general knowledge of Working Time Regulations (WTR), but question was posed to try to encourage candidates to explain how the WTR was designed to protect employees. Most candidates could give some explanation, but like all questions which include an element of regulation, there was a general lack of precision in the answers, lots of generalisations which were not explicitly incorrect, but suggested that candidates had a working knowledge of the WTR rather than an understanding of why it existed and how it protected employees.

Question, 3d. Most candidates could state the advantages of volunteering to jobseekers and the unemployed. However, some just put the advantages to the wider community, rather than the jobseeker, as they did not read the question properly.

Question, 3e. Most candidates have a general idea that H&S training is a good thing, but showed little precision in their answers, but awareness of H&S in the workplace is high, mostly from a positive point-of-view, i.e. keeps the workplace safe, protects visitors/customers etc. A few candidates answered that reduced the chances of (the business) being sued - with little explanation of why that may be so, but presumably based on a background awareness of personal accident claims.

Question, 3f. This was a classic example of a question that candidates either know about the topic, Frederick Taylor, or they don't. Most of those that did, knew the basic facts of his theory, only stronger candidates outlined how the theory translated into the actual management of their chosen business. Others had a guess, that it was to do with 'money motivates' and could pick up some marks for the bonus and working harder and one or two got as far as the negative side of piece rate payments. Candidates who wrote from the experience of part-time jobs seemed to produce better answers than those that just took a general theoretical approach to their answer

Question, 3g. Judging by the wide range of examples given as answers, it suggests that most candidates had scant knowledge of consumer protection legislation - but could give an example that was vaguely to do with consumers, although frequently they were examples that were more like customer service or marketing initiatives that

claimed to have the consumer at it centre. It was interesting to note that how many candidates are still giving the Trade Descriptions Act as an example, even though it was effectively replaced by the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations in 2008.

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