

Business and Communication Systems

General Certificate of Secondary Education **GCSE J230**

Report on the Units

June 2010

J230/R/10

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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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CONTENTS

General Certificate of Secondary Education

Business and Communication Systems J230

REPORT ON THE UNITS

Unit/Content	Page
Chief Examiner's Report	1
A265 Businesses and their communication systems	2
A266 Developing business communication systems	6
A267 ICT skills for business communication systems	7

Chief Examiner's Report

Centres appear to have adjusted well to the requirements of this new specification which replaces the legacy 1950 qualification.

Centres are strongly advised to read this report in conjunction with the assessment materials (question papers/controlled assessment tasks and mark schemes), together with the support material available on the OCR website.

Most candidates coped well with the new style untiered written paper for A265. Most issues raised in the Principal Examiner's report can be summarised as follows: candidates should be encouraged to answer in the context of the question in order to gain higher level marks and centres need to ensure that they cover all aspects of the specification to allow candidates the maximum opportunity to do well.

The majority of candidates produced high quality controlled assessment work on unit A266 and adjustments to marks, where made, were mainly designed to align all centres to the same national standard.

The practical examination for unit A267 worked well with most candidates having little difficulty in completing all tasks set. Centres are advised which the wording of the tasks that was used in this year's papers will be used in future – this is particularly to enable all candidates to know exactly when to print and what to include on their printed documents.

There will be additional INSET provision this year. 'Get Started' courses will continue (as during 2009-2010) to introduce the qualification to centres delivering it for the first time. 'Get Ahead' courses will also be offered which will review the performance of candidates during this first year and will provide delegates with opportunities to share experiences and discuss any issues they may have had whilst delivering the specification. Details of all INSET provision are available from the OCR Customer Contact Centre on 01223 553998 or OCR's website: www.ocr.org.uk/training.

A265 Businesses and their communication systems

General comments

This was the first examination session in which a paper for this unit of this new GCSE qualification was sat. Centres may wish to study the reports for the legacy qualification (1950); however, they should not be taken to be an indication of the standards required for this new unit – not least because the legacy qualification included tiered papers for Foundation and Higher candidates.

This paper is for candidates of all ability throughout the GCSE range. The marks awarded suggest that it achieved its aim of being accessible to all candidates – with very few instances of a large proportion of no response to questions – even at the bottom of the mark range.

The following comments have previously appeared in reports for the legacy qualification. After this first session of this new unit it is clear that there is a need to reproduce them here.

There are still many instances of candidates failing to gain marks due to a misreading of the questions. If a question asks candidates to explain the drawbacks to customers, they will score no marks for a list of benefits to the business. Some candidates showed good examination technique by planning their responses to six mark questions and by underlining the command words in each question.

Centres are once again reminded that where questions ask candidates to name a particular type of applications software (eg. spreadsheet), they will gain no marks for giving a brand name (e.g. Microsoft Excel or Apple Numbers). The specification requires candidates to have knowledge of types of applications software, not examples of software applications.

A number of candidates still believe that “quick” and “easy” are benefits of using business communication systems. These answers will only gain credit if they are explained by offering a relevant comparator, eg. sending an email is quicker than sending a letter by post.

Some candidates appear to believe that their answer to a six mark question should include six points. Candidates are encouraged to take more careful note of the command words in the questions. ‘Bullet point’ type answers are only appropriate for ‘state’ or ‘identify’ type questions. These candidates are extremely unlikely to gain more than half marks for ‘describe’, ‘explain’ or ‘analyse’ type questions and are probably only going to achieve Level 1 (one or two marks out of six) for ‘evaluate’ or ‘assess’ type questions.

There are increasing instances of candidates who attempt to offer evaluation type responses to the ‘evaluation’ questions but who are not awarded Level 3 (five to six marks). This is typically because these candidates either offer an unsupported conclusion (eg. “so to conclude, the advantages outweigh the disadvantages”) or because their evaluation is based upon incorrect or irrelevant analysis. Evaluation marks are awarded to candidates who either offer a reasoned summary of their argument (eg. “so to conclude, desk top publishing software should not be used because it is easier to produce this report using a word processor, because the report will mainly consist of text”) or who are able to prioritise factors relevant to an issue (eg. “e-procurement is an important tool for businesses providing they are able to ensure that the system is secure and reliable”). Candidates who offer rote learned generalised conclusions which could be applied to any evaluation question regardless of context will not be awarded Level 3.

Comments on individual questions

1(a)

Most candidates correctly identified all five errors within this part of the question. Weaker responses failed to find five errors or circled correctly spelt words.

1(b)

Most candidates scored full marks on this part of the question. Weaker candidates appeared confused by the words 'input' and 'output'.

1(c)

Only a minority of the candidates could offer a valid benefit to the business of saving files to a memory stick; however, most candidates were well aware of the drawbacks – sometimes perhaps gained from personal experience.

1(d)

Most candidates could offer some relevant points or a one-sided analysis and so scored one or two marks. A very small number of candidates could offer the balanced discussion of both benefits and drawbacks leading to an overall judgement which was needed to achieve three or four marks.

2(a)

This part of the question presented few difficulties to candidates.

2(b)(i)

Only a minority of candidates failed to score any marks on this part of the question. Of those who did, most did so by identifying locks as a valid method, very few gave a second method.

2(b)(ii)

Very few candidates answered this part of the question successfully. A very small minority knew that access rights could be assigned to different users. Very few then discussed how this could help restrict access to the network. Many candidates did not have the knowledge required to answer the question and so discussed physical security measures or the default responses to such questions ('usernames' and 'passwords').

2(c)

Most candidates gained at least one mark on this part of the question – usually for knowing what 'spam' is and how it can be reduced. Very few knew what spyware was or what it could do.

2(d)

Most candidates could offer some relevant points or a one-sided analysis and so scored one or two marks. A very small number of candidates could offer the balanced discussion of both benefits and drawbacks leading to an overall judgement which was needed to achieve three or four marks.

3(a)

Most candidates knew all three Acts. Very few did not know any of them.

3(b)(i) and (ii)

Most candidates could easily identify three health problems. Rather fewer could state actions the user could take. Incorrect answers usually referred to actions the employer could take (eg purchase ergonomically designed equipment) or were too vague; eg. using a comfortable chair (an armchair?) – rather than a properly equipped one.

3(b)(iii)

Most candidates gave the correct response to this part of the question.

3(c)

As with similar questions, the large majority of candidates could offer some relevant knowledge to answer this part of the question and so gain at least one or two marks. Approximately half could then offer an analysis resulting in three or four marks but only a few offered a judgement based on a balanced discussion needed to trigger Level 3 marks.

4(a)

Most candidates could offer one valid reason, usually then adding a second.

4(b)

This part of the question proved slightly harder for candidates than the previous question. Weaker responses were unrelated to sole traders.

4(c)

Most candidates either did not know, or had a muddled recollection of, limited liability. Those candidates who did know gained at least one mark for realising it helped protect shareholders by limiting their debt liability but few gained a further mark, eg. for explaining when this might happen.

4(d)

Most candidates had sufficient knowledge to answer this part of the question which, like some others, touched on topics which were not part of the legacy specification.

4(e)

Most candidates could recommend a development as having the greater influence, but very few then proceeded to justify this choice on the basis of either a clear analysis of it (Level 2) or on the basis of a balanced consideration of both influences (Level 3). There was evidence that many candidates were not prepared for this type of question, despite it being directly related to an assessment objective in the specification.

5(a)

Most candidates scored well on this part of the question. A confusion between an ISP and a URL being the common weakness.

5(b)

This relatively straightforward part of the question yielded good marks for most candidates.

5(c)(i)

Most candidates had sufficient relevant knowledge to gain at least one mark on this part of the question

5(c)(ii)

Very few candidates could provide one, let alone three stages in the process of data encryption.

5(d)

As with similar questions, the large majority of candidates could offer some relevant knowledge to answer this part of the question and so gain at least one or two marks. Approximately half could then offer an analysis resulting in three or four marks but only a few offered a judgement based on a balanced discussion needed to trigger Level 3 marks.

6(a)

Very few candidates had any relevant knowledge of the WEEE regulations. Of those who did, most gained one or two marks for recognising that the manufacturer is responsible for the product's safe recycling, and that this raises their costs. Very few candidates then saw the effects that a desire to reduce these costs would have on the environmental impact of producing such products.

Report on the Units taken in June 2010

6(b)

Most candidates scored at least two marks on this part of the question for identifying two methods, although few then explained how they would reduce environmental impact.

6(c)

A surprisingly large minority failed to offer a correct response to this part of the question.

6(d)

Compared to the other six mark questions, this one drew a larger proportion of poor responses with a large minority of the candidates failing to score any marks. Clearly, the concept of ethical trading was one that many candidates found difficult. Still, at least half of all candidates scored half marks.

A266 Developing business communication systems

General comments

This was the first assessment of this unit of the new GCSE. The controlled assessment is aimed at candidates at all levels and the breadth of marks awarded suggests that it was accessible to all candidates.

Most centres chose Scenario 2 and candidates completed the report for the head teacher about the ways in which the school communicates with parents/guardians, making recommendations about improvements, along with the letter to parents/guardians to persuade them to accept these changes. This allowed candidates to use the valuable resource of the school itself in carrying out their investigations.

Since this is a controlled assessment, centres should bear in mind that only the work which is completed within the time limit should be submitted, additional work which was completed as part of the investigation is not required. In addition, the work has to be that of the candidate and when structures for letters, etc. are taught there must still be the availability for the candidate to complete the task to show their own knowledge.

Most centres completed all of the paperwork accurately and required samples were dispatched quickly. Centres should make sure that controlled assessment cover sheets (CCS309) are checked for arithmetic errors so that candidates are not penalised. These cover sheets give an indication of where marks have been allocated for each part of the tasks. In addition to these marks it is always useful to see additional annotation by the teacher on each individual piece of coursework. This will show where teachers allocated the marks and also the reasons for the band awarded. Some centres completed this but it would help the moderation process further if it was a policy adopted by all centres for future sessions.

Comments on the individual tasks

Task 1

The application of the assessment criteria by individual centres was generally good. Some centres, however, did err on the lenient side and award marks at the higher end of each mark band, in particular Mark Band 3 where, to obtain the highest marks, the candidate must analyse and assess in detail and also justify comprehensively. Centres should also bear in mind that each section follows from one to the other and recommendations for an improvement must come from an analysis of the current system and the opinions of the stakeholders and their recommendations.

Task 2

Centres are reminded that in order to obtain the highest mark the letter or leaflet should be of a near professional quality, virtually error free and be very convincing in communicating the proposals to the stakeholders.

A267 ICT skills for business communication systems

General comments

In terms of questions and level of difficulty the paper was deemed suitable. There was a wide range of questions which were suitable for the low ability and were able to fully stretch the more able candidate. The candidates who scored better were those who did not get bogged down with a problem area and moved swiftly onto the next task. It was these candidates who divided their time up well and did what they could of each question who were the most successful. As for printing, the vast majority of candidates followed the specific instructions to ensure that their details were printed on each document. These detailed printing instructions are provided for candidates so that they are aware of each and every occasion when a document has to be printed – so that marks are not lost as a result of a failure to provide the examiner with evidence that a part of the task has been completed.

Many candidates demonstrated good skills with databases. Most candidates were able to edit the database, care needs to be taken when transcribing data as, in some cases, lower level marks were sometimes lost through this failure. The vast majority of candidates were able to insert fields and sort data. The majority of candidates were able to create queries and reports; however, some candidates failed to complete these tasks, especially the report on the query.

There was a wide range of understanding of how to create a mail merge letter and the ability to set out a formal business letter. This seemed to vary from centre to centre.

There was generally good understanding of the advantages of storing data electronically rather than on paper; however, candidates often failed to relate this to the business, leaving them unable to access higher marks. The same was found whilst comparing spreadsheets to databases for storing information. Most candidates who attempted this task were able to state things that a database could do that a spreadsheet could not; hence, explaining why they were more suitable. The vast majority of candidates, unfortunately, then failed to evaluate. Centres would be advised to review 'evaluate' type questions with their candidates.

Although the memo was not always completed, it was it was usually done well and in the correct style when submitted.

Comments on individual questions

Task 1

(a)(i)

Candidates were awarded one mark for correctly deleting a specific record. This was done well.

(a)(ii)

Candidates were awarded up to three marks for editing a member's details. This was done well, however, some candidates transcribed the postcode incorrectly thus losing marks.

(a)(iii)

Candidates were awarded up to six marks for adding the details of a new member. This was attempted by the majority of candidates. The majority of candidates transcribed the details correctly, although some misspelt the member's surname.

(b)(i)

Candidates were awarded up to three marks for inserting a new field, in the correct place using the correct data type. This was done well by the vast majority of candidates; however, very often all the details of the field were not displayed properly and candidates lost a mark.

(b)(ii)

Candidates were awarded up to three marks for correctly transcribing the details of members' telephone numbers. This was mostly done well. Occasionally, however, the incorrect phone number was transcribed and occasionally it was entered in the wrong place.

(b)(iii)

Candidates were awarded up to two marks for sorting the 'Date Joined' field in ascending order. Most candidates were able to complete this part of the task.

(c)(i)

Candidates were awarded up to three marks for creating a specific query using the software. The candidates who attempted this part of the task did it well. Some candidates, however, did not attempt this part of the task.

(c)(ii)

Candidates were awarded up to two marks for creating a report of the query they created in the previous part of the task. As with the previous part of the task, when this was attempted it was done well. Some candidates, unfortunately, did not attempt this part of the task.

(d)

The candidates were awarded up to 14 marks for creating a business style, formal, mail merge letter. The ability to complete this part of the task varied greatly. Even if the candidate was unable to set up a mail merge, they were still able to access many marks; therefore, most candidates gained quite a few marks - even if the task was not set up as a mail merge. Some candidates lost marks through incorrect style of the business letter and a lack of evidence as specified in the instructions.

Task 2

(a)(i)

Candidates could gain up to six marks for comparing why businesses store information electronically rather than on paper. Some candidates, unfortunately, did not attempt this part of the task. The majority of candidates who attempted this part of the task gained marks and were able to come up with plausible answers. Many candidates, however, failed to take their answers any further in order to access higher level marks by relating this to the business. However, there were candidates who did this very well and structured their answers to a high standard.

(a)(ii)

Candidates could gain up to nine marks for evaluating the extent to which a business would be better off storing member details on a database rather than on a spreadsheet. Once again some candidates did not attempt this part of the task. The candidates who did attempt this part of the task were able to access the lower level marks by successfully stating what a database could do that a spreadsheet could not. Some candidates were able to take their answers a level further by stating what impact this would have on the business. Very few candidates were then able to evaluate the impact on the business.

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