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# **GCE EXAMINERS' REPORTS**

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**GCE (NEW)  
BUSINESS  
AS/Advanced**

**SUMMER 2018**

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<b>Unit</b>	<b>Page</b>
Unit 1: Business Operations	1
Unit 2: Business Functions	4
Unit 3: Business Analysis and Strategy	6
Unit 4: Business in a Changing World	10

# BUSINESS

## General Certificate of Education (New)

Summer 2018

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### UNIT 1: BUSINESS OPERATIONS

#### General comments

A full range of responses was delivered across both Unit 1 and Unit 2. Some impressive answers were written and candidates demonstrated an ability to attain marks across all of the four assessment objectives. Emphasis had been placed at recent CPD meetings upon attaining marks through the understanding of the assessment objectives and this does seem to have been reflected in the examination scripts. However, the attainment of marks for application to the scenarios given (AO2) is still an area of concern.

Those with good numerical skills tended to pick up all the marks on offer but there was considerable evidence that a significant number of the cohort lack these skills. 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.

Good communication skills were demonstrated by the upper end of the cohort, although it is fair to say that this is an area that still needs attention. A not insignificant number of scripts were barely legible and centres need to consider scribes and word-processing facilities to candidates with handwriting issues.

#### UNIT 1

- Q1. (a) This straightforward opening task was undertaken competently by the majority of candidates. Failure to write a lucid description was the most common error but many candidates achieved full marks.
- Q1. (b) A similar mean mark to the opening task was recorded for this slightly more challenging task. Again many responses achieved full marks. Vague explanations meant that some candidates did not attain all the marks available.
- Q2. (a) Those who followed the instruction to answer to 2 decimal places and carried out the straightforward calculation attained both marks on offer. Typical errors were - failing to calculate to two decimal places, inability to calculate the total population and failing to use a percentage (%) sign.
- Q2. (b) The good start made by many candidates was not evident in the majority of responses to this evaluative task. Too many candidates do not have a grasp of the important basic concept of 'the public sector'. Explanation of public sector provision in Wales and the UK was often weak or incorrect. Evaluation of the need for a public sector was either limited or non-existent in the majority of cases. Having said that some excellent responses were offered which demonstrated sound understanding of the extent of the public sector, clear explanation of the provision and excellent evaluation. Such responses were, disappointingly, few and far between.

Given the disappointingly low mean mark achieved, centres would be well advised to place greater emphasis on this key concept of the business framework in Wales and the UK.

- Q3. (a) Generally good understanding and explanation of the concept of 'limited liability' was evident and, in the majority of cases, two reasons were offered as to why the choice to change the legal status of the business was undertaken. Those candidates who effectively applied their responses to the scenario achieved full marks. However, many made no reference to the scenario at all, thereby failing to gain any marks related to this assessment objective (AO2).
- Q3. (b) (i) Overall understanding of the concept of market segmentation was good. Those who did not make specific reference to the business in question sacrificed the marks for application (AO2).
- Q3. (b) (ii) The mean mark of 1 for this task was most disappointing. All too often candidates briefly identified a possible benefit and then failed to develop their analysis.
- Q3. (c) The best responses here hit all three of the required assessment objectives. Some excellent analysis and evaluation was evident, along with appropriate application to the situation facing the business in question. However, such responses were very much the exception rather than the rule. The statistics tell us that the candidates found this question to be the most difficult by far. The inability of many of the cohort to build a comprehensive response was very evident. Knowledge related to the problems associated with market research was very limited indeed, with lots of vague generalisations being offered.
- Q4. (a) A straightforward calculation which was dealt with well by the majority of candidates. It is worth noting that the omission of a £ sign occurs too frequently at AS level. This error was penalised.
- Q4. (b) The correct figure could be simply obtained from the diagram, which the majority of candidates did. Even so, a mean mark of 0.6 suggests that many candidates find taking data from a chart challenging.
- Q4. (c) (i) Knowledge of what constitutes fixed costs was generally good and this task delivered the highest facility factor on the paper.
- Q4. (c) (ii) The reason why the fixed cost line in a breakeven chart runs parallel to the horizontal axis was generally understood. The main error was the linking of fixed costs to 'sales' and not 'output'.
- Q4. (d) Another straightforward question which surprisingly did not attain a higher mean mark (0.6). Failing to recognise that a margin of safety is measured in units of output and not pounds sterling (£) was a not uncommon error. Some candidates did not seem to understand the term at all.
- Q4. (e) Those candidates who recognised that there was a percentage fall attained both marks. A 20% fall in profit is very different from a 20% rise in profit and many responses failed to recognise this. Some failed to put a percentage sign and some added a £ sign.

- Q4. (f) Some impressive responses were offered by candidates who had a sound understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of break-even analysis and were able to use good communication skills to argue their case. Middle range responses tended to focus on the benefits, whilst only briefly touching upon the drawbacks. Lower range responses were characterised by weak communication skills and limited knowledge.

## **BUSINESS**

### **General Certificate of Education (New)**

**Summer 2018**

#### **Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**

#### **UNIT 2: BUSINESS FUNCTIONS**

- Q1.1. Some sound understanding of the relationship between cash flow and the various stages of the product life cycle was demonstrated by those candidates achieving top marks. Many, however failed to recognise that the ranges in question ran across more than one stage in the lifecycle and, as a result, their responses were limited. Weaker candidates did not focus on cash flow and some did not mention it at all.
- Q1.2. The best responses to this task appreciated that product life cycles can be used to analyse the sales of existing products, as well as being used to predict sales revenue patterns of new products. This led to some well-developed evaluation. Whilst the majority of candidates were able to offer a response in relation to the benefits of using product life cycles, this was not the case in relation to possible limitations. This is an area of the specification that centres may wish to focus upon to a greater degree.
- Q2.1. Candidates generally dealt well with this task. Top responses used the text effectively to attain the application (AO2) marks on offer. Those who failed to make effective use of the text did, nonetheless, identify important characteristics of an effective purchasing department.
- Q2.2. Good knowledge of appraisal methods was demonstrated by the majority of candidates and the attainment of all four marks was not uncommon. It is worth noting that some candidates penalised themselves in terms of time, by writing far more than was necessary to attain all the marks on offer.
- Q2.3. Some excellent knowledge and analysis was demonstrated in relation to the benefits of carrying out appraisals, resulting in many pleasing responses. Middle of the range responses tended to focus on the motivational aspect of carrying out appraisals and over analysed this benefit to the detriment of other benefits, such as the identification of training needs and potential candidates for promotion.
- Q3.1. A wide range of responses was offered in relation to this task. Excellent knowledge of the key features of lean production was demonstrated accompanied by appropriate development. At the other end of the spectrum candidates had no understanding of the concept whatsoever or focused entirely on just-in-time.
- Q3.2. Some very impressive responses were witnessed at the top end of the cohort, fully covering all three assessment objectives. The knowledge of the concept of just-in-time was generally good and the benefits were often well-explained. Again, the inability to evaluate effectively saw candidates sacrifice marks - although the majority did attempt to offer some counter argument.
- Q3.3. Knowledge of the meaning of cost of sales was generally sound. The fact that these are direct costs related to the production of goods was not always fully appreciated.

- Q3.4. It was pleasing to see candidates following the guidelines in relation to showing the answer to two decimal points, as well as writing out the formula correctly. A common error was to use retained profit in the calculation, as opposed to gross and net profit.
- Q3.5. Overall the responses to this task were disappointing, resulting in a very low mean mark. Surprisingly, 12% of the cohort chose not to attempt the task at all. Some candidates undertook sensible analysis and compared the GPM and NPM of the business in question to the industry averages, realising that the NPM was more of a concern than the GPM. However, a significant number of candidates ignored the fact that the figures related to the industry and not to the business itself - subsequently sacrificing marks. Evaluation was, on the whole, limited. Candidates failed to appreciate that there is a need to compare figures year on year and that average industry figures need to be treated with caution. Understanding the shortcomings of financial data taken out of context is something that centres may wish to place more emphasis upon.
- Q3.6. This task was generally calculated well. Again, the request to calculate to two decimal places was heeded.
- Q3.7. A straightforward task for the majority. Candidates must bear in mind to include £ signs when appropriate. How some candidates feel that £4.65 is an adequate annual salary is a wonder.
- Q3.8. Far too many responses failed to apply their response to the situation facing the business in question. The fact that the business had fifteen retail outlets to sell was largely ignored, as was the fact that the business already had a bank loan – a fact which might well influence the attainment of another one. Those that did refer to the text tended to achieve all the marks on offer. Most responses recognised the role of interest rates and the need for repayment as key discriminators.
- Q3.9 Here application to the scenario was much better and many responses were organised around the planned changes in question. Numerous stakeholders were identified and the impact upon them was analysed effectively. Top answers offered a balanced argument, pointing out both positive and negative impacts on a variety of stakeholders. However, too many responses focussed almost entirely on the negative and sacrificed (AO4) evaluation marks as a result.

# BUSINESS

## General Certificate of Education (New)

Summer 2018

### Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced

#### UNIT 3: BUSINESS ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

##### General comments

This examination paper was accessible to nearly all candidates. Most candidates made excellent use of the time available and attempted all questions, with between 99.6% and 100% of each question being attempted. The quality of written communication was generally good, with very few illegible or incomprehensible scripts. It was pleasing to see a number of excellent scripts from well prepared candidates who demonstrated their knowledge of the specification content and effective use of a range of skills such as; application, analysis and evaluation. It appeared that most candidates used the time of the exam effectively and were able to dedicate sufficient time to all questions. Occasionally candidates missed out a question or provided brief responses: however, this seemed to be due to a lack of knowledge rather than an issue with time.

##### Individual questions

- Q1. (a) (i) Many candidates were able to achieve full marks on this question. The exceptions were when candidates miscalculated, with incorrect use of figures/decimal places, or with a very few showing no understanding of payback period.
- Q1. (a) (ii) Again, a number of candidates achieved full marks on this question and most were able to access AO1 marks by correctly identifying the formula. Where candidates received 0 marks, they unfortunately did not realise that the calculation involved annual profit and used revenue instead. There were a few candidates who had a mark deducted because they failed to include a % sign. Very few scripts suggested no knowledge of ARR.
- Q1. (b) Generally this question was answered well by the majority of candidates, with a few achieving full marks. There was evidence that candidates had been well prepared to analyse and evaluate a decision based on aspects of investments appraisal. It was also clear that a number of candidates understood the value of qualitative data in their evaluation and were therefore able to discuss the decision with reference to the information provided in the case study. However, a minority of candidates provided valid points for discussion but then did not apply their knowledge, analyse or evaluate, which restricted them to the lower bands of the mark scheme.

- Q2. (a) (i) There were mixed responses to this question. Strong candidates were able to accurately achieve full marks. With a requirement of this question being to express the answer as a ratio :1 and with correct use of rounding decimal places. A minority of candidates used the correct formula but were deducted marks for incorrect rounding or failing to answer with a ratio.
- Q2. (a) (ii) Responses to this question were generally weaker than the previous question, with few being able to identify the components of the gearing calculation. Those who achieved a mark of 0, either had no knowledge of the gearing calculation or did not use all components for capital employed, which are shareholder funds + long term liabilities.
- Q2. (a) (iii) There was a wide spread of marks achieved for this question, with many candidates correctly using the formula to calculate the working capital for both 2016 and 2017. Some however, used the correct figures whilst others used incorrect figures. Those candidates who calculated the working capital correctly accessed at least 3 marks. The strongest candidates were also able to correctly calculate the percentage change between the two years. Unfortunately, a few candidates failed to illustrate that the working capital decreased and were therefore unable to achieve full marks. There were also candidates who clearly misunderstood the concept of working capital and used incorrect formulas. Very few chose not to attempt the question.
- Q2. (b) Nearly all candidates attempted this question with varying degrees of success. Many candidates were able to achieve band 2 for AO2 and AO3 by using the data from the calculations for the current ratio, gearing and working capital questions. Even though candidates may have incorrectly calculated in the previous questions, they may have also used the data provided in the balance sheet and the measures of profitability in order to analyse a number of key factors such as issues with profitability, impact on shareholders, liquidity problems, impact of being highly geared and the problems associated with having a limited amount of working capital. Very few candidates were able to address the qualitative factors that would impact financially on Woodland Experience Ltd and could therefore not achieve band 2 for AO4.
- Q3. (a) (i) This was a very accessible question on decision tree diagrams for the well prepared candidates, and many were able to complete it correctly. Some candidates failed to read the requirements in the question and did not fully complete the expected values for A, B and C on the diagram. The most common omission was the total values of success plus failure and some candidates incorrectly calculated the values for success and/or failure when multiplying the probability by the expected returns.
- Q3. (a) (ii) A high majority of candidates correctly calculated the profitability of each of the three options. Some candidates incorrectly calculated the value of either success or failure which resulted in the incorrect profitability of an option. Therefore, these candidates achieved a mark for AO1 but not for AO2.

- Q3. (b) The majority of candidates had a clear approach to this question, clearly using a revised structure and theoretical knowledge to explore at the positives and/or negatives of decision tree analysis and were able to provide an overall conclusion as to whether it would be useful for Fast Snacks PLC. However, candidates struggled to gain AO2 marks by only making it relevant to this particular context. The strongest candidates not only outlined the theoretical positives and negatives but they also developed the arguments by relating their points to relevant data from the decision tree including the probabilities of success and failure, relevant qualitative data linked to specific strategies that may be ignored and options that may not have been included. The strongest candidates who scored the highest AO4 marks made a judgement on the overall usefulness of the theory and also factors that affected the usefulness, such as the experience of those preparing the decision trees. Weaker candidates' answers tended to just list positive and/or negatives without developing or explaining them for better AO3 marks.
- Q3. Overall Question 3 was the second highest scoring question on the paper, but was impacted by the lack of application in question 3 (b).
- Q4. This was the most accessible question on the examination paper with a facility factor of 64.6%. Most candidates were able to identify benefits and/or drawbacks of rationalisation to Barclays Bank. Therefore, many candidates were able to access band 2 for AO1. In the majority of cases, candidates were also able to access band 2 for AO3, with a good progression of arguments provided to demonstrate the effects of rationalisation. However, there were candidates who simply listed points and remained in band 1 for AO3. The strongest candidates were able to provide detailed explanations of both the benefits and drawbacks but also apply their arguments to the data provided in the case study such as the impact on customers in Aberfan, the benefits/drawbacks of providing the 'Digital Eagle' scheme and the impact on existing staff due to the closures.
- Q5. Candidates found the concept of Ansoff's Matrix a challenge, which is possibly the reason why there were examples of brief responses or in some cases, no attempt at a response. For the candidates who attempted the question, many were able to identify the four strategies that make up the matrix but a number of candidates were unable to illustrate good understanding of the strategies by relating them to existing or new markets or products. The strongest candidates used a diagram to demonstrate good knowledge but this was not essential to achieve band 2 for AO1. Those candidates were also able to achieve band 2 for AO3 and band 3 for AO2 by developing points to explain the strategies that Caws Cenarth could use to grow as well as applying information from the case study to support their points. However, those candidates who found this a challenge were unable to develop upon either their limited understanding of Ansoff Matrix or simply provided irrelevant points in an attempt to analyse the strategies.
- Q6. (a) Nearly all candidates attempted this question. However, it was surprising that a number of candidates found it challenging, with too many scripts illustrating a lack of knowledge and understanding in terms of the franchisor responsibilities such as providing training, providing products/equipment and/or a successful business model. It was only the strongest of candidates who were able to provide the correct responses for AO1 and also provide application to ChipsAway to achieve band 2 for AO2. This was despite having sufficient information in the case study. Nevertheless, most candidates were able to achieve 1 or 2 marks for either AO1 and/or AO2.

- Q6. (b) Lots of candidates struggled in their approach to this question. One reason was that there was little or no comparison of franchising with other methods of growth. Therefore, these candidates were restricted to band 1 for AO1, AO3 and AO4. Secondly, for those who did try to compare methods of growth, in most cases there was limited evaluation and those candidates again struggled to move out of band 1. Stronger answers were able to not only evaluate franchising as a form of growth, but effectively compare it with mergers, takeovers and internal methods of growth, whilst discussing the benefits and drawbacks. Additionally, candidates misunderstood the question and discussed franchising from the view of the franchisee and therefore found it difficult to achieve bands 2 and 3. This could be the reason that this question had the lowest mean score on the paper, with a facility factor of 47.3%.

Overall, Question 6 was the second lowest scoring question on the paper, illustrating a lack of knowledge of various methods of business growth.

# **BUSINESS**

## **General Certificate of Education (New)**

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### **Advanced Subsidiary/Advanced**

#### **UNIT 4: BUSINESS IN A CHANGING WORLD**

##### **General comments**

This paper is synoptic and will assess knowledge and understanding gained from the full specification, for example, SWOT analysis is studied in Unit 3 and candidates could include knowledge gained from AS and A Level units. It was pleasing to read responses that illustrated a breadth of knowledge from across the specification. One consequence of this was that candidates tended to write far more than was anticipated. Unfortunately, in some cases, extra quantity did not translate into extra quality.

Nearly all candidates answered all questions in Section A and attempted one of the essay questions in Section B (with one or two unfortunate candidates attempting more than one question and therefore wasting valuable time). This attests both to their hard work and to that of their teachers who had clearly prepared them well for the examination.

Most teachers and candidates are conscious of the need to read questions carefully and pay particular attention to command words. This means, for instance, that they will know when evaluation is expected (key words include assess, consider, discuss and evaluate) and cases where it is not (key words include analyse and explain). Candidates who ignore these command words often waste valuable time in the exam without gaining extra marks. If the question uses the term “such as” application is not required and other examples can and probably should be given.

##### **Individual questions**

###### **Section A**

The questions in this section were based on a short case study concerning the activities of Amazon. This is a business that should be familiar to most, if not all candidates although no detailed knowledge of its operations was required.

- Q1. (a) This was the most accessible and least challenging question on the examination paper with a facility factor of 66.9%. The question asked candidates to explain how changes in technology and market conditions impacted Amazon. The strongest candidates wrote about both technology and market conditions with many making good use of the information in the case study to achieve band 2 for AO1, AO2 and AO3. Whilst most candidates demonstrated knowledge and applied it well to Amazon some answers lacked detailed analysis. It was pleasing that nearly all candidates demonstrated knowledge and understanding of the impact changes in technology or market conditions have or could have on Amazon, therefore achieving band 1 and at least 3 marks.

- Q1. (b) This question required candidates to explain how contingency planning may have aided the survival of businesses experiencing sudden events such as the bursting of the dotcom bubble. The key words in the question were “such as”. As explained in the introduction this means that there are no marks available for application and that the question was not specifically about Amazon or the bursting of the dotcom bubble. Unfortunately, the majority of candidates seemed to be unaware of this and restricted their answers to the bursting of the dotcom bubble. Therefore, it was the least accessible of all questions within Section A, with a facility factor of 55.4%. Despite this, most candidates were able to give a suitable definition of contingency planning and then went on to analyse ways to react to the bursting of the dotcom bubble to achieve the lower end of band 2 for AO1 and AO3. Unfortunately, too few candidates explained the benefits and drawbacks of creating contingency plans. A number of candidates also analysed the impact of the bursting of the dotcom bubble on Amazon’s competitors, which was really not relevant. The best responses developed arguments with reference to the benefits and drawbacks of having contingency plans and these were justified with the use of other examples of risk.
- Q1. (c) Asked candidates to discuss the view that working conditions at Amazon are ethical. Nearly all candidates attempted this question. Many were able to demonstrate clear understanding of ethical behaviour with the best candidates providing an accurate definition. There was an abundance of data in the case study and most candidates were able to provide sufficient application to achieve at least band 1 for AO2. The best responses made effective use of the data to provide detailed arguments either agreeing or disagreeing with the statement. This was required to achieve band 2 for AO2 and AO3. Those candidates who achieved the highest standards were able to provide balanced arguments with effective use of the data to develop detailed arguments.
- Q1. (d) Most candidates understood the concept of SWOT analysis and therefore found this to be an accessible question. The question required candidates to evaluate the strategic position of Amazon by using SWOT. It was pleasing to read responses that illustrated detailed knowledge and understanding of terms and concepts from across the specification. Again, there was a vast amount of information in the case study to allow candidates to apply their knowledge and achieve the higher bands for AO2. Unfortunately, some candidates tended to confuse weaknesses and threats by suggesting internal factors were threats and external factors were weaknesses, therefore these points could not be credited. However, the strongest candidates were able to identify at least one strength, weakness, opportunity and threat. They also provided detailed analysis and well-reasoned developments with supporting judgements to build on arguments.
- Q1. (e) This was the second most challenging question within Section A. It required candidates to consider whether the objective of rapid growth is of benefit to all of Amazon’s stakeholders. Most candidates illustrated an awareness of the stakeholders that would be affected by growth and could demonstrate why they would be affected by growth, which was sufficient for band 1 across AO1, AO3 and AO4. A majority of candidates were able to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of growth on a range of stakeholders to achieve band 2 for AO1, AO3 and AO4. However, only the strongest candidates were able to apply their understanding of how rapid growth would impact on most of the stakeholders of Amazon. The application would refer to the takeover of key rivals mentioned in the case study, the collaborative working/partnerships with businesses such as DC Comics/UK Civil Aviation Authority and the organic growth such as the development of the new distribution centres.

## Section B

Candidates were required to choose one of the three following essay questions. Question 2 was clearly the most popular choice of topics.

- Q2. (a) Most candidates had some idea about protectionist policies with most identifying tariffs and quotas as examples. The better answers outlined a number of different protectionist measures and explained the implications on businesses in Wales and the benefits and drawbacks to trade with European and international countries. The best answers clearly showed detailed knowledge of the impact on importing and exporting businesses. Unfortunately, many candidates found it difficult to apply their response to specific small businesses and/or industries in Wales and therefore used examples of large businesses such as Tata Steel.
- Q2. (b) Candidates were required to evaluate the impact on businesses and stakeholders of the UK leaving the European Union. This is clearly a very topical subject and one which most candidates should be familiar with, which is why it may have been the most accessible of all essay questions with a mean mark of 11.2 out of 20. However, a number of candidates focussed on the political arguments rather than specifically addressing the impact on businesses and stakeholders, thus restricting the marks awarded to the lower bands across the assessment objectives. The better answers showed a clear understanding of how businesses, the government, workers and local communities may benefit or suffer as a result of the UK's withdrawal.
- Q3. (a) Asked candidates to describe the likely public costs and benefits of building a new motorway to connect North Wales with South Wales. This proved to be the most accessible of all questions in Section B with a facility factor 62.1% and a mean mark of 6.2 out of 10. Nearly all of the candidates were able to identify public costs and benefits associated with projects such as this, with points such as the environmental impact and job creation being raised. The very best candidates were able to provide specific application to the context with reference to improved tourism and improvements within the local economy due to more customers and the potential loss of public transport which some of the community may depend on.
- Q3. (b) Candidates were asked to discuss the following statement "Public costs and benefits will always be less valued by businesses than private costs and benefits". This question was not answered well by the vast majority of candidates. Those who did achieve bands 2 and 3 across the assessment objectives were able to define cost/benefit analysis, identify and explain the benefits and drawbacks of considering public costs and benefits. They considered points such as improved image, possible reduction of costs and greater profitability in the long run as well as the difficulty of valuing public costs and benefits. They also identified and discussed businesses with primarily social objectives rather than profit. The best answers then compared this with private sector businesses with the main aim to make profit and evaluated the reasons why private costs and benefits are more important in the pursuit of profit. The strongest candidates provided accurate conclusions.

- Q4. (a) Describing how small firms are likely to survive is often assessed in Unit 1 which may be the reason why this was by far the least popular of the three essay questions. However, there were some excellent responses. Many candidates were able to identify reasons such as personalised service, better relationships, convenience and lower cost but the majority were unable to explain the reasons and provide clear application to the grocery industry, therefore restricting the marks awarded to band 1 for AO1 and AO2. The strongest candidates considered the problems faced by small high street independent stores such as the threat from supermarkets and then with use of excellent examples, explained how they use their personal service and convenience to their advantage.
- Q4. (b) Candidates were required to evaluate the statement 'Customers need protection from exploitation by businesses'. This proved very unpopular with candidates and in general was not answered very well, with a mean mark of 7.3 out of 20. Again, this is addressed in Unit 1, illustrating the synoptic nature of the examination paper. There were examples of very good responses which identified reasons why customers need protection from activities such as false advertising, access to faulty or fake goods (particularly online) and the need to be protected from fraudulent activity. The best candidates explained and analysed these points in great detail but also analysed the benefits of legal protection with for example, the Consumer Credit Act and the existence of organisations such as the Advertising Standards Authority. Unfortunately, even the best candidates failed to address the arguments against the statement in terms of social media allowing customers to report mistreatment, extra costs passed on to consumers as a result of legislation or laws restricting customer choice and the fact that competition naturally leads to companies wanting to improve the quality of goods and services to be competitive. Therefore, very few achieved band 3 for AO4 in this question.



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