

Moderators' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

June 2011

GCSE Applied Business (5AB01)
Paper 01

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INVESTIGATING HOW BUSINESSES WORK

Administration

In most cases these issues were properly addressed but there were cases where the sample did not include highest and lowest or where signatures were missing from authentication statements and had to be requested separately.

The majority of the work was received on time.

Controlled Assessment

It is important to recognise the differences between the earlier 'coursework' approaches to the original version of this specification and the requirements of 'controlled assessment' here.

Many candidates produced responses which it was difficult to believe had been completed within the time allowed. Whilst it is not intended that 'exam' sessions should be held, the work submitted should reflect the candidates' responses to the set activities within the time limits allowed whilst adhering to the nature of a 'medium' level of control. This was better evidenced where clear references were made to sources of information used even where a 'bibliography' as such was not required. This would remove the practice of some centres whose candidates submitted all their research files. This is not required; the Awarding Body reserves the right to request such files in cases where there are some doubts concerning validity or authenticity but there is no need to send all research materials with the submitted work.

The nature of controlled assessment makes annotation of the work an essential feature, which is explained below.

Annotation of Work

The importance of clear annotation cannot be stressed enough; it provides guidance both for internal and external verification and moderation of assessment decisions.

The minimum requirement as identified in the Code of Practice is that there must be an indication of where marks have been awarded against the assessment criteria i.e. marks for research, presentation, analysis and decision making, evaluation and methodology. These could be indicated by reference to 'criterion' ('R', 'P', 'A', 'E', 'M' and 'descriptor'/level achieved – '1', '2', or '3', please refer to the specification for further details). Annotation by Assessment Objective ('AO') is rather more difficult as these underpin the whole specification.

Assessors need to clearly indicate where, and to what extent, these have been by reference to the mark descriptors contained in the Unit specification. Sometimes, in the recent series, assessors indicated that more could have been done, then proceed to award the highest mark possible!

In cases where there is little (or any) annotation indicating how marks had been awarded it is often very difficult for moderators to agree the marks as given and this lack of annotation is unhelpful to any form of moderation (internal or external). In future, work without any clear annotation will be returned to centres for assessors to complete.

The Controlled Assessment Activities

This year work moderated again ranged from the applied use of material drawn from real businesses to the more remote 'external' approach with information taken from text book or case study sources. Some assessors again indicated clearly how and where assessment criteria had been met whilst many others still provided little or no evidence in support of their decisions (see under 'Annotation of Work' above).

In some cases there was still evidence that downloaded information (images, pictures, maps, graphs and in some cases whole passages of text) had been sanctioned and/or material plagiarised. Where information has been downloaded, this needs to be clarified as having been done during research time rather than during 'controlled conditions' as this is not permitted. It must be emphasised in the strongest possible terms that the work submitted by candidates must be their own work in its entirety and if material is copied across it must be referenced and used as part of the candidate's answer and not as a substitute for the candidate's own work. In practice, where evidence of this or of plagiarism is detected by moderators, the work will be referred to the 'Malpractice' section of the Awarding Body. The rules on plagiarism and on the conduct of controlled assessment must be made clear to candidates and centres must also ensure they are fully aware of the rules and apply them diligently.

Again it was also evident that, in some instances, excessive 'prescription' had been given to candidates. This is questionable in its legitimacy. This was particularly so where all candidates had received very similar information and tackled the 'activities' in a prescribed manner making differentiation between candidates difficult not to mention bringing into question the whole purpose for which controlled assessment was introduced.

Activity 1

Most candidates tackled the set tasks but there were instances where candidates had only looked at a single business and thus comparisons were impossible. In a couple of instances, tasks had been re-written emphasising other aspects of business that did not match either the specification or the tasks. In these cases it was difficult to agree with the marks given.

Some candidates did not give reasons for their choices of organisations investigated. Even where such choices were made by the assessor there needs to be some rationale here. The choice of business is crucial in order for candidates to find out about aims, objectives and so on. A poor choice here often caused recurring problems throughout the work. The skill of 'justification' was often weak, even amongst stronger work.

Assessors still need to consider carefully the suitability of all chosen businesses particularly the larger (frequently supermarket) chains where candidates often had difficulty in focussing on particular aspects of their operations; particularly where there was little focus on a particular 'branch' or outlet. It is advisable that candidates choose their own businesses to investigate rather than the business being chosen by the centre. There are many appropriate and accessible businesses available for students to choose – one of the businesses does not have to be Tesco or another supermarket – there are plenty of other interesting businesses available!

Much better work was found where candidates had chosen smaller, 'local' businesses and were then able to demonstrate much better coverage of the criteria where the business or organisation was familiar to them. Relying on websites or ready-made case studies is no substitute for a proper investigation of an actual business and also encourages candidates to copy and paste large sections of the corporate website.

With regard to 'ethical' trade some continued to treat this as 'ethnic' whilst others continue to think of 'Fairtrade' as a business brand. In order for candidates to gain some critical understanding it is important that they do not just assume that 'Fairtrade' is 'good' without considering any counterbalancing factors. However, some did again look at this issue seriously and examined the business' 'green' credentials.

Whilst the majority of candidates included a limited bibliography, few made it very detailed and thus marks were lost.

Activity 2

It is important that coverage of functional areas and communications should be applied to the business chosen rather than just as a generic topic for the business. An investigation here should be of the actual forms of communication used by the particular business. This provides yet another reason why the choice of an appropriate business is so important.

Some candidates again covered both businesses for all aspects of the activity and others misinterpreted the requirement completely. Although most were able to give an opinion, few candidates really gave reasons why their chosen method of communication was the most important of the many used.

Activity 3

The coverage seen was better here than in 2010. Generic lists of stakeholders were still in evidence but these need to be interpreted and applied to the particular business investigated. Without this, any work on the ranking of stakeholders or 'conflict' between stakeholders becomes academic. Dependent on the choice of business not all the generic stakeholders given in textbooks will always be relevant.

It is also important to ensure that candidates give examples of how the chosen business attracts and retains new customers (marketing and/or customer service could be reviewed here) and select two *relevant* pieces of legislation affecting the rights and responsibilities of employees. Once again, analysis and some evaluation were important in examining how far the law impacts on the chosen business.

Reflection on Skills

As well as completing the tasks contained within the activities above, candidates are required to consider these issues as detailed in the specification. One reasonably detailed reflection may be used to cover all three tasks so long as it addresses:

- time management, personal organisation and action planning
- use of data and problem solving
- roles played in any group work undertaken
- suitability of chosen methods of presentation

See Controlled Assessment tasks for full details

Assessment Criteria

Research

It remains important that assessor comments support the marks given. This is particularly so where no bibliography is explicitly required. Assessors will have witnessed the candidates' research activities and a clear statement of performance will justify any mark given. Again this year this had often to be inferred from the work itself and, in other cases, it was difficult to see how a particular mark had been chosen.

Present information

As with last year most of the work was reasonably well presented but there were instances of muddled presentation, activities out of sequence, no headings, paragraphs and so on that detracted from the clarity of the work. However, in some cases, simple bulleted lists were presented for Activity 1 making it merely a list of statements containing little or no analysis, application or evaluation. Just as it is for the research criterion, it is important for the assessor to be able to justify the marks given here.

Decision making

There was again evidence of some analysis throughout most of the work seen. Simply making comparisons, reaching simple conclusions based on findings and making judgements can constitute analysis. Also, 'QWC' is embedded here and in the subsequent criterion so marks can be given for clarity, spelling, expression, use of appropriate business terminology and so on.

Review/evaluation of activity

The specification requires candidates to evaluate each task and/or their personal and any group involvement in each activity. In practice, one reflection could cover all three activities and be kept to a minimum to avoid repetition.

Better candidates should be further encouraged to evaluate their business findings so that evaluation is of their understanding from the investigations of the businesses rather than too focussed on the personal aspects. Evaluation of the task involves applying higher order skills to the task itself (i.e. the questions posed in the task) not simply the process involved. There is little business understanding being demonstrated by students trotting out a standard list of what they did, how they did it and what they would have done differently if they had to do the task again. It must be remembered that the student is being assessed primarily on the basis of their business understanding.

Methodology

Again, it would have been helpful to see any planning sheets or 'logs' used and to have a tutor comment to support the methodology mark given. As with 'research', an assessor statement as to how the candidate set about the tasks would help to justify any mark given.

Some candidates had again been well guided whilst the work of others lacked much evidence of 'planning' and marks were difficult to agree.

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