

Examiners' Report

January 2010

Principal Learning

Information Technology Level 2 Controlled Assessments

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Contents

1. Level 2 General Comments	1
2. Level 2 Unit 2 Report	3
3. Level 2 Unit 3 Report	5
4. Level 2 Unit 4 Report	7
5. Level 2 Unit 5 Report	9
6. Level 2 Unit 6 Report	11
7. Level 2 Unit 7 Report	13
8. Statistics	15

Principal Examiners' Report

Principal Learning - Information Technology - Level 2

General Comments

There were several pleasing aspects to the work moderated in this series, suggesting that centres had taken on board advice offered in previous centre and Chief Examiner's reports and training offered by Edexcel.

Centres had generally followed the correct administration procedures and other than delays caused by adverse weather conditions, work was submitted on time.

A significant number of centres submitted work electronically and the work submitted in this way was generally very well organised, giving learners the opportunity to produce clear evidence of how they had achieved learning outcomes.

There are however some issues which are still causing some concern and centres must ensure that they follow advice given for future series.

In some instances centres submitted witness statements as evidence for Mark Grid A learning outcomes; this is not acceptable, witness statements are confined to Mark Grid B learning outcomes.

It was also apparent that some of the work submitted did not comply with Annexe E requirements for the conditions under which tasks take place. Each internally assessed unit has a recommended period for summative assessment; it was apparent in some cases that this had been greatly exceeded and also that feedback to learners did not comply with the guidelines given. Centres must adhere to these guidelines.

Level 2 Unit 2 - Exploring Organisations

General Comments

It is pleasing to be able to report a marked improvement in performance on this unit. Unfortunately however there are some centres approaching the assessment incorrectly. This is an 'applied' unit and it should be approached through the context of exemplar organisations. After three assessment windows it has become clear that success in this unit requires good in depth knowledge of the organisations studied and that typically this can be best achieved through either a visit or a visiting speaker. Case Studies are a suitable alternative but internet research does not yield the depth of information required. In several cases the learners' school or college had been chosen as one of the organisations to study and whilst this is permissible it is not in the spirit of the qualification. Further learners often struggle to correctly identify the business structure of their school or college.

Consideration of organisations that have proved to be suitable to study show that characteristics of a good choice to study are that it is relatively small scale, local and making good use of IT; it does not need to be an IT company however. In the case of national organisations it will usually be easier for learners to study a local branch rather than the national set up.

When considering choice of an organisation it is vital that the four key business processes require for LO2/3 are clearly evident within the organisation.

It was also noticeable that some work appeared not to comply with annexe E requirements having apparently been completed over substantially longer period than the 20 hours recommended for this assessment task.

Learning Outcome 1

Learners should consider the structure, culture or roles (SCR) of at least two different organisations. A critical element in this strand is to identify the objectives of the organisation and then to investigate the SCR of each organisation against its stated objectives.

Frequently learners incorrectly describe, often at length, all types of SCR before moving on to looking at those in the specific organisations they are studying. This approach is not required and it is only the specific studies within their chosen organisations that should gain credit.

To gain higher marks in MB2 and MB3 the organisations objectives must be identified and for MB3 the SCR must be clearly related to these objectives.

Learners need to be reminded that this Learning Outcome (LO) carries only 10 of the 60 marks for this unit and that it is LO2/3 where the bulk of the marks will be gained.

Two organisations must be studied for this LO, where this has not been done achievement is significantly affected.

Learning Outcome 2 and 3

Learners are required to consider four key business processes (KBP), for approximately half the marks in this unit and the technology that supports them for the other half of the marks. This is made clear in the guidance for allocating marks. In many cases the KBP was done reasonably well but the technology that supported them was often unknown or described generically.

Only one organisation is essential here but learners are able to draw on either of the organisations they studied for LO1 or, if they choose, introduce a new organisation. There is no need to use more than one organisation to illustrate each KBP.

Of the four KBP customer relationship management and people management are usually explained well, but supplier management and service delivery are typically poorly understood and frequently confused with each other.

Understanding of the technology that supports each KBP remains poor, often learners propose possible generic answers when the expectation is for specific detailed knowledge of the technology behind the KBP in the particular organisation studied. It is expected that in some organisations there may be only one particular software system or technology used to support a particular KBP and if that is the case then the full range of marks may be awarded for the single exemplification.

Learning Outcome 4

This has become a very promising LO with some excellent examples of learners playing a range of interesting business simulation games and then proceeding to make good recommendations for a successful business based on their experience of playing the game. In some centres learners have been incorrectly guided into presenting recommendations for starting a business which often limits opportunities for gaining good marks. It is a consideration of what makes a successful business, established or new, that is the prime requirement here.

Most centres approached the work correctly with the emphasis on making business recommendations but there was a significant number of centres where the emphasis had been incorrectly placed on describing the playing of the business simulation game.

Level 2 Unit 3 - Effective Communication

Learning Outcome 1

In the first part of this learning outcome learners are required to explain the three main types of communication media used by business and to give examples of their use. Whilst many learners gave reasonable descriptions of the three types they often made no attempt to apply the knowledge in a business context and subsequently marks were limited to the lower mark band.

In addition learners must comment on the choice of business-related communications used for the team task; the majority of learners made appropriate comments however they should be encouraged to develop their comments to explain and justify their choice of business-related communications in order to achieve higher marks.

Learning Outcome 2

Learners submitted a wide variety of different communications ranging from videos and radio adverts to posters, letters and emails. The electronic submission by a number of centres made the moderation process interesting and allowed the learners work to be accurately assessed.

The communications produced were in the main appropriate and consistent and however there was generally scope for learners to further develop the work to improve the effectiveness of the communication and access the higher mark bands.

It was clear that in many cases learners had worked well together to produce group communications and this was often reflected in the team plans produced for Learning Outcome 3.

Learning Outcome 3 & 4

The quality of the plans and diaries submitted varied greatly. However the work rarely provided the detail required for Mark Band 3; to be assessed in this band learners must provide detailed team plans with detailed notes to track progress.

It is essential that planning is upfront and not produced retrospectively. The team plan may be produced collectively, but the tracking process must be done on an individual basis.

Diaries should indicate decisions made at both the planning stage and throughout the project and also provide a record of the learner's individual contribution to the team effort.

Learning Outcome 3 & 5

The majority of learners submitted work for assessment in this LO which was of a higher standard than in the previous series. The comments made were usually very sensible and well considered, in both the evaluation of their own performance and that of the team. Learners should be encouraged to consider their own performance in terms of the effectiveness of their communication with other team members and the effectiveness of the feedback given and received.

Level 2 Unit 4 - Skills for Innovation

General Comments

This was the second occasion on which this unit has been offered for assessment. A few significant issues have arisen in submissions at this window.

This is not a team work unit, although it is quite permissible for centres to tackle it as a team work task, the evidence that is submitted must be that of the individual learner.

Credit may not be given for jointly produced team products.

The use of witness statements is confined to Mark Grid B and therefore to the learners performance in making their presentation for LO3. It is not possible to ascribe credit in LO1 or LO2 through the use of witness statements. Also the physical evidence used in the learner's presentation such as printed reports, powerpoint etc, must be submitted for moderation against LO3 Mark Grid A.

It is not possible to credit the research evidence and conclusions, in their raw form, from LO1 as the evidence for LO3. At the end of LO1 learners are required to assemble their possible alternatives and explain their decisions on which proposals they will proceed with. Assessment here is on the choices made by the learner on which proposals they will put forward to their client and why they have settled on those particular proposals. In LO3 this decision and its supporting evidence will have been processed ready to present to the client and will be assessed on the quality of their presentation and how suitable it is in enabling the client to make an informed decision.

It is vital that the challenge/opportunity set is simple and open to numerical interpretation. It is also important that the task is set in the context of a clearly defined challenge preferably with some pre-identified success factors against which learners can make judgements. It has become evident that learners find this assessment more manageable if they have an overall budget to work to.

Many challenges/opportunities were too loosely defined or far too broad in their scope for learners to keep on top of. A good choice of challenge will be clearly based on numerical data, will allow 'like for like' comparisons, allow data to be gathered from a range of sources and allow, for MB3, at least three alternatives to be presented to the client.

The challenge or opportunity must be set in a clear business context.

Learning Outcome 1

The first aspect for assessment is proof that the learner has understood the opportunity or challenge they have been set. Copies of interviews with clients is insufficient to show this, the learner must process this information into a clear set of objectives that they need to achieve for their client.

Exploring the opportunity or challenge primarily requires the gathering of data and this must be done from more than one source. The client should not be the only source of data. Evidently if the task involves the purchasing of equipment a variety of retail sites can be consulted. In some cases seen however the type of data the learner was expected to gather was too obscure or complex to source leading to unreliable data being used. The source of all gathered data should be acknowledged.

The third stage of this LO was to process the data in a spreadsheet. It is hoped that whenever possible the learner will submit the spreadsheet(s) they have completed electronically so that the moderator can test out their spreadsheet(s). If the evidence is submitted on paper a formula view of the spreadsheet is expected.

Spreadsheets need not be overly complicated but they should allow data to be easily changed and allow for suitable 'what if' questions to be asked. Where practical it is preferable to have one spreadsheet that is used to generate the data for all the possible options.

For Mark Band 3 the spreadsheet should be developed to incorporate features that make it easier to use, or more flexible in its handling of data. The use of drop down menus for selecting possible components in an option or conditional formatting are two examples of what could constitute a sophisticated spreadsheet.

Finally in this LO the learner will identify the proposals they intend to put forward to their client and explore the reasons for the choices they have made.

Learning Outcome 2

The legal and other constraints must be considered in the light of the challenge or opportunity. Credit cannot be gathered for a generic overview of possible constraints. Learners need to focus on a few, most significant, legal and other constraints and clearly identify how they will impact on their recommendations. For Mark Band 2 and Mark Band 3 it is an expectation that learners will cover both relevant legal and other significant constraints.

Learning Outcome 3 (Mark Grid A)

For LO3 learners must process the evidence collected in LO1 and create a proposal document. This might be a report, a leaflet, a digital product such as a powerpoint or movie. It may be a combination of these items. It should identify the challenge or opportunity, set forward the possible solutions, present relevant numerical evidence, consider the legal and other considerations and conclude with a recommendation. Where appropriate it is hoped that the proposal will be submitted in digital form.

Teamwork Approach - Where a teamwork approach has been chosen, each learner must have evidence of undertaking all LO1, LO2 tasks and contributing their findings to the team. This may take the form of their initial interpretation of the challenge or opportunity which is subsequently discussed in their team. They could research specific data on behalf of the team and be assigned specific legal and other constraints to investigate and present to the team to decide if relevant to the team proposal. They should independently identify possible solutions from the gathered information and put these forward to the team. The team would then make a final decision on which options will form their proposal. Each learner must independently create aspects of the final team proposal that are clearly identifiable to them. They should have worked to an agreed 'team style' for the proposal.

Level 2 Unit 5 - Technology Systems

General Comments

As a unit that covers mainly the traditional areas of IT, the majority of work was of a good standard. The database sections of this unit were generally better addressed by learners with evidence for the 'Network Components' in Learning Outcome 1 (LO1) missing some of the key areas required by the marking grid.

The unit divides into the 2 areas of networks and databases and the comments below address these separately.

NETWORKS

Learning Outcome 1

Generally this was done well with learners identifying the key network components as detailed in the specification. However, to achieve the top mark band, explanations should not only identify the components, but give a good explanation of their function. Where marks were lost, it was because learners omitted details on the **function** of these components. In addition, where centres tried to include task with the process of learners assembling and testing their own network, explanations were generally weaker as fewer components were included and/or the level of explanation was weaker.

One suggestion for the completion of this LO is to ask learners to produce a guide for others that explains the function of key network components.

Learning Outcome 2

This LO is entirely assessed by the centre using Mark Grid B.

Learning Outcome 3

Following on from the construction of the network in the previous LO, the learner should move on to consider the factors that are important to a business with respect to keeping its network running smoothly. The key areas which the higher end of the marking grid specifically requires are: **appropriate** file structures, security and backup. This does not mean that learners cannot include **other** measures to safeguard continuity, but they **must** include the areas mentioned to achieve Mark Band 2 or Mark Band 3. Mark Band 3 requires a detailed description of these measures, and so not only are learners expected to give an overview of the proposed measure ie "backing up data regularly is an essential measure for any business network because...", but they must also suggest a strategy that a business should consider. The same logic applies to all key areas of safeguarding business continuity.

In many instances, learners missed out on the higher mark band because they failed to give suggestions of how a business could implement each specific measure.

Learning Outcome 5

The key aspect for this LO is that the learner is required to review the network that they have assembled and tested in LO2. In cases where learners had reviewed an entirely different network, marks were reduced. The 'How you will be assessed' section of the specification clearly states that the review is of 'your network'. This section of the

specification also offers useful guidance in that the review 'should assess fitness for purpose and identify areas for improvement'.

Network reviews on the whole were weak, with few learners making any reference to the original aims in terms of audience and purpose, and rather than an evaluative review, saying how they had met these aims, many learners simply **described** the process of assembling their network.

DATABASE

Learning Outcome 4

Centres generally addressed this LO well, with many learners achieving marks in Mark Band 2 or Mark Band 3. The key to accessing the higher mark bands is that the learner produces a database which has an effective structure, forms, reports etc and which all show a good sense of audience and purpose. As simple as it may sound, by including a brief introduction about who the database is for and the key requirements for the system, learners would find it far easier to subsequently evidence what they have produced and **effective** database which provides a structure, forms, reports, macros etc which show a **good sense** of their audience.

Once the learner has provided evidence that their database is actually effective for their audience and purpose they immediately have access to the Mark Band 3 range of marks allowing them to achieve up to a maximum of 24 marks.

This is a 'high scoring' LO and learners should be made fully aware of this.

It is **not** a requirement for learners to show **how** they have set up their database, validation, created a form etc but it would be expected that they setup suitable fields with sensible data types and field properties etc and then explain **why** this is appropriate for their audience and/or purpose.

Learning Outcome 5

Again, in general, writing an evaluative review tend to be a weakness with many learners. Instead learners write a description of what they have done instead of referring back to their initial aims (purpose) and the intended audience and then consider the ways in which they have achieved this.

For higher mark bands, as well as evaluative comments, learners must also make sensible suggestions for improvement. Simple and non-specific comments such as 'add more records' is not a sensible suggestion for improvement.

Level 2 Unit 6 - Multimedia

General Comments

There are 2 parts to this unit; the first is to consider the uses of multimedia in business and the second, to design and create at least 2 multimedia products.

In Part 1, learners could explain in general terms how and why multimedia is used, and then choose a range of actual multimedia 'products', learners could assess their fitness for purpose and evaluate the effectiveness of some of the design features that have been used.

Part 2, requires the learner to design, develop, and evaluate at least 2 multimedia products. It is important to recognise that the **design** detail is equally as important as the subsequent **development** and **testing** of the products.

Learning Outcome 1

Learners tended to select examples of multimedia in business and then 'review' their chosen products giving only brief consideration to the design features used, with their focus being on simply reviewing the products. The actual requirements of the LO are to explain the uses of multimedia in business, assessing fitness for purpose, and then to evaluate the effectiveness of the design features such as, the use of hyperlinks, animation, sound etc. Again, the explanation of how these features contribute to whether the product is suitable for the audience and purpose is critical in this LO.

In too many cases, learners lost marks because they focused on 'superficial' features such as the colours and layout of a companies website rather than actual 'multimedia' features such as navigation, use of sound, images etc.

Learning Outcome 2

This LO carries the majority of marks for the entire unit with a maximum of 36 out of the total 60 being accessible for this one LO.

A critical aspect of this LO which reduced the marks of many learners, is the weakness of the designs that were provided. For Mark Band 3, the requirement is a 'complete set of upfront designs'. The important points here are **complete** set and **upfront**, implying that the designs should allow a 3rd party to create the products from the designs given. Many learners produced only annotated sketches and whereas a timeline or structure diagram would often improve and add to the detail in the designs considerably.

For the higher Mark Bands, design sketches should have detailed notes specifying fonts face, font size, colour, image details (description of or filename) and other relevant information. There is no set rule to exactly **what** evidence the learner must provide for a design as this will vary depending upon the products being developed. The key factor is that whatever design information is given, it should allow 3rd party implementation in order to achieve the top mark band.

It is **essential** that electronic evidence of the actual multimedia products is included with the sample. Without this evidence moderation cannot take place.

Centres are encouraged to burn the evidence to a CD allowing sufficient time for learners to check that their products still work as intended. In many cases, centre marks had been awarded based on evidence that had been viewed on the centre's network and not the products on the CD which had areas no longer functioned.

The mark grid does not explicitly state that testing must be carried out but this is required and is implicit in the requirement to 'meet all of the specified requirements'. Testing should be based on initial product objectives and intended audience. And again, it would

be beneficial if centres encourage learners to test the final product on CD rather than on the network which can lead to a mismatch in testing evidence and the actual products provided.

Learning Outcome 3

For all Mark Bands the evaluation of the 2 products should consider feedback from reviewers. To achieve Mark Band 3 it is expected that comments gathered from reviewers will be specific and based upon targeted questions that do assess the degree to which the products are suitable for their intended audience and purpose. Having gathered this feedback, learners should be considering feedback that they have received and commenting accordingly. High scoring evaluations should give a realistic assessment of the final products, and should include justified and sensible suggestions for improvement.

Level 2 Unit 7 - Managing Projects

Learning Outcome 1

In this learning outcome learners are required to investigate two IT projects, one successful and one unsuccessful; careful selection of the projects is critical to the success of the learners.

Many learners used their own Unit 6 work as the successful project; however the Specification states in the 'Approaches to assessment' section that the projects must be 'carried out by others' and subsequently learners could not be credited for this work. Some centres allowed learners to use 'fabricated' scenarios; once again it was not possible to credit learners for this work.

Learners should be encouraged to research Industry Standard IT projects that include stated objectives and outcomes, so that they are able to identify and expand on the project's success or failure. The key success factors and reasons for failure that learners need to focus on are identified in the 'What you need to cover' section of the specification.

The majority of learners produced some 'hints and tips' although they were often vague. To be awarded marks in the higher mark bands the descriptions of the projects must include objectives and outcomes and the 'hints and tips' should reflect on what has been learned from the projects studied in the first part of the learning outcome.

Learning Outcome 2

In this learning outcome learners are required to produce a project proposal and a project plan for a small-scale IT project. In this instance it is acceptable to use a project that the learner is going to carry out and Unit 6 provides an acceptable choice. However it is essential that the work for the two units is produced and submitted separately.

In this learning outcome learners can be given support to produce proposals and plans to gain marks in the lower mark bands, however to be awarded marks in Mark Band 3 they must work independently; centres often failed to identify the level of support given.

Many of the project proposals submitted were of a good standard. Centres are advised to refer to the 'What you need to cover' section of the specification to ensure that all areas of the project proposal are covered. It is also important that learners are clear as to who the stakeholders of their project are.

The quality of the plans submitted varied greatly. Many learners submitted plans that were lacking in detail with the main stages not clearly identified, or broken down into subtasks. There were often milestones but almost too many with a milestone after each task just for the sake of having a milestone.

Interim reviews were often included, but unfortunately these were at inappropriate points in the project and therefore of limited use in managing the project.

In several instances the plans submitted generation of evidence for all learning outcomes instead of the project. There is no requirement to produce a plan for the whole of this unit - the plan should be based upon the project the learner is carrying out.

Learning Outcome 3

There were a small number of learners who had provided initial and final plans which showed that the learners had made ongoing use of their plans to manage the projects and communicate progress. These learners had clearly identified risks and recorded where adjustments had been made and how the progress had been communicated to

stakeholders. However the majority of learners did not fall into this category and the plans showed little attempt to track progress and only brief comments were recorded.

Many learners submitted diaries; however they often lacked detail and did not cover the duration of the project. Learners should be encouraged to keep an ongoing diary of their progress throughout the project execution that identifies how they have used the plan and communicated progress.

This learning outcome carries a large proportion of the marks for the unit and learners should be encouraged to spend a proportional amount of time producing evidence.

Learning Outcome 4

Many learners lost marks in this learning outcome by evaluating the product and not the project; subsequently there were some detailed reviews of the multimedia products produced for Unit 6 which could not be credited at all. Other learners produced vague reviews with comments such as "I should have managed my time better".

Learners must be encouraged to look carefully at the project themselves and to seek the views of others; reflecting on the information gained they should be able to reach realistic conclusions.

Statistics

Level 2 Unit 2 - Exploring Organisations

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	60	52	42	32	22
Points score	10	8	6	4	2

Level 2 Unit 3 - Effective Communication

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	60	51	41	31	21
Points score	10	8	6	4	2

Level 2 Unit 4 - Skills for Innovation

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	60	51	42	33	24
Points score	10	8	6	4	2

Level 2 Unit 5 - Technology Systems

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	60	53	43	34	25
Points score	10	8	6	4	2

Level 2 Unit 6 - Multimedia

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	60	53	43	33	24
Points score	10	8	6	4	2

Level 2 Unit 7 - Managing Projects

Grade	Max. Mark	A*	A	B	C
Raw boundary mark	60	54	43	33	23
Points score	10	8	6	4	2

Notes

Maximum Mark (Raw): the mark corresponding to the sum total of the marks shown on the mark scheme or marking grid.

Raw boundary mark: the minimum mark required by a learner to qualify for a given grade.

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