

Business and Communication Systems

General Certificate of Secondary Education J230

OCR Report to Centres

June 2013

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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

This was the final examination series where candidates were able to resit units previously taken during a two-year learning programme. From June 2014, in common with other GCSEs, this qualification will become linear with all units being taken at the end of a learning programme.

Overall the performance of candidates was good. On unit A267 it was pleasing to see that nearly all candidates attempted all of the tasks, although some failed to achieve marks by not providing a printout showing the spreadsheet formulae. There were a few instances where the candidates failed to put identifying information (candidate name, number, etc) on their document before printing and it was clear that, for most candidates and centres, the requirements for this unit are well understood.

Unit A266 also saw good performance from candidates and there were relatively few administrative issues with the submission of either marks achieved or supplying requested samples to moderators. The candidates appear to have a good understanding of the requirements of this unit and this reflects well on centres and their understanding of the task requirements.

Performance on unit A265 was comparable to recent examinations. However, candidates do need to ensure that they offer credible analysis and evaluation on the six-mark questions. Many candidates attempted to discuss the impact of the issues in the questions on the business organisation; however, too many candidates made points which were untenable, eg. stating that any drop in income or legal infringement would result in business bankruptcy or closure. Candidates who achieved good marks on these Level 2 and Level 3 questions typically did so because they were able to analyse how the actions taken by the business or its employees would have an impact on either business costs or income and then evaluate the likely impact on profitability (or surplus in the case of a charity).

A265 Businesses and their Communication Systems

General comments

For the first time in recent years this year's examination was taken largely by a Year 11 cohort. It was pleasing to see that nearly all of the candidates attempted all or nearly all of the questions as this increases the candidate's chances of achieving marks.

Candidates were able to apply their answers to the context of the charity and very few had only a limited understanding of the context in which a charitable organisation operates.

The main issues this year echoed those of recent examination series. Firstly, the default response of many candidates was to state that any action by an organisation will either make it seem more or less 'professional'. Such an approach is likely to yield very few marks. Secondly, too many candidates have an overly optimistic or pessimistic view of the extent to which business organisations are affected by the operation of their communication systems. For example, many candidates took the view that a failure to comply with data protection legislation would inevitably mean the forced closure of the organisation by the government (and the imprisonment of its trustees) or such a substantial drop in donations from the public that the organisation would face financial ruin and insolvency. Such exaggerated responses are incorrect.

Feedback on individual questions

Question 1

- (a) Most of the candidates spotted at least three of the five mistakes in the document. The incorrect spelling of companys (sic) was not spotted by most candidates.
- (b) Most of the candidates could identify one or two benefits to the organisation but they were often not explained. Candidates typically lost marks because the benefits to customers were explained, or candidates incorrectly stated that checking letters would inevitably remove all errors.
- (c)(i) Most of the candidates could offer at least one other filing method, such as alphabetical by surname. The weaker responses offered alternative filing systems rather than different methods of filing documents in a manual system.
- (c)(ii) Most of the candidates gained full marks on this part of the question.
- (c)(iii) Most of the candidates could not offer a valid benefit of using a manual system.

Question 2

- (a) Many of the candidates had a good knowledge of what a charity does, but did not explain how being a charity could benefit the organisation. Those who did either discussed the taxation benefits of charitable status or the increase in donations which result from pursuing not-for-profit charitable activities.
- (b) Most of the candidates gained good marks on this part of the question – a failure to achieve full marks often came from repeating a method previously stated.

- (c) To achieve good marks on this part of the question the candidates needed to analyse how one method would be better than the other. Most candidates could offer relevant points in support of one or other method, typically by pointing out that a television campaign would potentially result in a lot of donations but at a high cost. Analysis could have explored the impact of this on the organisation or compared the riskiness of the two methods; however, this was rarely done.

Question 3

- (a) Most of the candidates gained four marks with part (ii) often being incorrectly given as the Computer Misuse Act.
- (b)(i) Many of the candidates struggled to give either specific actions needed to comply with health and safety legislation or to identify the financial implications. Those who did so achieved one or two marks.
- (b)(ii) Many of the candidates surprisingly, and incorrectly, held the opinion that complying with health and safety legislation would make many people wish to seek work there. Whilst the opposite may be true, evidence does not suggest that legislative compliance is a major pull-factor affecting recruitment or consumer preference. Few candidates correctly answered that compliance would limit the extent to which legal action would follow any workplace accidents.
- (c) Most candidates had a reasonable understanding of social responsibility, although those candidates who did not understand the term made some interesting guesses and discussed workplace bullying or other forms of harassment. Most candidates did, however, recognise the potential impact for a charity but few offered analysis sufficiently convincing to take the response into Band 2.

Question 4

- (a) Most candidates gained three marks on this part of the question but some gave responses to the first device (such as video recorder) which were too vague.
- (b)(i) This is a storage device with which many candidates are familiar and, therefore, most could state one or two drawbacks.
- (b)(ii) A USB's portability was often mentioned and its near-universability for PCs as a plug-and-play device was the commonest response amongst candidates achieving full marks.
- (c)(i) Most of the candidates could offer at least one relevant feature but some candidates misunderstood the question and listed benefits rather than features.
- (c)(ii) Most of the candidates could offer at least one drawback but many gave drawbacks to the user rather than to the organisation.
- (c)(iii) Candidates who could state one way in which a tablet is better than a laptop gained the required mark (for example, a tablet is smaller and so easier to carry). A failure to offer a comparison was the main reason for not awarding a mark (laptops and tablets are both 'small').
- (c)(iv) Most of the candidates struggled to give a drawback to a user of using a tablet. A typical incorrect response was to state that tablet batteries last for less time than those in a laptop. Perhaps these candidates were basing their responses on their own experiences of using a tablet, rather than their understanding of how such devices compare with laptops.

Question 5

- (a)(i)** Most of the candidates gained one or two marks on this part of the question but few had a sufficiently clear understanding of how usernames are used as a part of a network security system. Most candidates had some idea that usernames are unique to each user and work best alongside a password, but few could offer more specific responses than this – some candidates stated incorrectly that the existence of usernames made it impossible for unauthorised users to gain access to the system.
- (a)(ii)** It was anticipated that this part of the question would be challenging for most candidates and so it proved. Candidates who had a good understanding of the concept scored well and those who did not often failed to achieve any marks.
- (b)** Most of the candidates recognised that a more frequent back-up would be better. Some recognised that this was because the back-up system would put up to six days' worth of data at risk of loss every week. A minority of the candidates explored in more detail the problems which would result from this data loss. Weaker responses argued unsuccessfully that, in fact, the present system was too expensive and instead less-frequent back-ups should be made.
- (c)** Most of the candidates recognised at least one benefit or drawback of the two alternatives but very few offered a clear analysis of the implications for the organisation of choosing one of them.

Question 6

- (a)(i)-(iii)** Most of the candidates gained the full three marks on each of these parts of the question.
- (b)(i)** Only a few candidates knew which two items would normally be visible.
- (b)(ii)** Only a minority of the candidates had an accurate knowledge of data encryption. A number of candidates stated that existing text was jumbled up – which is not encryption. Only a few candidates discussed the need for an encryption and decryption key.
- (c)** Very few of the candidates gave relevant actions such as ensuring appropriate security software is installed or not letting keystrokes be monitored.
- (d)** Most of the candidates had some awareness that legal consequences would follow non-compliance with data protection legislation, but only a small proportion of the candidates were able to offer any analysis of these consequences. Those candidates who argued that the business would be closed down by the government, and the trustees imprisoned as a result, were incorrect and not rewarded with any marks.

A266 Developing Business Communication Systems

This is the fourth series in which this unit has been assessed and the marks awarded were largely as expected. This controlled assessment unit is targeted at candidates at all levels and the breadth of marks awarded suggests that it was accessible to all of the candidates.

The number of candidates who chose each of the set tasks was unbalanced, with more attempting Scenario 1 than Scenario 2.

Since this is a controlled assessment unit, centres should bear in mind that only the work which was completed within the time limit should be submitted, additional work which was completed as part of the investigation is not necessarily required, although needs to be used when writing the report. There is a recommended limit on the number of words within the report and centres should refer to pages 28 and 29 of the specification. In addition the work has to be that of the candidate and when structures for report writing and letter structure are taught, there should still be the potential for candidates to complete the task in a way which demonstrates their own knowledge.

For Scenario 1, the candidates used a variety of entertainment venues as their resource, including large venues such as Alton Towers. These candidates found some difficulty in analysing in detail and justifying their recommendations, although there has been a vast improvement in this area over the past series. This has meant that more candidates obtained marks at the top of Band 2, with a larger proportion accessing the higher marks in Band 3. The letter was generally well set out but candidates still spent time listing the proposed changes, instead of actually trying to 'sell' them to the stakeholders. This approach frequently prevented the candidates from achieving marks at the top of Band 3.

A267 ICT Skills for Business Communication Systems

General comments

Many candidates performed well on this question paper. There seemed to be very few issues with candidates running out of the time needed to complete the paper.

Candidates, on the whole, did seem well prepared for the examination. There were, however, differences in the candidates' ability to produce the required evidence for the spreadsheet task and in writing a business letter.

The majority of candidates performed well on Task 1. However, some candidates were unable to print all the required evidence for the task. Some candidates did not print their formulae, and so did not achieve full marks.

The ability to write a letter in a business style varied among the candidates. Most candidates knew the basic structure, but some did not include details such as the correct date or correctly use open punctuation. Some candidates became confused with the correct salutation and complementary close for this style of letter.

Many of the candidates had an understanding of the how to set up a mail merge, were able to state benefits and drawbacks of mail merge, and were able to make sensible recommendations. Better candidates were able to analyse the impact of these benefits and drawbacks on the organisation.

Comments on individual questions

Task 1

- (a)(i)** Nearly all of the candidates were able to delete a record.
- (a)(ii)** Nearly all of the candidates were able to enter the new records. The misuse of capital letters and typographical errors occasionally lost candidates marks.
- (b)(i)** Nearly all candidates were able to enter a label. The misuse of capital letters and typographical errors occasionally lost candidates marks.
- (b)(ii)** Many candidates were able to create a suitable formula in order to calculate the total cost of shine spray.
- (b)(iii)** Many candidates were able to replicate a formula.
- (b)(iv)** Nearly all of the candidates were able to enter a label. The misuse of capital letters and typographical errors occasionally lost candidates marks.
- (b)(v)** Many candidates were able to create a suitable formula in order to calculate the order total.
- (c)(i)** Nearly all of the candidates were able to format their spreadsheet to currency and to two decimal places.
- (c)(ii)** Nearly all candidates were able to use a range of formatting techniques in order to improve the appearance of their spreadsheet.

- (c)(iii)** Many of the candidates were able to perform a sort. However, some candidates sorted in ascending rather than descending order as required by the question paper.
- (c)(iv)** Nearly all of the candidates were able to print a landscape copy of their formatted spreadsheet.
- (d)** Nearly all of the candidates were able to produce a chart. Most candidates were also able to select the correct chart type and include the specified data. Many candidates were able to add axes and a suitable chart title and to print their chart on one sheet.
- (e)(i)** Some candidates were able to use absolute cell referencing although not many were able to create the formula completely correctly. However, many candidates were still able to achieve one or two marks as some elements of the formula were correct.
- (e)(ii)** Some candidates did not print their formulae and were, therefore, unable to access the marks here.

Task 2

- (a)** In general the candidates did not perform as well on the letter as they have in previous series. Many candidates used the letter template provided, and only a few of them did not use the blocked style and open punctuation. However, once again, many candidates failed to include the date.

Many candidates did not address the letter correctly and seemed to be confused with the salutation and complementary close for this style of letter. Most candidates were able to achieve some marks on this part of the question by transcribing the information in the letter. However, some candidates tried hard to add extra detail and missed out vital points which needed to be specified. It was clear that some candidates needed to review this aspect of the specification.

- (b)(i)** Many candidates were able to explain how a mail merge was created. Although some candidates did not structure their response very well, it was clear that most had a good understanding of this element. Some of the candidates were able to answer this part of the question to a very high standard. Most of the candidates were able to gain some marks for identifying the steps used in this process, although some misinterpreted the question and referred to the benefits and drawbacks of mail merge.
- (b)(ii)** Most of the candidates were able to describe some the benefits and drawbacks of using mail merge in an organisation. These included the ability to personalise letters, allowing letters to be created more quickly, the need for specialist training and that some customers may start to view the letters as 'junk mail' if sent too often. Most candidates attempted to analyse the impact of these benefits and drawback on the organisation. Candidates needed to demonstrate the skill of analysis in order to access the marks available for this part of the question. The mark scheme gives clear examples of the sort of statements which were needed to access these marks. Most of the candidates were able to make a judgement about whether Nigela should use the mail merge facility. However, very rarely were both the benefits and drawbacks of mail merge fully analysed.

OCR (Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations)
1 Hills Road
Cambridge
CB1 2EU

OCR Customer Contact Centre

Education and Learning

Telephone: 01223 553998

Facsimile: 01223 552627

Email: general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk

www.ocr.org.uk

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Head office
Telephone: 01223 552552
Facsimile: 01223 552553

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