



GCE Examiners' Report

Business
AS/A
Summer 2024

Introduction

Our Principal Examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each unit.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	WJEC offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.wjec.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For unitised specifications grade boundaries are expressed on a Uniform Mark Scale (UMS). UMS grade boundaries remain the same every year as the range of UMS mark percentages allocated to a particular grade does not change. UMS grade boundaries are published at overall subject and unit level. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each unit that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results, Grade Boundaries and PRS (wjec.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

Exam Results Analysis	WJEC provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
Classroom Resources	Access our extensive range of FREE classroom resources, including blended learning materials, exam walk-throughs and knowledge organisers to support teaching and learning.	https://resources.wjec.co.uk/
Bank of Professional Learning materials	Access our bank of Professional Learning materials from previous events from our secure website and additional pre-recorded materials available in the public domain.	Portal by WJEC or on the WJEC subject page.
Become an examiner with WJEC.	We are always looking to recruit new examiners or moderators. These opportunities can provide you with valuable insight into the assessment process, enhance your skill set, increase your understanding of your subject and inform your teaching.	Become an Examiner WJEC

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Executive Summary

All four examination papers were of a similar standard to previous examination series.

Candidates generally demonstrated an overall good knowledge and understanding in a number of topic areas from across the full A level content, although there were also quite a few gaps in knowledge and some incorrect understanding of key business terms. There was evidence that a number of candidates lack precision when attempting to apply business tools such as supply and demand diagrams, breakeven analysis, financial calculations, price elasticity of demand and critical path analysis.

The quality of written communication was a concern in all four units. Some scripts were barely legible. If the examiner cannot read the writing, then the examiner cannot award any marks. Centres are encouraged to consider this for future series and determine if candidates need extra support to write their exam responses.

Too many candidates offer responses that do not answer the actual question. Candidates should read questions carefully before answering and underline and plan what is required from the question. Attention should be given to this when preparing candidates for the examinations. Candidates should also take care in identifying command words in order to recognise the skills being assessed in the question.

Candidates should strive to take care when working with numerical data. This includes showing formula when relevant; expressing numbers to two decimal places with correct rounding; using units of measurement in final answers and showing workings so that some marks can be awarded even if there are some errors made.

Candidates must be aware that application involves using the data to analyse and evaluate not simply listing important data from the stems and case studies.

Candidates should be encouraged and given an opportunity in the classroom to answer extended response questions. They should take a key point and develop it giving a logical and fully explained argument rather than a long answer that reads in a list-like style with lots of stated points that are not developed. Candidates should be advised to carefully consider the mark allocation of each question to allocate sufficient time for each question.

Centres need to reinforce with candidates the synoptic nature of the unit 4 examination paper. Candidates will be assessed on content across the full qualification.

For the essay in unit 4:

Part (a) Many candidates did not use the context during their answer. In doing so the candidate limits their potential mark to 6 out of 10. Effective use of the scenario is the crucial factor in performing well on these questions.

Part (b): Responses where evaluation occurred throughout the answer rather than solely in the final paragraph appeared to promote a higher level of discussion from candidates and is a practice to be encouraged.

Areas for improvement	Classroom resources	Brief description of resource
Gaps in knowledge of some topics	WJEC Educational Resources Website	Knowledge organisers Blended learning Digital textbook
Precision in quantitative skills	WJEC Educational Resources Website AS/A Level Business (wjec.co.uk)	Quantitative skills resource Past paper mark schemes
Identifying command words	WJEC Educational Resources Website AS/A Level Business (wjec.co.uk)	Command words and assessment objectives resource Exam walk through

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UNIT 1 – BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Overview of the Unit

The 2024 examination paper was accessible to almost all candidates. This was evident with the average attempt of 97.8% per question.

Some impressive answers were written, and candidates demonstrated an ability to attain marks across each of the four assessment objectives.

However, the attainment of marks for application to the scenarios and data given (AO2) and the explanation and analysis (AO3) is an area of concern.

Candidates should be taught exam techniques to understand the requirements of command words. This will enable candidates to attain the upper mark bands.

For AO2, it is crucial that candidates make effective use of the information given and making good use of a given data and applying this information within their answers.

Overall, the candidates had sound knowledge (AO1) of most business topics, however more focus must be given in the classroom on how to develop and expand their answers (AO3). A clear example of this was Q.2(c). The candidates were able to identify factors that affect supply, but many did not possess the skills to explain and develop how these factors affect the supply of strawberries in the UK.

As in the past, the quality of written communication is a concern. A number of scripts were barely legible.

Based on the facility factors, the most accessible questions for candidates were:

Q.3(a) The private and public sector - 73%

Q.5(c) Calculation of profit - 81.1%

The least accessible questions were

Q.5(diii) Margin of safety - 30.9%

Q.5(e) Benefits and limitations of breakeven analysis - 41.1%.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a)** The attempt percentage for this opening question was highest on the paper. It was accessible with a mean mark of 1.4 out of 2. Some candidates failed to apply 'in exchange for goods and services' for the second mark.
- (b)** Nearly all candidates attempted this question. Most candidates understood the AO1 element of location factors, however ineffective use of the data and insufficient application of the location factors to 'Time for Tea' was often evident.

- (c) This question asked the candidates to explain components of a business plan. A high majority of candidates were able to explain the content of a business plan, however many candidates gave incorrect knowledge of the component title such as Overview, Financial Plan etc.
- Q.2** (a) Most candidates drew and labelled the supply and demand curves correctly; however a common mistake was either not labelling the curves or incorrect labelling.
- (b) The facility factor for this question was a cause for concern. 1 mark each was awarded for adapting the supply curve and including the original and new equilibrium price and quantity. The main issue was the lack of labelling e.g. Q-Q1 & P-P1.
- (c) Overall, the candidates understood the factors that affected the supply of strawberries, however more focus was needed on the AO3 in explaining and developing the effect the factors would have on the supply of strawberries.
- Q.3** (a) The facility factor of 73% was amongst the highest in the paper and candidates clearly outlined the difference between the public and private sector.
- (b) In order to gain the full 3 marks, the candidates had to demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of the role of the public sector. This required the appropriate business terminology such as merit goods and services. Candidates were too ready to list examples of the goods and services rather than describing the role of the public sector. This resulted in a mean mark of 0.8 out of 3 marks.
- Q.4** This question had a mean mark of 4.3 out of the maximum 10 marks. The candidates were asked to compare operating a business as a private limited company compared to sole trader. The common theme here was for candidates to focus one side: on the sole trader aspect rather than a private limited company. This one-sided focus did not allow the candidate to access the highest mark band. One concern was that many candidates abbreviated private limited companies to PLC's.
- Q.5** (a) Most candidates were able to understand reasons for the use of market research. However, many candidates were unable to develop this and not did not access AO3 by explaining the importance of market research.
- (b) Most candidates used the correct examples for fixed and variable cost however the definition of the terms was often incorrect and not clearly linked to output.
- (c) The facility factor of 81.1% was the highest in unit 1. Candidates still need to be reminded to include the £ sign.

- (d)** In the first part of this question the candidates were asked to construct and label a breakeven chart. Overall, this was well attempted with a mean mark of 1.9 out of 3. It must be noted that clearer plotting is required, especially when plotting the total revenue. There were many examples of candidates attempting this question without a ruler and a sharp pencil. Lines drawn were not precise enough. The majority of candidates were able to correctly identify the breakeven point. Most candidates found labelling the margin of safety challenging. This question had the lowest facility factor and the lowest attempt rate. The margin of safety must be clearly labelled ranging between the breakeven point and the point of maximum output.
- (e)** Although the attempt percentage was fairly high, the mean mark was 3.3 marks out of 8. This question was assessed through AO3 and AO4 focusing on the benefits and limitations of using breakeven analysis. The data suggests that most answers were between mark band 1 - limited and mark band 2 - good. Answers tended to be one sided and focusing on either the benefits or limitations of a breakeven analysis. Many candidates attempted to explain breakeven although the question did not ask this.

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UNIT 2 – BUSINESS FUNCTIONS

Overview of the Unit

The 2024 examination paper was accessible to almost all candidates. This was evident with the average attempt of 96.1% per question. The attempt percentage on question 12 was low and those that attempted the question lacked the knowledge and understanding of management by objectives.

Some candidates found questions assessing AO3 and AO4 challenging.

Candidates must clearly understand how to answer a question when asked to analyse and / or evaluate. Therefore, centres would be well advised to place greater emphasis on assessment objectives in order that candidates can achieve across the full range from AO1 to AO4.

As in the past, the quality of written communication is a concern. A number of scripts were barely legible, again this should be a focus in the classroom.

Based on the facility factors, the most accessible questions for candidates were:

Q.21 Data analysis - 99.7%

Q.42 Financial calculations - 98.8%

The least accessible questions were

Q.13 Management by Objectives - 16%

Q.44 Economies and diseconomies of scale – 32.7%.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.11** The opening question was answered competently with a mean mark of 2.6 out of 4. Candidates on the whole understood the main function of management but should be encouraged to use the appropriate terminology such as planning, organising and leading.
- Q.12** The responses to this question were very disappointing with a mean mark of 0.3 out of 2. Candidates either had not revised management by objectives or did not fully understand it. The facility factor was the lowest in the paper at 16%. The candidates did not refer to the fact that MBO is a joint employer/employee approach to setting objectives.
- Q.13** The candidates in this question were asked to explain one advantage and one disadvantage to a business of using MBO. A common pattern was for candidates to answer this question from a generic objective setting perspective rather than MBO.
- Q.21** The facility factor for this data analysis question was fairly high at 69.3%. Overall, candidates were confident in the AO2 aspect of extracting information from the given data, however the aspect of considering the usefulness of the data and how it could be used was weak.

- Q.22** Candidates were asked to outline the term 'Operations Management'. The mean mark of 0.9 out of 3 mark was low. Candidates on the whole referred to the general running of a business rather than the production process.
- Q.23** In this question candidates were asked to evaluate the two methods of production used in the case study. Many candidates analysed (AO3) and evaluated (AO4) the methods used however did not refer to the actual batch and job production methods. Many candidates also referred to the business's distribution model in selling to independent retailers. The question did not ask this.
- Q.24** Candidates need to learn the definition of added value. The mean mark for this question was 1.4 marks out of 4. On the other hand, there were many excellent examples of applying the data to added value by referencing the 'quality of the ingredients' and that it was a 'premium product'.
- Q.25** Candidates needed to evaluate the decision of setting 'high but competitive prices' on a product. There were no AO1 knowledge marks, however many candidates described various pricing strategies. Many candidates could explain the impact of setting high prices. However, in order reach mark band 2 at AO4 the candidates needed to look at impacts of setting high prices on both the business and its customers.
- Q.31** Candidates were asked to define the term organisational design. There were good examples of clear understanding of the term however with a mean mark of 1 out of 2, definitions again must be a classroom focus.
- Q.32** The candidates were asked to state three terms. Overall, this was well answered, and many candidates had clear understanding of the terms delegation and empowerment. However, referring to authority as someone who is charge was not sufficient. In order to gain the mark, candidates needed to refer to authority or power to make decisions.
- Q.33** The attempt rate of 91.2% for this question was a concern. However, those who did attempt it had clear understanding of laissez-faire leadership and applied it well to Google. However, some candidates suggested other leadership styles that Google could use, and the question did not ask this. Candidates should be encouraged to carefully read and understand the question before answering.
- Q.34** The mean mark for this question was 3.9 out of 10 with a facility factor of 39.3%. Most candidates did understand the matrix structure and analysed the benefits of a matrix structure. Those candidates who did not understand the matrix structure analysed and evaluated the hierarchical structure only. There were very good examples of AO2 where the matrix structure was clearly applied to Google and good use of the qualitative data was made.
- Q.41** This was a well answered question where the candidates clearly understood the role of the finance department.
- Q.42** This question had the highest facility factor of 93%. It was a straightforward calculation of profit. Some candidates still need to be reminded to include a £ sign.

- Q.43** This question focused on the usefulness of budgeting. In order to reach the higher mark bands, the candidates had to reference qualitative and the quantitative data. Within the case study there was an income budget and qualitative information. Most candidate focused on qualitative or the quantitative data and therefore found this question challenging, hence the mean mark of 3.2 out of 9.
- Q.44** The final question looked at economies and diseconomies of scale. This question had a low facility factor of 32.7 and also the lowest attempt rate of 86.2%. Many candidates opened their answer with a definition of both economies and diseconomies of scale which was good to see. It was clear that most candidates were unable to state and explain the various economies/diseconomies of scale. The most common reference was as expected 'bulk buying'. The question also required the candidates to evaluate the impact of economies and diseconomies of scale on the business and two stakeholders. Again, reading and understanding the question before answering is an exam technique that needs to be developed in the classroom.

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UNIT 3 – BUSINESS ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

Overview of the Unit

Overall, the standard of responses on unit 3 was very good, with the majority of candidates managing the timing of the exam well and attempting all questions on the paper. The last question had an attempt rate of 97.2% showing that most candidates got to the end of the paper. There were examples of scripts where candidates achieved the highest standard, illustrating detailed knowledge and understanding of a range of specification content and excellent skills including application, analysis and evaluation. When questions were not answered, it was often due to limited knowledge of the subject content rather than a lack of time.

The majority of candidates followed good structures in their responses, showing logical developments in their arguments. A surprisingly large number of candidates did not use paragraphs in their writing, making it more difficult to separate out chains of argument. Alongside this, handwriting was more of an issue than in previous series, with a growing number of scripts having to be studied in closer detail to interpret the poor writing. There were a larger number of word-processed scripts than usual, and it is pleasing to see when these scripts leave space between each question and indent from the question number. Spacing out of the lines makes it a lot easier to mark.

Those with good numerical skills, shown within Q.1(a), Q.3(c), Q.3(d), and Q.6(a), where candidates tended to pick up all quantitative skills marks available. Unfortunately, comparable with previous years, there are candidates who lack these skills which restricts the marks awarded and their ability to accurately respond to questions requiring quantitative skills. It was pleasing to see an improvement on the accuracy of data presentation. It was less common for monetary values to be expressed without a £ sign, and the majority of candidates expressed all their answers to 2 decimal places, even when the question did not directly prompt them to do so. There were only a small number of candidates who were not able to round their response correctly, and on occasion the mark scheme penalised them for this. For several of the quantitative questions on the paper there was a formula mark available. If the correct answer was shown the formula mark was given with implied knowledge but it was useful for some candidates who scored a formula mark despite getting the workings wrong. This was perhaps most relevant on Q.1(a) and Q.4(d). In addition, a lack of precision was evident when responding to numerical tasks and candidates would be well advised to show the workings to all their calculations.

In the majority of questions, candidates had correctly interpreted the trigger word of the question. Candidates generally used the stimulus material provided when required, especially in Q.2, Q.3 and Q.4. Weaker answers tended to repeat/quote the stimulus material, whereas stronger answers were able to provide judgements and bring in wider context knowledge. It should be noted that some candidates were failing to show good/excellent analysis by developing their points well into structured arguments, which made it difficult to score high marks on certain questions, particularly noticeable in Q.2 and Q.4. The better candidates were able to give detailed, well-structured and balanced arguments, and were able to interpret the requirements of the question well by looking at the phrasing of the question and the key trigger words used.

The strongest answered numerical question was critical path (Q.6(a)(i)), with a facilitating factor of 60.4%. (A facilitating factor is the mean mark expressed as a % of the total mark available).

The strongest answered written responses were in relation to franchising Q.5(b) with a facilitating factor of 62.0% and a definition of vertical integration Q.5(a)(i), with a facilitating factor of 59.0%. The weakest numerical question was Q.1(a), price elasticity of demand, with a facilitating factor of 51.8%, and the weakest written question was a definition of net assets, Q.3(a), with a facilitating factor of 34.7%.

Knowledge (AO1) was good throughout the paper, although a large number of candidates were not adding enough detail into the 2-mark definition questions. Whilst it is not an essential requirement of a longer answer, definitions of key terms are useful. Analysis was good overall, although a larger proportion of candidates than normal were listing lots of different arguments instead of developing one argument in more detail. Lots of candidates were using the given contexts well, and this was useful in questions with a large proportion of AO2 marks. AO4 remains to be the most difficult objective, and many candidates did not show any evaluation, or perhaps just a small amount in a very brief conclusion. Stronger responses showed evaluation throughout the response in each argument.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- Q.1 (a)** Candidates were required to calculate the price elasticity of demand. This question was completed to a reasonable standard, with a facilitating factor of 51.8%. The majority of responses clearly laid out the stages of their workings and most came to the right final answer. The most common mistake was made when candidates correctly calculated the percentage changes in demand and inputted it into the formula upside down. This is where it was worthwhile for the candidate to write out the formula, as if they had written it out correctly, they still picked up the AO1 mark. If they hadn't written it out and calculated it upside down, they only scored 2. Own figure rule was applied in this question. It is important that candidates are reminded of the need to correctly include the negative sign in their final answer. Although it was not required, many candidates also indicated that their answer was elastic – this facilitated them in the following question.
- (b)** This question followed on from the previous part and required an explanation of the impact of the level of the estimated changes in price on sales revenue of Waves Watersports Ltd. based on both quantitative and qualitative data. The mean score was 2.9/6 on this, as responses were often quite simplistic and only referred to the likely increase in sales following an increase in price and these responses were held at limited. Stronger responses that moved up to band 2 were able to take the AO3 and AO4 further and look at the qualitative aspects such as the impact of income levels rising or the seasonality of the jet ski. In terms of AO2, stronger answers linked to the fact that this is a niche market, and that competition exists and were able to explain that this meant there would be a more than proportionate change in demand following a change in price.

- Q.2 (a)** This was a 2-mark outline of what is meant by Corporate Strategy. The majority of the responses referred to it being concerned with the strategic decisions a business has to make that affect the entire business, and then stronger responses would link to being set by senior management and it being a medium to long-term plan. With a mean score of 1.0/2, SD of 0.8 and an attempt rate of 98.5%, this was an accessible question. Nevertheless, there were several responses where candidates provided a description of vision and mission statements and thus no marks awarded.
- (b)** With a mean of 6.6/12 and a SD of 2.8, the majority of candidates started their answer with the best practice either a definition or a diagram of Porters Five Forces. This meant that AO1 marks could be easily awarded, and the stronger candidates proceeded to analyse each of the components separately. Candidates made a fair effort to use the data from the question stem to apply Dyson to Porters although a significant number of candidates are losing application marks as they do not do this consistently throughout their responses, thus limiting them to the lower AO2 bands. This then impacted the AO3 and AO4 marks that could be awarded as they were restricted to lower bands.
- Q.3 (a)** This was a state question that asked what is meant by net assets. Either a definition or the formula were credited. With a mean of 0.3/1 it was clear that many candidates did not know this definition. Candidates need to be reminded of the need to learn key definitions and formulas.
- (b)** This was another state what is meant by response. Candidates were better placed to provide a correct definition of working capital, with a mean of 0.6/1 being awarded.
- (c)** This was generally a well answered calculation question, and most candidates were correctly able to calculate the percentage change in turnover. The most common errors were due to incorrectly calculating the difference in turnover by taking the old away from the new and not new from old. Units of measurement were required, and one mark was deducted if the figure was not expressed as being negative. Those candidates who performed poorly on this question can be attributed to them not knowing how to work out percentage changes.
- (d)** Whilst this was the third lowest attempted question on the paper at 96.6%, it was generally a well answered calculation question, and most candidates were correctly able to calculate the working capital figure. The most common errors were due to incorrectly calculating the numbers and missing off the units of measurements, but the candidates who had written down the correct formula were still awarded 1 mark. Units of measurement were required, and one mark was deducted if the figure was not expressed in £s and/or millions. Candidates who did not know the working capital formula found this question inaccessible – it is important that centres reminded candidates of the need to learn key definitions and formulas.

- (e)** This question was not answered particularly well overall, with a mean mark of 5.4/12.

Most responses considered the position of the UK national fashion retail business as having fallen based upon their calculated level of working capital as having decreased and the percentage turnover having decreased. The stronger responses supported their argument further by looking at the other items on the balance sheet and profit and loss account in more detail.

Analysis and evaluation were not particularly strong overall as candidates were generally not able to explain the consequences of the figures that they were discussing. For AO2, the strongest answers referred not only to the calculations they have previously worked out in Q.3(c) and Q.3(d), but then also put it into context by looking at further relevant calculations such as GPM, NPM, ROCE and gearing ratios. This allowed them to provide a more holistic approach to how the retail business was performing which also assisted in them developing their AO4 response and allowing them access to the higher bands for AO2, AO3 and AO4.

- Q.4** With an attempt rate of 95.1%, this was the second lowest attempted question on the paper, yet it had one of the highest facilitating factor. The majority of candidates started their answer with the best practice either a definition or a diagram of the Ansoff Matrix. This meant that AO1 marks could be easily awarded, and the stronger candidates proceeded to analyse each of the components of the matrix separately. Application marks were often restricted to Band 1 as candidates forgot to apply the matrix to Levi Roots as the question requested and instead adopted a generic response as to why the Ansoff Matrix is useful to a business. This then impacted the AO3 and AO4 marks that could be awarded as they were restricted to lower bands.

- Q.5 (a) (i)** This was a short state question, what is meant by vertical integration. With a mean of 0.6/1 and a SD of 0.5, many candidates were able to do this, however several candidates opted to explain horizontal integration instead. Credit was not given for examples, as this was not asked for.

- (ii)** This was a three-part question whereby candidates needed to explain one advantage of vertical integration to Starbucks. Where candidates knew what vertical integration was, there was a tendency to either state an advantage of vertical integration and give an example to Starbucks but forget the explanation so lost the AO3 mark available or state and explain an advantage of vertical integration but forget to apply to Starbucks so lost the AO2 mark. Candidates are to be reminded of the importance of decoding the question carefully to check that they are addressing all of the assessment objectives required.

- (b)** This was the strongest answered question on the paper, with the highest facilitating factor of 62.0%, and was the second most attempted question (98.9%). Franchising seems to be a topic that the candidates are comfortable with as evidenced by a mean score of 5/8 with a SD of 1.7. The majority of candidates started with a definition of franchising allowing them to secure AO1 marks immediately. It was pleasing to see that the candidates had used the stimulus material well to illustrate how Costa has used franchising to grow their business allowing their answers to reach band 2 for AO2. To ensure that Band 2 is reached for both AO3 and AO4, candidates are to be reminded of the need to fully develop the points that they are making and to provide a judgement throughout their response that directly answers the question posed.

- Q.6 (a) (i)** This was a well answered calculation question, and most candidates were correctly able to calculate the EST and LFT, contributing to the mean score of 3/5. There were several candidates who calculated the EST and LFT but failed to include the time required for each task, which resulted in a mark being deducted. Candidates can be reminded of the need to take care when performing calculations as the main reason for full marks not being awarded on this section was often due to candidates incorrectly calculating the numbers between each node. This error then carried forward through the remainder of their calculations. It is worth noting that OFR is not applied to this question.
- (ii)** The majority of candidates were able to correctly indicate the critical path on the diagram. Candidates can be reminded of the best practice to annotate the critical path correctly with the use of “||” along the critical path line. OFR was applied to this question, but no marks were awarded if the candidate made no annotation and only wrote out the critical path activity letters.
- (b)** The majority of candidates were able to obtain the full AO1 marks for their understanding of the use of CPA, which is likely a factor that resulted in the mean of 4.9/9 for this question. Candidates made an attempt to analyse and evaluate why critical path may be useful, but this was often generic so prohibited them from being awarded the higher mark bands for both AO3 and AO4. It was apparent that many candidates did not apply their response in the context of Lewis Construction Ltd which mean that AO2 marks could not be awarded.

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UNIT 4 – BUSINESS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Overview of the Unit

Candidates generally responded well to this paper. It was pleasing to see most candidates making a consistent attempt at questions in Section A. The attempt rate of questions ranged from 92.3% on question 1 5 to 98.7% for question 1 2. Equally, the level of response on questions demonstrated a strong grasp of key business concepts amongst many candidates.

Knowledge of the question topics was strong amongst most candidates. This is also supported by the high attempt rate across the paper. Some candidates made their knowledge clear by defining the key term(s) in the question before moving into their main set of arguments. This made it easier for examiners to be secure when judging the candidate's level of competence, especially in relation to awarding AO1 marks.

A full range of responses were provided with some impressive answers written and candidates demonstrated an ability to attain marks across each of the four assessment objectives. However, the attainment of marks for application to the scenario given (AO2) continues to be an area for development. The quality of written communication was generally very good, although there are an increasing number of scripts or sections of the scripts being illegible.

In terms of the structure of responses it was clear that candidates had been taught how to structure paragraphs to generate full and logical answers. Where appropriate, candidates included key theory to support their point. This was particularly useful when building extended discussions in response to the question. However, weaker responses gave general points with little or no theory to support the argument and made it difficult to award higher AO3 marks.

Although knowledge (AO1) and analysis (AO3) were frequently well expressed and managed by candidates, application (AO2) and evaluation (AO4) were sometimes missed where required. This led to some candidates gaining a limited number of marks as they were not generating marks evenly from all four skills. It appeared that most candidates had been prepared effectively for this exam with the majority demonstrating a clear understanding of the trigger words within the question. It was clear that some centres had clearly explained the types of responses required from words in the question such as 'explain', 'assess' and 'discuss', as a result, equipping candidates with the ability to perform very well in this examination. Conversely, some candidates frequently described issues rather than explaining and evaluating their implications for business. As a result, those candidates did not manage to score highly on AO3 and AO4.

Candidates seemed to manage their time well throughout this paper. Suitable attempts were made at a full range of questions by a large proportion of candidates. Although rare, there was still some evidence of a few candidates spending too long on part A leaving time only for brief responses in part B.

Overall, candidates seemed to have a good level of skill both in terms of written responses and time management. This series was successful for a large number of candidates who had taken the time to prepare for the exam scenario. Whilst this paper contains challenges for candidates, the quality of responses received in this series demonstrated, in most cases, a strong ability to meet the demands of a fully written paper within the time constraints of the exam.

Section A

In this part of the examination candidates were provided with an extended case study about the operations of Google and provided with extensive data globalisation, innovation, legal factors, organic and external growth and causes of internal and external change. Section A was managed effectively by many candidates. The case study was used effectively in the vast majority of cases with candidates frequently using the nature of the business and its actions in their responses to support arguments. The attempt rate for each question for Section A was in the main excellent: Q.1.1 97.0%, Q.1.2 98.7%, Q.1.3 97.7% and Q.1.4 98.0%. However, candidates found question Q.1.5 less accessible with an attempt rate of 92.3%.

Section B

This section of the examination afforded candidates the ability to work to their strengths. Candidates selected one question from a choice of three options. The questions attempted in Section B were split with approximately 45% attempting question 2, 34% attempting question 3 and 21% attempting question 4.

Each of the part (a) questions required the candidate to apply their answer to a scenario noted within the question, with 4 marks awarded for AO2. Candidates performed similarly across these questions with means ranging from 3.3 to 4.2. Although candidates usually demonstrated good knowledge of the question they had selected, some did not use the context provided within the question making it impossible for the examiner to credit AO2 marks. Centres are encouraged to focus on the techniques needed in this part of the paper to help candidates move up the mark range.

As Section B, part (b) has 8 AO3 and 8 AO4 marks on offer this could have acted as a barrier to the achievement of a high total mark for some candidates.

It should be remembered that unit 4 is synoptic and may include questions from any part of the specification.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

Q.1 (a) This question proved difficult for many candidates, with a facility factor of 29.9 and a mean mark of 1.8/6. Many candidates appeared to be unclear on what the term globalisation means, confusing globalisation with international trade. Unfortunately, too many candidates seemed to misinterpret the question and approached this question in the wrong way by discussing the factors that have led to Google being a global brand and not what the question required which was to explain the factors that have led to globalisation. Therefore, it was difficult to award any marks because the response did not answer the question. Candidates should be reminded to decode the question carefully as there was no application necessary for this question, yet a vast majority wrote a significant amount about the ways in which Google traded globally.

- (b)** With a facility factor of 65.5 this proved to be the most accessible question on the examination paper. Most candidates provided either a clear definition of innovation or it was implicit throughout their responses meaning AO1 marks could be secured. The majority of candidates made effective use of data within the case study to demonstrate and apply knowledge of the ways in which Google has been innovative. Some candidates could have developed their answers further in this area to secure the 4 AO2 marks that were available. The best responses went on to use the data to provide detailed explanation of how this enabled Google to be innovative.
- (c)** This question focussed on the extent legal factors affect the operations of Google. This was attempted by nearly all candidates but with a varying degree of success. Most candidates used the data from the case study to help illustrate their understanding of the legal factors affecting Google operations and many then went on to analyse these factors, although this was done to a varying degree of success. This question required evaluation with clear judgements being made with supporting statements which restricted a large number of candidates to the lower-level marks for AO4. With 4 of the 10 marks available for this question awarded to AO4, this may be the reason why the mean mark was 6.0/10.
- (d)** This question proved accessible to many candidates, with the second highest attempt factor of 98.0%, a mean of 7.5/12 and a facility factor of 62.2%. Candidates in general showed a good knowledge of both internal and external growth methods thus forwarding the opportunity to discuss the various methods of growth that Google has employed. Many candidates illustrated the various methods using the case study data allowing them to achieve Band 2 for AO2. There were candidates who unfortunately failed to capitalise on using the case study data and thus limited them to Band 1 for AO2. A balanced response with well supported judgements was required to achieve band 3 for AO 3 and AO4, unfortunately the majority of candidates only focussed their response on the benefits of either organic or external growth restricting them to Band 1. With half marks available for this question awarded to AO4, this may be the reason why the mean mark was 7.5/12.
- (e)** It must be noted that this question had two elements to it, to evaluate both internal and external causes of change and to consider the impact on Google and its stakeholders. To achieve AO1 Band 2, candidates needed to show an understanding of both internal and external changes. Unfortunately, there were a large number who addressed only one aspect, and this limited the marks that could be awarded. Candidates did not appear to make as much use of the case study as they have done in the previous questions and many also failed to identify other stakeholders apart from Google. This again prohibited them from accessing the higher bands in this question. Whilst the majority attempted to evaluate the impact of their responses, there were very few who were able to provide a well-supported evaluation which is an area for centres to continue to develop. With an attempt rate of 92.3% and a facility factor of 51.6 this may have been a result of writing far too much on earlier questions with lower mark allocations.

Section B

- Q.2 (a)** This question was popular being selected by 44.9% of candidates. With a mean of 3.9/10 and a standard deviation of 1.7 the quality of answers varied significantly. From the stronger responses, it was clear that candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding of business plans. However, even with the stronger candidates, the main problem was that only a minority of candidates provided any link as to the purpose of a business plan for a start-up social enterprise, thus restricting them from the highest marks in Band 3 for AO1 and Band 2 for AO2. With the weaker responses, there were often a general lack of development as to the purpose of a business plan and instead only a list of the key elements was provided.
- (b)** With a mean of 9.5/20 candidates who opted for this question were able to demonstrate an understanding of small to medium sized enterprises and multinationals. This allowed them to gain the available knowledge marks. Many candidates focused on the benefits that SMEs bring to the economy and the importance of the role that they play, with stronger candidates then moving on to discuss the benefits of large multinational businesses. Very few candidates went on to develop their responses by considering the negative arguments of either SMEs or multinationals, therefore access to Band 3 for AO3 and AO4 was restricted. A number of candidates brought in relevant examples which is recommended to aid and enrich the discussion.
- Q.3 (a)** This was the most accessible of all part (a) questions on Section B, with a facility factor of 42.4%. From the stronger responses, it was clear that candidates displayed good knowledge and understanding of training methods. As with all the part A responses, the main problem was that only a minority of candidates provided examples of where training methods could be used for job roles within the hotel industry, thus restricting them from the highest marks in Band 3 for AO1 and Band 2 for AO2.
- (b)** With a mean of 9.0/20 candidates selecting this question were able to demonstrate an understanding of how effective training can improve the quality of good and services. Candidates demonstrated good understanding of the importance and impact of training methods but lacked any further discussion on other methods that a business can use to improve quality. This significantly impacted the number of marks that could be awarded for AO3 and AO4 as they were restricted to Band 1. The best responses provided counter arguments suggesting other ways a business can improve quality such as the implementation and investment in technology and securing higher quality raw materials. These candidates would then discuss how these methods could lead to better quality and why it was better to invest in these rather than training. A number of candidates brought in relevant examples which is recommended to aid and enrich the discussion. Weaker responses tended to be very long but with little substance, often focussing on a wide range of training methods but providing limited analysis and evaluation.

- Q.4 (a)** Q.4 was the least popular choice amongst candidates with an attempt rate of approximately 21%. The first issue was a lack of understanding of below-the-line promotional strategies. Some answers confused the term with above-the-line promotional strategies. It would be useful for candidates to offer a definition in Section B part (a) questions to demonstrate a clear understanding of concepts tested within the question. Similar to Q.2(a) and Q.3(a), some candidates ignored the context of a manufacturers of breakfast cereals. This naturally limited AO2 marks contributing towards the 2.4-mark standard deviation, the largest of all the Section B part (a) questions.
- (b)** Candidates attempting this question often showed excellent knowledge of e-commerce. Although AO2 marks were not available, better responses made use of real-world examples to help demonstrate analysis and evaluation skills. This helped to build AO3 and AO4 marks as comparisons were easier to draw.
- Many candidates were less certain about the other factors that could affect the success of the business. A few candidates provided excellent responses but only addressed e-commerce therefore were restricted in the marks achieved because they did not fully answer the question. The weakest candidates tended to focus only on one side of the argument the e-commerce is essential to the success of all businesses for much of their answer. With a facilitating factor of 49.1, this was the highest performing 20-mark essay question.

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