

Applied Business

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J213**

General Certificate of Secondary Education (Double Award) **J226**

Examiners' Reports

June 2011

J213/J226/R/11

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This report on the Examination provides information on the performance of candidates which it is hoped will be useful to teachers in their preparation of candidates for future examinations. It is intended to be constructive and informative and to promote better understanding of the specification content, of the operation of the scheme of assessment and of the application of assessment criteria.

Reports should be read in conjunction with the published question papers and mark schemes for the Examination.

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Chief Examiner's Report

This was the fourth examination series for this qualification. In view of the terminal rule, many centres had deferred their entry for units A242, A243 and/or A244 until June 2011. There has been a considerable increase in entries for all units of both the single and double award qualifications.

INSET courses were available during the autumn term of 2010: 'Get Started – getting to grips with delivery and assessment'; and 'Get Ahead – improving delivery and assessment'. These provided the opportunity to discuss the structure of the qualification, controlled assessment, planning, delivery and assessment of all units, together with networking and sharing ideas for best practice. In addition, in-house training events are available on request. Further INSET courses are being offered during autumn 2011 and spring 2012.

Centres are reminded to take into consideration the terminal rule when planning delivery models and entering candidates for examinations and external moderation. Candidates must take at least 40% of the assessment in the same series they enter for either the single award or double award qualification certification, ie. one unit for the single award and two units for the double award. Units can be taken in any order as long as the terminal rules are satisfied. This terminal rule does have implications on delivery, particularly in the way in which the double award is delivered (see Specification page 48 and Teacher's Handbook page 4.)

Another area for consideration is the use of re-sits as an opportunity for the candidate to improve assessment outcomes. Whilst the candidate can re-sit each unit once before entering for certification, centres need to consider the logistical implications of re-sitting both internally and externally assessed units. If a re-sit is used to satisfy the terminal rule, this re-sit result will count towards aggregation, even if it results in a lower mark than the original result (see Teacher's Handbook pages 4 and 7).

With regards to the controlled assessment tasks (see Guide to Controlled Assessment pages 8, 9 and 10), centres are reminded that during the write up (Unit A242 Tasks 1, 3, 4 and 5 and Unit A244 Tasks 2, 3, 4 and 5) candidates should only have access to their research notes which they have made during the research phase of task taking (Unit A242 Task 2 and Unit A244 Task 1). It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that these are only research notes and that they do not include a draft or final version of the tasks. During the write up candidates must not have access to USB, the Internet/ intranet, email or mobile phone. A breakdown of time limits is contained in the Controlled Assessment tasks for A242 and A244. If a candidate is absent when an assessment is carried out, the Controlled Assessment task may be sat at an alternative time provided that the centre is satisfied that security has been maintained by keeping all materials secure. The teacher may give appropriate support and guidance to the candidates during the research phase but verbal and written feedback are not permitted during the write-up phase.

A241 and A243

The candidates had been well prepared with theoretical knowledge of the units. However, they needed to develop examination techniques and apply their answers to the case study and also, in the case of unit A241, to a business they have studied. For unit A241, when questions ask candidates to respond using a business which they have studied, they must apply their answers to the selected business. It is not sufficient merely to name the business and provide a theoretical response. Centres are reminded that calculators are allowed for both examinations. Candidates will be disadvantaged if they do not have access to a calculator, particularly when carrying out calculations within unit A243. When candidates cross out a response and insert a revised answer, it must be clear to the examiner which response should be marked.

Centres must ensure that the responses of their candidates are legible. Increasingly, there are scripts which are difficult to read as a result of the poor handwriting.

A242 and A244

When using the OCR repository, it would be helpful to internal and external moderators if one file per candidate was produced (word document or pdf). There have been instances where a number of files per candidate have been submitted in a variety of formats. The opening of a range of files per candidate is time-consuming for moderators.

For unit A242, different approaches were evident. The majority of centres had selected one scenario for use by the whole cohort. In a small number of centres, a range of scenarios had been used throughout the cohort. Tasks 1, 3, 4 and 5 must be carried out under controlled conditions using the research findings from Task 2. If Task 2 is weak, it is difficult for the candidates to score high marks for the tasks carried out under controlled conditions. There were some lenient assessment decisions, particularly at the higher levels. Some candidates who had been awarded Level 3 marks had not met the Level 3 requirements of the assessment objective; particularly in relation to AO3.

For unit A244, the general pattern appeared to be that candidates had chosen their preferred scenario. Some lenient assessment decisions had been made in Task 2 (AO1) as all the requirements of the unit specification had not been addressed. In some centres, the quality of the work for Task 5 was weaker than that produced for Tasks 2, 3 and 4. This may have resulted from insufficient research on the key issues of applying for a more senior position or insufficient time allocation for Task 5.

A241 Business in action

General Comments

This was the fourth sitting of the unit A241 examination and an increasing number of candidates were entered for this session with a good range of marks being awarded. It was clear that centres had prepared candidates with the theoretical knowledge required to do well on this unit. Visits to businesses and the use of case study material were also evident. As always candidates who have been fully prepared for the examination have generally performed well. Responses indicate a good level of understanding and demonstrate that candidates can apply the subject matter in context.

Questions for this unit will either be purely theoretical, applied to the business given in the texts within the question paper itself, applied to a business such as, or applied to a business which the candidate has studied. The introductory texts need to be read very carefully by the candidates and used, as appropriate, when answering the questions. The texts put the business, in this case Gorse Hill Farm (GHF), in context and give candidates invaluable information which allowed them to apply their answers and enable them to access the higher levels of the mark scheme.

When a question asks the candidate about a business which they have studied, then their answer must clearly relate to that particular business. It is not sufficient to simply write the name of the business and then write a general, possibly theoretical answer. In future examinations, candidates will be asked to state the activity of the business in addition to its name. This is to help them to focus on what their business actually does and then to apply their answer.

Some candidates, when identifying a business which they had studied, had obviously learned a lot about their chosen business, and were able to relate their findings to the questions on the paper, but quite a few seemed to have a limited understanding of how their chosen business actually operated.

In this examination, the 10 mark questions either related to the case study business or a to a business which the candidates had studied. In this paper, 10 mark questions had a maximum of two marks for an answer which was not in context (even if there was application of knowledge). Including the name GHF in the answer a couple of times is not 'context' and an answer of this type will score a low mark. From January 2012 candidates will be able to access Level 2 by demonstrating application of knowledge. They will score a maximum of four marks if their answer is not in the context of the case study business or their chosen business.

It was pleasing to see that more candidates than in previous sessions had been taught to apply their answers to the level of response questions with good use made of the scenario in the question paper. Candidates who did this immediately accessed Level 2. Those who did not, quite often had good analytical skills and demonstrated a high level of business knowledge which, unfortunately, could not be awarded. Candidates across the ability range were able to write at length on all three of the 10 mark questions. Some of the lowest grade candidates actually obtained most of their marks from these three questions.

Questions asking candidates to explain a way or reason are generally marked on a one plus one mark basis. This means that the first mark is awarded for stating or identifying the way or reason. The second mark is for developing that reason (in context, if that is required by the question). It was pleasing to see that a smaller number of candidates than in previous sessions stated two or three different reasons rather than developing one of them. Stating two or three different reasons, limits the candidate to a maximum of half marks on such questions because there is no development of their reasons.

Within the specification there are easily identifiable areas where evaluation questions can be asked. Some of these areas include reference to a business the candidate has studied and some do not. Careful study of the specification will enable centres to plan their visits to businesses to their advantage. The use of the centre as a business is not always beneficial to candidates. An approach to planning could be to select a business or case study to cover each area of the specification where 'a business candidates have studied' is mentioned.

Centres need to ensure that when teaching the theory for this unit candidates have been taught using the terminology in the specification. For example questions 4(a) and 4(b) asked about behaving/operating in an ethical manner. Answers which were examples of being environmentally friendly are not included in the specification under the section ethical manner, and so were not awarded.

Comments on Individual Questions

1(a) – A wide range of alternatives were accepted answers and so, therefore, this part of the question was well answered.

1(b) – This part of the question tested the candidate's understanding of business studies and many answered incorrectly that partnerships have limited liability.

1(c) – The misconception in question 1(b) was often alluded to in this part of the question. As a low tariff question most candidates were able to access Level 2 – using context about the business being run by two brothers, supporting two families, a farm, it currently being a partnership, etc. allowed access into Level 2 when the answer was applied. General understanding of the types of business ownership was good.

2(a) – Candidates were able to gain marks for identification but were often unable to gain the development mark as they were not able to explain why it was important for GHF to set aims.

2(b) – Candidates understood the concept of stakeholders and that different stakeholders would have different interests. They were able to gain a mark for identification of the interest, but the development in the context of the farm shop was not always present.

2(c) – The majority of candidates responded to this part of the question by explaining the nature of a conflict – who was involved and what was the problem was. Few candidates actually explained the interests of each stakeholder.

3(a) – As the question asked 'in a business such as ...' candidates did not need to give specific examples from a farm (although they could do). Candidates seemed to have greater knowledge of the finance functional area. There was a lot of confusion over the tasks of human resources, possibly candidates were unsure and used the word resources in an attempt to answer the question. The question clearly asked about one key operational task. Stating a number of tasks for each functional area could only gain one mark for each functional area as there was no development.

3(b) – This part of the question asked the candidates about the possible consequences if the functional areas did not operate together. Writing about individual areas without tackling the issue of not operating together did not score marks. A lot of candidates were able to explain the consequences if an individual functional area did not perform a specific role, but were unable to make links to other functional areas and, hence, the question was not well answered. When answered in context, candidates focussed on the functional areas, rather than the farm.

3(c) – Candidates who had learnt employment law could answer this part of the question. The Race Discrimination Act, however, was often mistaken for The Race Relations Act.

3(d) – Candidates knew how to develop good working relationships. The main answers were meetings and social events.

3(e) – This part of the question was well answered, but some candidates did not refer to types of ICT.

3f(i) – Answers which stated that ICT was quicker and easier scored no marks. Candidates needed to explain specific benefits.

3f(ii) – This part of the question was answered better than question 3(f)(i). Most candidates used the increased cost and the resulting effect as their response.

4(a) – This part of the question asked about an ethical manner and not about being environmentally friendly. There was a wide range of excellent ideas in context. A few candidates solely focussed on environmental factors for which they could obtain no credit.

4(b) – This part of the question was answered particularly well as candidates demonstrated that they had a good understanding of what it means to be 'ethical'. A number of high profile businesses have been affected by this situation and candidates wrote well if they knew of such cases. However, many candidates spent their time writing about the ethical aspects, rather than the consequences of not being ethical.

5a(i) and a(ii) – This was the first occasion in which the topic of franchising has been tested. These two parts of the question were well answered as long as the candidates understood the difference between a franchisor and a franchisee.

5(b) – There was evidence that candidates had a better understanding than in the past of what it means to be enterprising by taking a risk.

5(c) – Most candidates gained one mark on this part of the question for a suggestion or for new idea(s).

A242 Making Your Mark in Business

General Comments

In view of the terminal rule, many centres deferred their entries for unit A242 until this series. There was a significant increase in entries this series, so observations in this report are based on a greater range of centres and candidates than was the case previously.

The controlled assessment materials for this unit are available via OCR Interchange. Candidates must use one of the five scenarios provided by OCR. Work was moderated using all five scenarios. It is acceptable for candidates to use the actual names of their selected business and competitors within their work, rather than using the names within the scenarios. Candidates must, however, ensure that they follow the requirements of the chosen scenario. Scenario 3, for example, requires candidates to recommend 'ideas of other products or services the business can offer both in its shops and through the internet'. In the work of some candidates, the new products or services were not entirely clear.

Task 1 (AO2). Candidates must produce an action plan, addressing each of the bullet points within the task (2 hours allocated). Candidates would benefit from using a tabular format to design the action plan, clearly showing how each task will be approached. Candidates would also benefit from focussing the action plan on Task 2, ie. to obtain information on target market needs and competitor activity in relation to the business scenario. Following Task 1, candidates should use the action plan as a working document. They may need to make changes to the original plan as the investigation progresses. In order to achieve Level 3, the action plan must be comprehensive and fit for purpose. Monitoring must take place, with changes being made and reasons being given for the changes. Candidates should indicate how the changes have impacted on other actions.

Task 2. This task is based on research and carries no marks. However, it was apparent from some of the work moderated that questionnaire design was weak and that limited secondary research had been undertaken. As a consequence, some candidates had minimal information on which to base their controlled assessment tasks. These weaknesses were reflected in the marks awarded. In the design of the questionnaire, it was helpful if candidates had an understanding of the marketing mix of the selected business. Primary research could also take the form of an interview with a member of staff, observations, or acting as a mystery shopper. Primary and secondary research should focus on the marketing mix.

Task 3 (AO1). A brief introduction would be helpful stating which real business is being studied and which competitors are being investigated. Candidates are required to clearly identify and describe how the chosen business is currently meeting the needs of the target market. The current customers may not necessarily be the target market from the scenario and candidates should describe the target market the business actually has. There tended to be implied evidence but it needs to be more explicit in relation to what the business currently offers the target market. The final bullet point within the task requires candidates to describe **two** ideas of how the business could better meet the needs of its target market and be more successful than its competitors, making reference to the marketing mix. In order to achieve Level 3, candidates must suggest two relevant ideas for improvement, with explicit links to more than one aspect of the marketing mix. Candidates must describe how the ideas will impact on the target market. The two ideas must be based on findings from their research and may be derived from any aspect of the marketing mix: Scenario 1 (eg. refurbishing salon, new product(s), price reduction); Scenario 3 (eg new products or services); Scenario 5 (eg. new product(s), targeted promotion, price deals).

Task 3 (AO2). Candidates must present their research findings in appropriate formats in relation to both customers and competitors. The use of tables to compare products/services and prices is an effective technique. For Level 3, there should be accurate interpretation, with detailed coverage of both customers and competitors. Data should be presented in a variety of appropriate formats with supporting explanations, eg. charts, graphs, tables, location maps. There will be few, if any, errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Task 4 (AO1). For Level 2, candidates must provide a comprehensive description of the reasons **why** it is important for businesses to promote. Descriptions are enhanced by the use of a range of examples from businesses. Some candidates had described **how** rather than **why** businesses promote.

Task 4 (AO2). The item of promotional material must link to one of the ideas from Task 3, eg. producing an item of promotional material for the new product idea. For Level 3, the item of promotional material should be clearly applied to the business, the target market and based on research. Some candidates had included a second copy of the promotional material which had been clearly annotated and cross-referenced to show how it was fit for purpose, particularly targeted to research outcomes and target market. Annotations could also show reasons for the choices made, eg. font size, colours, images.

Task 4 (AO3). Candidates must address each of the three sections within the third bullet point. A frequent omission was section one – why your chosen item of promotional material is more appropriate than any other. Links to the target market need to be clear in the evaluation, including how the promotion will attract the target market. Evidence from research should support judgements. At Level 3, an evaluation of costs may consider different ways of producing and distributing promotional material.

Task 5 (AO3). Candidates must use their action plans in order to address both bullet points within the task. Some candidates would benefit from using a range of criteria to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of their skills and teamwork. For Level 3, candidates are required to reflect on a range of skills, supported by the action plan. An in-depth evaluation is required of their own contribution and reflection on other group members' contributions, with strong and regular links to the action plan. There will be few, if any, errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation. For Levels 2 and 3 candidates need to make links to their action plan. This could include reflecting on the process of creating an action plan and any benefits they derived from this process. They also need to reflect on the changes they made to the action plan and why they feel those changes which were necessary. They may like to consider whether or not the changes were avoidable had they worked in a different way. Candidates also need to make judgements about their contribution to the group. Did they have a large or small impact on the group? Were they effective as a team player? What evidence is there for this? Did they take a leading role? Did they solve any issues? Candidates need to support the judgements they are making with examples.

A243 Working in Business

This is the fourth session in which this unit has been assessed. There was a significant entry; therefore, the observations have some grounding and can be supported from evidence, but these will become more accurate as the entry further increases.

The content of this unit is wide in both its depth and breadth; therefore, it is important that candidates are particularly well prepared for this examination. Revision guides and practice at examination questions are an important part of the revision process for this unit.

Due to the depth and breadth of the specification, and as noted in the specification, not all aspects will necessarily be tested in each paper. The only constant will be the finance functional area which will take up about one quarter of the marks allocated in each paper.

The use of a calculator is allowed and centres are recommended to urge candidates to use one as this will assist in the accuracy of their calculations. These will inevitably take place in the finance aspect of the paper, but could also take place in other aspects; for example, as in this paper, when candidates were asked to complete a pay slip.

Centres should note that specific ICT applications such as spreadsheets and databases will be tested within this paper. A spreadsheet was included on this paper.

Centres still need to prepare candidates to effectively answer the longer questions which are assessed using level of response criteria, and also the candidates' quality of written communication. There is evidence that where centres have done this, the structure and style of the candidates' responses allowed them to attain the higher marks. Candidates must be reminded to make good use of the stimulus material which is provided within the question paper – either within the text boxes themselves or in the question stem. This information has been provided for the purpose of helping candidates to tackle questions requiring them to demonstrate the higher level skills of analysis, evaluation and supported judgement. Centres should be aware that questions have been designed so that all candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate the Level 3 skills of analysis and evaluation. In the 2012 sessions the longer response questions will have an eight mark tariff.

Most candidates made an attempt at all the questions on the paper and there were some very full and competent answers. There was clear evidence that most centres are familiar with the specification and have prepared their candidates fully; however, some candidates had clearly entered the examination room without **pens** or **calculators**. Calculators are identified as required additional materials on the examination paper. Centres need to ensure that all candidates are suitably equipped to enable them to reach their highest potential.

Comments on individual questions.

Question 1

Part (a) was generally well answered; however, some candidates misread the question and only identified one, rather than two types of business organisation.

Part (b) asked for a task which a chief executive may carry out and this was extremely poorly answered with candidates generally being unaware of the chief executive's executive role.

Question 2

Part (a) was well answered by the candidates who read the question but there were a number who ignored the instruction to pick examples from the list in Text 2.

In part (b) many candidates were able to identify the advantage of using a website; however, very few explained the advantage for the additional development mark. The same was true of part (c).

Candidates were able to answer part (c) in the context of documents and this immediately allowed them to access Level 2 context marks. Candidates were able to explain the advantages and disadvantages of the storage of electronic and hard copy documents. Those candidates at the upper end of the mark range were able to explain the impact on the administrative functional area.

Question 3

Part (a) was well answered; however, there were some candidates who were under the erroneous impression that VAT is a deduction from take home pay.

If candidates knew that the answer to part b(i) was automated, then they were able to gain some credit in the second part of the question. There was a fair amount of ignorance on behalf of the candidates with regards to BACS.

The calculations in part (c) were generally correct but some candidates did not gain full credit because they forgot to include the appropriate units.

The cash flow forecast in part (d) was very well answered with very few candidates getting the calculations incorrect. Part (e) asked the candidates to comment on the usefulness of a cash flow forecast when considering expansion. Those candidates who understood that cash flow forecast is a tool to forecast liquidity were able to access Level 3 marks. However, many candidates did not answer the question and merely took information from part (d) which only allowed access to Level 1 marks, and many are still under the misconception that cash flow relates to profit and loss for which no credit can be given.

Question 4

In part (a) candidates were able to gain mark but did not access any development marks, and in part (b) many gained one mark because they were unable to identify more than one method of market research as required by this part of the question.

In part (c) most candidates were able to obtain one mark for both the advantages and disadvantages, but they then failed to explain them in order to obtain the development marks.

Question 5

Part (a) was well answered by candidates as they were able to identify the tasks of the administrative staff. The spreadsheet in part (b) was also well answered; however, very few candidates were aware of the autosum function, and those who understood the working of a spreadsheet were able to answer part (c) which asked for an advantage of a spreadsheet.

The construction of types of business communication is part of this unit. In part (d) candidates were asked to create a formal letter, from given information. Most candidates were able to document the content of the letter but many were unable to construct the outline of a formal letter correctly and because of this inability very few were able to access Level 3 marks.

Candidates should be taught to construct a fully-blocked business letter – and preferably with open punctuation.

Question 6

Candidates were generally able to identify the tasks of the customer service functional area as required in part (a). However, in part (b), although many candidates were able to identify and explain fire drills, they found it much more difficult to suggest other emergency procedures.

In part (c) candidates were asked to evaluate the consequences to *PS plc* of not keeping its customers happy; however, some candidates described customer service, while others referred to keeping customers happy for which no credit was given. Those candidates who answered the question gained appropriate credit.

The advice to centres is, firstly, to teach candidates to read and answer the questions. Secondly, that their candidates must make sure that when, for example, one advantage, etc, is required then they must develop that advantage in order to access the development marks.

Please note: In future sessions the questions which assess the candidates' quality of written communication and which allow the candidates to demonstrate their analytical and evaluative skills (AO3) will have an eight mark allocation. This is to achieve a more discernable differentiation between the candidates when assessing these two skills.

A244 Business and you

General Comments

In view of the terminal rule, the majority of centres deferred entry for the double award unit A244 until June 2011. This is the first opportunity to report observations on the moderation of this unit. The controlled assessment materials are available via OCR Interchange. Candidates must use one of the five scenarios provided by OCR. Work was moderated using all five scenarios.

Task 2 (AO1). Candidates must identify and describe the main activities of the human resources functional area. Candidates need to ensure that all four bullet points from page 35 of the unit specification have been covered in their descriptions. For Level 2, thorough descriptions of all four bullet points are required.

Task 2 (AO2). Centres are reminded that candidates must complete the application form provided by OCR and not re-create their own version. The application form should be supported by a CV and letter of application. For Level 3, the application documents must be fit for purpose, extremely focused and targeted on meeting the needs of the chosen job role. Candidates should match their skills, abilities and qualifications to the job description and person specification.

Task 2 (AO3). Candidates must produce a coherent and in-depth evaluation on why the application documents are fit for purpose and will result in an interview. Evidence must show strong levels of analysis and judgement of why the application pack will be successful. The evaluation must consider all three documents and why they are fit for purpose. Justification is required of why the application pack will be successful (or unsuccessful). There will be few, if any, errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

Task 3 (AO1). For Level 2, a thorough description is required of what makes an effective interview process from the perspective of both the employee and the employer. Where candidates only focus on either the employee or the employer, marks are limited to Level 1.

Task 3 (AO2). Candidates must identify potential questions which would be asked by the interviewer and explain why each would be asked in relation to the job role. For Level 3, the interview questions must be extremely focused and targeted on the chosen job role; not generic questions. Detailed reasons why the questions are suitable for the interview for the specific job role are required.

Task 3 (AO3). Candidates need to evaluate how the five laws outlined on page 36 of the unit specification impact on the recruitment and selection process for their selected job role. Candidates need to avoid generic explanations of how legislation impacts on the recruitment and selection process. They must link these to their chosen job role.

Task 4 (AO1). Candidates must produce an induction programme suitable for a new employee and not merely describe the induction process. For Level 2, all the key features should be covered including content, activities, timings and venue.

Task 5 (AO2). Candidates must produce a training programme with supporting explanations and not merely provide a description. The training programme must clearly show the key features which will equip the employee with the added skills and competencies needed for a more supervisory job role. The training programme must focus on the role of a supervisor including methods for learning, skills required for the role, duration of training, venue and costs involved.

Task 5 (AO3). Candidates must assess how day-to-day activities may change in a more supervisory role. For Level 3, evidence must show in-depth analysis of how skills may change in the supervisory role. Judgements are required. There will be few, if any, errors of grammar, punctuation and spelling.

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