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# **Examiners' Report**

## Principal Examiner Feedback

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# INVESTIGATING SMALL BUSINESSES

## General comments

This was the penultimate series of the Unit 2 controlled assessment, which means next year is the final series in the lifecycle of the qualification.

Controlled assessment provides students the opportunity to investigate an actual business for a real purpose. To this end it is a valuable exercise. More centres are now requiring candidates to choose their own business and, as such, moderators are seeing wider range of investigations. It is pleasing to see a snapshot of local businesses from different areas across the UK (and beyond).

A summary of controlled assessment is as follows:

- Candidates have a choice of 5 investigation titles. New titles are published each year.
- There are 4 assessment objectives – Research, Presentation, Analysis and Evaluation.
- The investigation is to be carried out under controlled conditions. Research should be up to 6 hours under low levels of control. The write-up is 3 hours and under conditions of high control. The specification and Controlled Assessment Guide provide further detail.
- The investigation should be of a **small business**.
- All candidates should investigate a different business.

Despite the progress that has been made with controlled assessment over the duration of the qualification, there remain some issues which recur every year. Annotation of candidates' work was again variable. There were examples of work which contained very little or no annotation. Centres should understand that the moderator's role is to agree (or not) the marking of the centre, rather than doing a complete remark of the sample. Good annotation clearly helps this process and enables moderators to see how marks have been arrived at. There is a recommended list of abbreviations that centres can use, but these are not compulsory. Providing the moderator can see how marks have been awarded, this is the most important thing. A series of ticks alongside candidate work is of little use. More valuable are notations as follows:

- *Source of info 1/2/3...*
- *Using Research to address the Q*
- *Simple Analysis – L2*

As noted previously, there is no expectation or requirement that candidates will word-process their work. We understand the pressures that some centres are under in accessing ICT facilities for controlled assessment.

In terms of the choice of tasks this year, the most popular were Task 1 (adding value) and Task 4 (customer satisfaction). Task 1, although

accessible in terms of the topic, required candidates to compare the methods and success of one business to another rival business, and because of this had a degree of challenge for candidates. As for previous series, at least one task every year – in this series Task 5 (business cycle) – are designed in such a way that they can be tackled without needing primary research. The intention is that these tasks can be based around only secondary research data. A relatively small number of candidates chose Task 5, perhaps due to the economics-related topic area. It will remain a feature that one task each year will only require secondary data.

Below is a summary of the main issues arising for each of the different marking criteria:

## **Research**

Centres and candidates should expect that different investigations will require different types of research. **There is no simple numerical formula to be applied.** For Task 1 – To what extent is the business you have chosen more successful in adding value than a competitor? – candidates were often able to gather lots of research evidence for their chosen business, but did not always compare to another business. To reach top bands for Research on this task required information of a competitor, as this was the investigation title.

Note that there is no expectation that candidates will collect both primary and secondary data. The criteria descriptor makes no such requirement. The key term in the descriptor is '*selectivity*'. Has the candidate selected information which is appropriate to the investigation title? For Level 3 (7-9 marks) work must demonstrate '*good selectivity*'. For Level 4 the research must have, '*high-quality organisation ...and focus*'. These descriptors should encourage candidates to **avoid** providing unnecessary detail about the chosen business, such as its history or location. This information is not required in any depth. Similarly with photographs and maps, candidates should by all means use these, but only if they help to address the question. Some interviews once again contained questions which did not help the candidate to tackle the question.

## **Presentation**

The quality of Presentation this year was similarly strong to previous series and the comment here echoes what was stated previously. Lots of images were once again in evidence this year, and these are good to see, providing tangible evidence of candidates carrying out 'field research'. Importantly, candidates must use the actual images to help answer the question in their investigation. There is some evidence that candidates are getting better at this. Images are an excellent means of demonstrating original thinking; candidates should be reminded that images that do not help to answer the question, that are not really thought about, are of little use.

Candidates are rewarded for presenting their findings using appropriate methods and in terms of their, '*attention to detail*'. For some investigations this may involve presenting statistical data using charts and diagrams. Where

an interview has been carried out it may involve relevant quotes being used in the write up. The point is candidates must 'do something' with the information and data they collect, and this must be appropriate. For example, a pie chart showing the results of a 'yes or no' question on a survey is not appropriate. Simply including a chart is, in itself, not enough.

Once again as noted last year, organising work into appendices, and making reference to this section, is also an effective method of presenting information. Using charts, maps and photographs will not automatically push an investigation high into marks for presentation. Such techniques must support/clarify the point being made.

## **Analysis**

As noted in previous years, some candidates perform very well in this area, whilst others find the skill more difficult. This is the nature of a higher order skill like Analysis.

The following feedback is what has been said in previous series, but is still relevant. Too often moderators found examples of centres rewarding work with the annotation '*Analysis*', when in fact the information was not analysis. Key here is that candidates make use of their research information to address the particular investigation question. When candidates conduct interviews or surveys, they need to be clear on why they have asked a question. How do their questions link with the relevant concepts and theories that are integral to their investigation? The impression is that candidates feel it is vital to include some form of questionnaire, produce graphs and/or pie charts and then to talk about their findings in general terms with little or no meaningful analysis. Some candidates justify the questions asked by showing the links to the relevant concepts and theories and by including their rationale in the appendices and by referring to each question's validity in the analysis of their findings. Others, however, once again used quotes as analysis (not rewardable) or made simple or basic statements which did not merit the higher level marks sometimes given.

## **Evaluation**

As with the previous series this was the weakest strand for many candidates, although the view of the senior examination team was that performance is improving, with candidates often weighing one factor against another to arrive at a justified conclusion. It is important that the analysis of research data should inform the conclusion candidates arrive at.

More examples were again seen this year of 'evaluation' where a candidate suggested what they would do differently if they were to do this task again. **This is not evaluation.** Suggesting that, '...next time I would get more questionnaires completed...' should not be rewarded at Evaluation. Too often, teacher annotation indicated that this was being rewarded.

## What was done well?

Some centres are once again to be commended for their approach to this type of investigation. Moderators saw some excellent, original work from centres that had clearly embraced the preferred approach. The list below is reproduced from last year, not out of expedience, but on the basis that these observations have been evident in this series:

- **Range of businesses** – as noted previously, it is clear that thousands of small, independent businesses have been investigated by candidates. Some superb investigations have been carried out. Centres are to be commended for the opportunities they are providing for candidates to investigate real business situations.
- **Creative use of images** - intrepid candidates are increasingly taking to the road, the High Street, the shop floor, etc. to collect images that they think will help them tackle their investigation. These images are often used as a source of creative, original thinking.
- **Choice** - the most success once again came from centres where candidates had been given a free choice of the titles and were not provided with a very prescriptive template to work to. Note that businesses need not be unknown to candidates, but more often than not those for which some contact is already established. Many used businesses which family or friends owned, or where they worked, and this is fine.
- **Presentation and organisation of work** – as noted above, there was some excellent presentational techniques used by candidates. Lots of work was structured clearly in different sections using diagrams, charts, footnotes and appendices.

## Areas where centres can improve their practice

- **Annotation of candidates' work** - appropriate annotation is a requirement of the QCDA Code of Practice for CA. As indicated above, the annotation of the work was sometimes limited and did not provide much help to moderators in understanding how the marker had been arrived at the levels and marks. It should be remembered that the marking of work is for the benefit of the teacher and the moderator and not for the student since the work cannot be drafted and amended. It is suggested that when judgements are made and supporting reasons/consequences/ causes/ issues/factors etc. are given by the student, these are identified in some way by the marker so that it becomes clear whether high levels of analysis and evaluation are being consistently demonstrated throughout the work.
- **Answer the question** - candidates should be reminded to check that they are arriving at an answer to the specific title question. Rather than describing what is meant by customer satisfaction (for example) and how it can be achieved, they should ask themselves whether they are arriving at a decision regarding the most important factor which contributes to customer satisfaction. Sometimes investigations appear to be simple

description of what a business does, without sufficient analysis or evaluation.

- **Administration** - centres should not supply candidates' work in plastic wallets. Work should ideally be treasury tagged to simplify the work of the moderator. Some centres supply work in unwieldy folders.
- **Presenting research/use of appendices** – there is no expectation that candidates should submit their entire research folder. The best practice is where appendices are used which contains the specific information that is referred to in the write-up. **However, please ensure that where marks have been awarded which are based on a particular piece of evidence or research that this is included in the piece that is sent to the moderator.**

### **Additional support**

There is extensive support for teachers in relation to controlled assessment from Edexcel. This includes:

Ask the Expert – a service which allows teachers to ask questions of the senior examining team directly –

<http://edexcel--5571.custhelp.com/app/ask/session/L3NpZC9pOUI5cHJfag%3D%3D>

There are new exemplar materials and regular updates on training, including online training on the GCSE Business web site –

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/Business/Business/Pages/default.aspx>

Customised training can be arranged to deal with specific queries that centres have. –

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/Business/Business/Pages/training.aspx>

A publication designed to support students in preparing for CA has also been published by Pearson/Edexcel along with other guidance on CA which appears in the official Edexcel textbooks for the qualification –

<http://www.edexcel.com/quals/gcse/gcse09/Business/Business/Pages/Resources.aspx>

