

Applied Business

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J213**

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

OCR Report to Centres

January 2012

J213/J226/R/12J

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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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Overview

INSET courses were available during the autumn term of 2011: '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 the assessment of all units, together with networking and the sharing of ideas for best practice. In addition, in-house training events are available on request. Further INSET courses are being offered during autumn 2012 and spring 2013.

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 in which they enter for either the single award or the 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 rule is 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 aspect for consideration is the use of re-sits as an opportunity for the candidates to improve their assessment outcome(s). Whilst a 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, then it is this re-sit result which 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 phase (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, Internet/intranet, email or mobile phone. A breakdown of time limits is contained in the Controlled Assessment tasks for units 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 through the keeping of 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.

Units A241 and A243

The candidates had been well prepared with theoretical knowledge of the units. However, they needed to develop their examination techniques and to apply their answers to the scenario(s) and also, in the case of unit A241, to a business which they had studied. For unit A241, when a question asks the candidates to respond using a business which they had studied, they must apply their answer 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 A243. Centres must ensure that all candidates are suitably equipped with a pen and a calculator.

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

Units A242 and A244

In view of the terminal rule, there were few entries for units A242 and A244 this series. Centres should, therefore, refer to the Principal Moderator's Report from the June 2011 examination series.

A241 Business in Action

As always candidates who have been fully prepared for the examination have generally performed well. Responses indicated a good level of understanding and demonstrated that the candidates could apply the subject matter in context.

Questions on this unit will either be purely theoretical, applied to the business given in the texts within the question paper itself, 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 JR Tours Ltd, in context and gave candidates invaluable information which allowed them to apply their answers and enabled them to access higher levels of the mark scheme.

When a question asks the candidate about a business which they have studied their answer must clearly relate to that particular business. It is not sufficient to simply write the name of the business and state the activity of the business then write a general, possibly theoretical, answer. This was the first series in which candidates were asked to state the activity of the business. This was designed to help them to focus on what their business actually does and then 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 limited understanding of how their chosen business actually operated.

In this examination, the 10 mark questions either related to the case study business or to a business which the candidates have studied. This was the first series where candidates were able to access Level 2 by demonstrating application of knowledge (not necessarily in context). They scored a maximum of four marks if their answer was applied knowledge in theory, rather than in the context of JR Tours Ltd or a business which they had studied. This method will continue in future series.

It was pleasing to see that more candidates than in previous series had been taught to apply their answers to the level questions with good use made of the scenario in the question paper. Candidates who did this accessed Level 2 – five marks. Those who did not, quite often had good analytical skills and demonstrated a high level of business knowledge which unfortunately could not be awarded above four marks. 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 were actually picking up 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 in 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 they are not developing 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' has been 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 knowing what constitutes sustainable development and understanding what is a valid change in a business practice.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 (a) This part of the question was designed as a straight forward introduction to the paper.
(b)(i) and (b)(ii) – Both parts asked the candidates to answer from the perspective of JR Tours Ltd rather than a shareholder in the business.
(c) Some candidates did not answer part (i) correctly, giving aims which did not reflect the start of the business, ie: expansion
(d) Candidates wrote slogans rather not mission statements. Few candidates were awarded both marks for part (ii).
- 2 (a) Candidates were able to answer part (i) well but through not reading the question carefully enough wrote another task carried out by the employees within head office, rather than a task carried out at branch level.
(b) Many candidates were able to identify key marketing tasks/activities such as advertising or putting on special offers, although some struggled to explain the overall purpose of the functional area
(c) Many candidates did not seem understand the purpose of the administration functional area. On occasions human resources tasks were offered as an answer. Some candidates could identify that the functional area dealt with paperwork.
(d) Some basic responses were given to this part of the question – “the business will not operate smoothly”. There did not seem to be a solid grasp of how the inability to work together can impact on overall efficiency, costs and communication.
(e) This part of the question was answered very well by most candidates.
(f) Good answers were seen to this part of the question with both marks awarded for most of the ways given. However, a number of candidates suggested ways which formed part of a contract of employment so lost valuable marks.
- 3 (a) Most candidates were able to give the name of a charity. Centres need to make candidates aware of which well known organisations are not actually charities. Selling goods in the charity shop was a common error for the second mark.
(b) Many candidates gave responses relating to promotion and advertising, rather than to changes in systems and working practices.
(c) Most candidates made a good attempt at explaining how the business could change its existing business practices but with little attempt at analysis. If there was any, most of the time candidates presumed that less customers would mean liquidation or bankruptcy with no pathway to the latter evident. Context of the business showing the applied nature of the qualification is improving but still needs to be practised.
(d) Some answers to this part of the question incorrectly linked sustainability to the business surviving or just giving examples rather than a definition.

- (e) Whichever way part (d) was answered affected responses to this part of the question.
 - (f) The allowance of using the content of the given bullet points as context enabled more candidates to commence their marks at five marks with more achieving Level 3 analysis. Candidates generally understood the consequences to the business.
- 4
- (a)
 - (i) Many candidates could suggest one answer – can book online, but few managed two correct answers. Some candidates incorrectly responded to the question from JR Tour’s point of view rather than the customers.
 - (ii) Some candidates answered this part of the question by describing the benefit to the customers rather than to JR Tours Ltd.
 - (b) This part of the question was answered well by candidates of all levels of ability.
 - (c) Economic factors is a difficult concept for some GCSE candidates. Most candidates attempted this part of the question by coming up with ways in which the business could react but as they did not link them to any economic factor no marks could be awarded. There were, however, others who used the detail given in part (b) to their advantage as a guide to the question. Candidates who wrote about the consequences of changes in economic factors rather than how the business could react to these changes were restricted as to the level which could be achieved.

A243 Working in Business

The content of this unit is wide in both its depth and breadth; therefore, it is important that candidates are particularly well prepared for the 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 their candidates to use one as this will assist in the accuracy of their calculations. These will inevitably take place in relation to the finance aspects of the paper, but could also occur 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.

Centres still need to prepare their candidates to effectively answer the longer questions which are assessed using level of response criteria and which also assess the candidates' quality of written communication. There is evidence that where centres have done this, the structure and style of candidate responses allowed them to assess 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. From the January 2012 series the longer response questions now 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.

Some candidates handwriting is very difficult to decipher and centres are urged to impress on their candidates the need for perfect presentation. Candidates can make use of extra paper should they require this, rather than using the unlined space on the question paper.

Comments on Individual Questions

- 1 Part (a) was generally well answered, with most candidates focusing on the increased speed of communication.

Part (b) was less well answered, as a significant majority of candidates related the disadvantage to the employee rather than *Brack Records Ltd.*

Part (c) required the candidates to explain one task of the Chief Executive and the Marketing and Sales Director. This was poorly answered as many candidates focused on the role rather than a task undertaken by the employees. Also, in the case of the Marketing and Sales Director candidates assigned low level tasks such as creating a promotion, rather than emphasising the management of the team who were creating the promotion.

Candidates answered part (d) well as they were able to identify and describe the forms of communication which could be used in business.

- 2 Part (a) is one way of assessing the candidates' knowledge of the flow of business documents. Generally this has been well answered but during this series the mistake most often seen was when candidates confused a remittance advice slip and a statement of account. There were a small minority of candidates who were unaware of the flow, or the need for a flow of documents.

In part (b) many candidates were able to identify the fact that a statement of account was used to show how much money was owed; however, very few were able to further explain the purpose of the document.

The invoice in part (c) was not as well answered as in previous series. There were miscalculations, the use of the wrong type of unit and some candidates who still consider VAT to be a deduction. Centres are referred to the advice in the introduction referring to the use of calculators.

Pleasingly candidates were able to construct the break-even chart in part (d); however, many were unable to label the y-axis with costs/revenues or a similar appropriate label.

Part (e) was the first opportunity for the candidates to display their extended writing skills. Some misread the question and eloquently displayed their knowledge of the use of break-even in a business context, whereas the question clearly asked for the advantages and disadvantages of using ICT to construct a break-even chart. Many candidates could not access Level 2 or 3 marks because they did not relate this specifically to *Brack Records Ltd*. Candidates need to be able to discern which question responses need to be applied to the context of the business used throughout the paper. This is different to unit A241 where candidates are not only asked to use the businesses named within the paper, but also one which they have studied.

- 3 Part (a) was well answered, with the majority of candidates selecting 'Flyer B' and then using the flyer's features to show how it would promote the 'new single' to potential customers. Some candidates listed the features, without giving specific reasons.

If candidates knew the meaning of sales promotion they were then able to explain this, often using a relevant explanation.

Even if candidates struggled to respond to part (b) they were able to show their knowledge of sales promotion in part (c). Some candidates failed to pick methods of sales promotion which would be appropriate for *Brack Records Ltd* when promoting a new single. Many candidates selected 'BOGOF' as a relevant method of promotion and this had to be well explained to receive any credit.

During this series candidate were much better prepared to answer questions on ASA guidelines and most candidates were able to identify one principle, usually that the advertisement should be decent; however, many were unable to apply this guideline to the chosen business context of *Brack Records Ltd*.

- 4 In part (a) candidates were asked to complete a telephone message form using the information given in Text 4. Many candidates were able to complete the body of the text but became confused about who the message was from. Most assumed Mr Brandon Flavour, but the answer was Melanie Mitchell, an Administrative Assistant. The subject was often long-winded when all that was needed could have been 'Parental Complaint'. Forms such as the telephone message form are included within the 'in-tray exercise' section of the specification and candidates do need to practice these skills.

In part (b) most candidates were able to gain one mark for identifying the fact that Jemma Cole, the Customer Services Director of *Brack Records Ltd*, would investigate the complaint, but the vast majority were unable to then explain her role prior to offering Mr Flavour compensation in a telephone call.

Part (c) was the first eight mark question which offered the candidates the opportunity to show their business acumen through extended writing. It should be noted that the context of this part of the question was an evaluation in relation to any business as the question stated 'such as *Brack Records Ltd*, of **not** dealing effectively with customer complaints'. This is identified in the unit specification and still some candidates focused on the consequences of good customer service. Centres should note that to enter Level 2 candidates need to explain the consequences of poor customer service. To enter Level 3 candidates are required to analyse the effects of poor customer service and then link a judgement to their analysis.

- 5 Part (a) was surprisingly badly answered by many candidates as they were not aware of the visitor information which would be taken by the reception staff. Many identified items such as age and telephone number, when car registration number or time of arrival were more appropriate.

In part (b) the candidates were asked to evaluate the benefits and drawbacks to *Brack Records Ltd* of using a computerised database compared with a manual filing system. Similarly to Question 2(e) candidates could access Level 2 or Level 3 without applying their response to *Brack Records Ltd*. Many candidates failed to tailor their response to **this** business.

Please note: In future series 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.

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