

**GCSE (9–1)**

**Examiners' report**

# **BUSINESS**

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**J204**

For first teaching in 2017

**J204/02 Summer 2024 series**

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## Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. A selection of candidate answers is also provided. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

Where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from OCR.

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## Paper 2 series overview

The entry for this paper and qualification continues to grow significantly. This year's paper covered a wide range of concepts from the specification, although performance was slightly down on last year. The large examining team reported that many candidates made good use of, and engaged well with, the business contexts. This allowed candidates many opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Some candidates attempted to use their own context rather than that provided in the case study. Centres are reminded that application in answers can only be awarded for use of the context provided in the case materials.

Many of the comments made in last year's report still apply this year: gaps in candidate knowledge, answers which lacked focus on the question set, a high omit rate by some candidates, lack of understanding which limited access to any marks in certain questions.

The standard of handwriting continues to be a concern, with many candidate scripts very difficult to read. In some cases, candidates who had been provided with a laptop still wrote many of their answers by hand which proved almost impossible to read.

As always, this report should be read in conjunction with the published mark scheme which contains clear guidance on what was, or was not, rewardable in each question.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scored 10 or more marks in Section A.</li> <li>• Made good use of the three texts to contextualise answers, where this was required.</li> <li>• Had wide-ranging knowledge and understanding of most of the specification.</li> <li>• Wrote brief answers which were focused on the question.</li> <li>• Supported their decision when required in those questions with marks for evaluation.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Missed out a significant number of questions.</li> <li>• Did not show the necessary understanding in questions before attempting to show analysis or make use of the context.</li> <li>• Did not appear to know which skills were required to be shown in each answer.</li> <li>• Did not read the question carefully enough.</li> </ul>

## Section A overview

There was a huge variety in the performance by candidates in this section. Many gained full marks, but a significant number scored less than five marks. Questions 1, 3, 7, and 9 were answered correctly by more than three quarters of candidates. On the other hand, Questions 6, 13, and 14 were correctly answered by less than half of candidates. A handful of candidates omitted answers to multiple choice questions.

### Question 6

- 6** A company has recently experienced a fall in its net profit margin from 4.2% to 2.9%.

This means that:

- A** every £100 of sales earns £1.30 less net profit than it used to
- B** for every £100 of sales the company only earns £1.30
- C** net profit levels have fallen by 1.3%
- D** the company has made a net loss of 1.3%

Your answer

[1]

This was the least well answered question in the whole paper. This appeared to come from a combination of weak numerate skills and a limited understanding of what is a profit margin. If the margin (which is the net profit per pound of sales revenue) falls 4.2% (4.2 pence per pound) to 2.9% (2.9 pence per pound) that equates to a fall of 1.3 pence per pound so £1.30 for each £100, giving the correct answer of A.

Answer C was the most common wrong answer which shows a misunderstanding of how percentage change works. A fall in the net profit margin from 4.2% to 2.9% is a decrease of 31%. D was a slightly less popular answer. Although the net profit margin has fallen it remains positive, so a profit will still be made.

### Question 13

**13** A market trader paid £4600 for goods which they sold for £12 500.

The market trader's gross profit margin was approximately:

- A** 37%
- B** 63%
- C** 79%
- D** 172%

Your answer

[1]

The correct answer of B was chosen by less than 40% of candidates. The question required candidates to first calculate the gross profit (£12 500 - £4 600) before calculating it as a percentage of the sales. Many candidates did not do this which explains the large number choosing answer A.

Some candidates who did first calculate the gross profit ended up choosing answer D, as they incorrectly divided the gross profit figure by cost of sales rather than sales.

### Question 14

**14** An entrepreneur has invested £150 000 to start up their own business. Their expected average rate of return is 10% per annum for the first three years.

Over the first three years of trading, the entrepreneur should expect to make:

- A** average profits of £45 000 per year
- B** average profits of £135 000 per year
- C** profits totalling £15 000
- D** profits totalling £45 000

Your answer

[1]

Only half of candidates were able to identify the correct answer as D. If an investment has an expected rate of return of 10% per annum that equates to £15 000 per year, so a total profit of £45 000.

Answer A was the most popular wrong answer which suggests that the question was not carefully read by many candidates. This probably also applies to the smaller number who chose an answer of C.

## Section B overview

The examining team reported that candidates generally engaged well with the three business contexts provided. Question 17 was the best answered of the three questions.

Compared with last year, more candidates made better use of the context to apply their answers to those questions which required it.

There was a clear distinction between the stronger and weaker responses. Application is a skill that was often lacking in answers and evaluation was rarely attempted in the seven-mark question (Question 16eii). In many answers, the understanding was often not explicit enough which led to some candidates gaining no marks for what was, potentially, a good response. There was a clear distinction between those candidates who had been taught how to correctly structure their answers and those who had not.

Questions 16cii, 17a, 17diii, 18a, and 18dii were the best answered. At the other extreme, Questions 16b, 16d, 17c, 18b, and 18di were not well answered. It is still the case that many below average candidates miss out on marks due to not having a wide enough knowledge of the specification. This contributed to an omit rate above 10% on Questions 16b, 18b, and 18e.

### Question 16 (a)

16

(a) Identify **two** characteristics of flow production.

1 .....

2 ..... [2]

Most candidates were able to identify at least one characteristic of flow production. However, a significant percentage suggested it was quicker or faster (which may or may not be true dependent on what is being produced). There were also some answers which suggested costs were high or low without being specific enough (e.g., high set up costs or low costs per unit of output).

Some answers referred to consequences of flow production, rather than characteristics. A number of candidates appeared to have no knowledge of the term.

## Question 16 (b)

**(b)** Analyse **one** way the marketing function impacts on the operations function of Unilever plc.

.....

.....

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.....

.....

..... [3]

This question was very poorly answered with two thirds of candidates gaining no marks. This was typically due to a lack of any specific recognition of what the marketing department had to do for operations to be impacted. This meant that these answers did not achieve the understanding mark and were therefore not able to access any other marks. Many answers simply stated the business would be 'marketing the product' or would 'use marketing activities' which were too vague.

Answers which did identify a marketing activity often did not then recognise that 'operations' was referring to the production activities of a business.

### Synoptic assessment

Centres are reminded that, in addition to the final question, there is always one other synoptic question. It would appear that on this occasion, most candidates were not prepared for a question which required them to use something they had studied in J204/01. Very few candidates were able to identify anything that may be carried out by the marketing function of a business.



## Question 16 (c) (i)

(c)

(i) Calculate Unilever plc's average revenue from 2019 to 2022.

Answer .....

[2]

Less than half of candidates gained full marks on this question. Of the 50% who gained no marks, most did not use the correct time frame by using all five figures from 2018 to 2022, instead of the four figures from 2019 to 2022. Another common mistake was to calculate the difference between 2019 and 2022 (€8100) rather than the average.

## Question 16 (c) (ii)

(ii) Explain **one** way revenue affects a business' decision making.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

This was generally well answered, although some answers did not refer to specific business decisions or actions. Many candidates grasped the understanding of decision making and achieved at least one mark, though a number misunderstood the question and considered how decisions affect revenue.

## Question 16 (d)

(d) Explain how operating in a difficult economic climate might affect a business.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

This was not well answered, with less than 40% of candidates gaining any marks. 'Economic climate' is a term that was not understood by many candidates (including quite a few who thought it referred to the possible impact of climate change). There was little reference to unemployment or lack of consumer income which are the examples in the specification. Some answers had an idea of what the impact of a difficult economic climate would be but did not show any understanding of what is meant by a poor economic climate, so no marks could be credited.

## Question 16 (e) (i)

(e)  
(i) State what is meant by international branding.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

This term was not well understood by most candidates. It was often confused with 'international marketing' and many answers suggested that it was the same as being a multinational or partaking in international trade. International branding has a very specific meaning which was largely misunderstood by most candidates.

### Assessment for learning



The two previous questions highlight the importance of ensuring that candidates are familiar with the specialised subject terms mentioned in the specification. Without this basic knowledge, candidates will be unable to show any higher order skills.

## Question 16 (e) (ii)

(ii) Evaluate the benefits of international branding to Unilever plc.

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..... [7]

As a result of many candidates not really knowing what this term meant, it was unsurprising that many gained only 2 or 3 marks in total. Many answers wrongly referred to the benefits of being an MNC or confused international branding with international trade.

A number of candidates repeated analytical comments, such as 'leads to higher sales' rather than developing this to include, for example, a reference to brand loyalty. Application was also noticeably weak in many answers. Some candidates gave a counter argument by considering the disadvantages of international branding, which was not required in this question. There were also misconceptions about changing products to suit different countries or cultures.

Better answers were seen, with some very good analysis, although these answers still often lacked any evaluation, other than a basic statement about international branding be important (see Exemplar 1).

## Exemplar 1

One benefit of international branding could be that the business ~~can sell its products~~ has access to more markets. For example, the case study states that Unilever sells ~~their~~ products across 190 countries. This could impact Unilever because they could target different markets for different products (eg Persil washing machine detergent to adults) which could lead to an increase in customers and revenue, which could lead to an increase in profit.

Another benefit could be that they can sell in countries where the economy is best for ~~them~~ the business. For example, the case study states that the economic climate is becoming more difficult, so Unilever could ~~produce~~<sup>sell</sup> less expensive products, or start selling in a country with a ~~more~~ beneficial economy for Unilever.

Overall, I think it's most beneficial that Unilever can access more markets. For example, ~~the~~ if one product's sales start to go into decline, they could target a different market as an extension strategy. This could affect Unilever because they could increase revenue, which could lead to an increase in sales.

This is one of the few examples seen by the examining team of an answer which scored most of the marks. In the first two paragraphs it clearly sets out two benefits (two are enough, as there are only two marks for both AO2 and AO3a) which make use of the context, so that both application and analysis marks could be credited.

Unlike many 'better' answers, this does then make an attempt to evaluate in the final paragraph. A simple statement that it is beneficial gains the first evaluation mark. This is then supported to gain the second evaluation mark. Although this justification is quite weak, as it repeats analysis of what came before, it was felt to be just enough to gain the second evaluation mark. However, to be awarded all the evaluation marks, the evaluation must be applied to the context. This requires some reference to the context as part of the evaluation. For example, reference could have been made in the final paragraph to how having products as diverse as Dove soap and Ben & Jerry's ice cream makes targeting markets at different stages easy for Unilever.

### Misconception



International branding, international trade, international marketing, and multinational companies are not inter-changeable terms. This confusion has been seen from many candidates in the last two examination sessions. Centres need to ensure that these are understood by candidates as clearly separate concepts.

## Question 17 (a)

17

(a) Identify **one** reason, other than expansion, why a business needs finance.

.....  
..... [1]

The vast majority of candidates gained this mark. Paying for salaries and raw materials were most common answers. Some answers were linked to growth, even though the question excluded this.

Some candidates answered the question as if it was asking about the need for a finance department, rather than finance, per se.

## Question 17 (b) (i)

(b)

(i) Explain why profit is important to a business' future.

.....

.....

.....

..... [2]

Most candidates achieved at least one mark, with expansion or growth being a popular answer. To pay off debts/loans and the developing of new products were also common answers. Some answers were linked to survival (which showed a confusion between profit and cash/revenue). Although a clear majority of candidates were able to identify a reason for profit being important, many did not support their answer with a relevant explanation.

## Question 17 (b) (ii)

(ii) Calculate the **daily** break-even quantity for the proposed hotel.

Answer ..... rooms

– [3]

There was a clear distinction between candidates who were confident with the formula for break-even and others who did not make an attempt to answer the question (nearly 10%). Even though the word 'daily' was emboldened in the question, a significant number of candidates completed a partial calculation, resulting in an answer of 105 rooms which only gained 2 marks.

### Question 17 (b) (iii)

- (iii) Analyse **one** disadvantage to the partnership if the proposed hotel's fixed costs were 10% higher than expected.

.....

.....

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.....

.....

..... [3]

Following on from earlier comments about not showing understanding in an answer, this was another question where the lack of any clear understanding often prevented subsequent application and analysis from being credited.

Better answers generally showed understanding related to profit or break-even, applied to the numbers available, and with an impact on the need to sell more rooms. This sort of full mark answer could be written in a sentence or two. Some analytical answers did not include any application.

### Question 17 (c)

- (c) Identify **two** uses of a cash flow forecast to a business.

1 .....

2 .....

[2]

This question about cash flow was poorly answered, with nearly half of candidates gaining no marks.

The most common correct answers were about the role in planning or anticipating periods of cash shortages. The most common wrong answers were to do with being able to calculate profit and loss, or break-even.

#### Misconception



It continues to be the case that at this level of study candidates are very unclear about the distinction between cash, revenue, and profit. Centres need to ensure that candidates are familiar with this vitally important distinction.

### Question 17 (d) (i)

(d)

- (i) Analyse **one** advantage to the partnership of taking on Finley as a new partner to fund the proposed hotel.

.....

.....

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.....

..... [3]

### Question 17 (d) (ii)

- (ii) Analyse **one** disadvantage to the partnership of taking on Finley as a new partner to fund the proposed hotel.

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.....

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..... [3]

Candidates responded to these two questions quite well and demonstrated good application to the case study. Many candidates focused on Finley's skill, or lack of, being useful in the partnership to help with marketing, but him not having any actual experience of running a hotel. Answers for the advantage were highly polarised, as many weaker answers were just reworded from the question or considered issues that were not relevant to funding the hotel (this was not a question about the pros and cons of operating as a partnership). However, there were some excellent full mark answers which often recognised the benefits of not having to take out a second bank loan.

Answers about the disadvantage more consistently gained 1 or 2 marks. This was often due to answers considering Finley's employment status and a possible lack of funds but not then analysing the impact of this for the business. Also, some candidates wrote about Finley being a member of staff, so that he needed paying, which again showed a misunderstanding of how a partnership operates. Many understood that a disadvantage would be that profit would now have to be split three ways but could not form any analysis from this point. Often, candidates wrote that this would mean there was less profit available to reinvest which would not be the case – it will just be split in more ways if it is not reinvested.



## Question 17 (d) (iii)

- (iii) Recommend whether the partnership should take on Finley as a new partner or use a bank loan to fund the proposed hotel.

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..... [3]

More than 90% were able to recommend either taking on Finley as a partner or using a bank loan. However, about half of these responses did not go any further in their evaluation as they did not compare the two options - some candidates just repeated responses from their previous two answers, so offered nothing additional to their evaluation.

When a question asks for a choice between two options, to achieve more than 1 mark an answer must make a clear comparative decision. An answer which only considers the option chosen cannot gain 2 or 3 marks. This is clearly explained, with examples, in the published mark scheme.

## Exemplar 2

Anika and Charlie should use a bank loan for the hotel expansion as Finley is unable to contribute finance as he is unemployed. Where as the bank loan has finance available which would result in the second hotel being finished quicker. As a result Anika and Charlie would be able to pay back the bank loan quicker, hopefully avoiding the rising borrowing costs. [3]

This exemplar clearly shows what is required to gain full marks when asked for a comparative decision. The answer gains a mark in the first two lines for simply making the choice (the bank loan) – this is something which all candidates should be able to achieve. The answer then very succinctly says why this is the best option rather than taking on Finley as a partner. The candidate has recognised that Finley is unlikely to have a spare £2m given what we know about him, but a bank loan is already available (we are told in the context this is unlikely to be a problem) so the hotel could be built sooner.

It is key to recognise that in this question the examiners are looking for context for what is effectively the third mark. In other words, it is the use of the evidence (embedding it into the answer) rather than quoting it as part of the answer. This is why repeating what a candidate has written in the previous two answers will not be awarded any marks in this question.

## Question 18 (a)

18

(a) Identify **one** factor which can affect the quality of a business' products.

.....  
..... [1]

This was answered correctly by nearly two thirds of candidates. Those who did not gain the mark often gave vague answers, such as 'suppliers', rather than clarifying it was the quality of the supplies which was the issue. There were also a lot of candidates who wrongly suggested it was the cost of the raw materials, rather than the quality of them, which would be the limiting factor – surprising given the context being about Primark.

## Question 18 (b)

(b) Analyse **one** impact of consumer law on Primark Ltd.

.....

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..... [3]

This question was not well answered and had a high omit rate, suggesting that many candidates were not familiar with the topic of consumer law. The best answers, only seen from one in five candidates, clearly knew about consumer law, with many citing the need for products to be 'fit for purpose' or of 'satisfactory quality'. These answers went on to consider the impact of this on the costs of quality assurance or the need for refunds which is specially an issue when the business is trying to price at a level lower than most retailers.

At the other extreme, many candidates did not understand consumer law and mixed it up with employment law (many referred to employee rights, fair pay, or working conditions) or ethical considerations. These candidates could not be credited with any marks, despite having application and analysis, due to not specifying any correct understanding (see Exemplar 3).

## Exemplar 3

One impact of consumer law to Primark is paying workers a fair wage. From the text, I know that Primark sells its clothes at cheaper prices than most retailers, yet they must still make a profit. They must make sure that yes they are keeping both variable and fixed costs low, but must still be paying minimum wage to employees whilst selling at a fair price. [3]

This candidate starts off by using the payment of a fair wage as their attempt at understanding of consumer law. However, paying a fair wage is an ethical issue. Although this answer goes on to correctly analyse that this would lead to higher costs for Primark, with application by referring to selling "at cheaper prices than most retailers" no marks can be awarded. As the mark scheme on all similar questions makes clear, "no further marks can be gained without understanding".

## Question 18 (c)

(c) Analyse **one** benefit for Primark Ltd of having low-cost suppliers.

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.....

..... [3]

This question was generally answered well with about 60% of candidates gaining 2 or 3 marks. Most candidates were able to demonstrate understanding, usually by stating that it helps to keep prices lower, or the business can pay less for raw materials, with a link to an impact on the business, such as higher sales or profits, with relevant application.

As with the previous question, many candidates did not clearly state a benefit, often only mentioning 'low cost' in their answer and so did not gain the understanding mark, resulting in no marks being awarded. Some candidates thought low-cost suppliers would allow the business to raise their prices which shows a lack of understanding about what they have been told about Primark.

## Question 18 (d) (i)

(d)

- (i) Analyse **one** advantage and **one** disadvantage to Primark Ltd of offering an online click and collect service for shoppers.

**Advantage** .....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

**Disadvantage** .....

.....

.....

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.....

.....

[6]

As with Question 16, it is detrimental to the total mark gained by a candidate when they do not score many marks on a high-tariff question. Less than a quarter of candidates gained 4 or more marks on this question and a similar number scored no marks. Low mark answers were often caused by candidates writing their answer from the customer's point of view, rather than Primark's. For example, there were often references to customers being unable to leave home to shop in store (so surely, they would not have been shopping at Primark in the first place). A significant number of answers considered the advantages and disadvantages of delivering to the customer although that is not the service that Primark is offering.

Better answers usually referred to the benefits of being able to take orders 24/7 but with the costs of having to operate a web-based service and the potential loss of instore impulse purchases.

### Question 18 (d) (ii)

- (ii) Recommend whether Primark Ltd should continue to offer an online click and collect service for shoppers.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

..... [3]

Most candidates were able to recommend whether to continue or not with the click and collect service but could not then adequately justify their decision. Often this justification was from the point of view of the customer, rather than Primark.

Less than a quarter of candidates gained full marks, often by suggesting that otherwise Primark would lose out on customers who have recently changed their buying habits. As with Question 17diii, it is use of the context, rather than simple application, which the examiners are looking for in this question. This required the evidence from the text to be used, rather than repeated, to help support any justification.

### Question 18 (e)\*

- (e\*) Evaluate whether Primark Ltd's use of ethical suppliers comes into conflict with its shareholders' objectives.

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..... [9]

There was a wide range of answers seen for this final synoptic question, although the first thing to note is the high omit rate. About one in six candidates did not attempt this question. This was most often seen in scripts where a candidate had also missed out many (or all) questions in Section B, so it appeared to be due to a lack of knowledge (or unwillingness to tackle a longer question) rather than any time constraints.

Only 10% of answers contained any specific knowledge about what is meant by ethics, although about half of answers were able to provide a suitable example of ethical behaviour (e.g., sustainable materials, or fair treatment and wellbeing of workers) to gain the mark for understanding. A similar number then identified the objectives of shareholders but did not always link them to the use of ethical suppliers by Primark. There was some confusion over who the ethical supplier was (some thought this referred to Primark). Some candidates interchanged the words shareholders and stakeholders; in some cases, an answer was solely about stakeholders other than the shareholders which gained very little reward. Many candidates did not know any shareholder objectives (e.g., profit or growth) and listed items from the text as objectives instead. Most weaker answers did not make any attempt to evaluate, or missed the point of the question by considering whether Primark should continue using ethical suppliers, rather than whether it conflicted with shareholders' objectives.

A small number of very strong, well written answers discussed how profits, dividends, or return on investment for the shareholders may be positively or negatively affected by using ethical suppliers. These candidates went on to make a thoughtful decision that there was no conflict for Primark to continue using ethical suppliers, as even though they were wanting to sell at a price below rivals, customers now expect ethical behaviour from high street retailers. Without this, the profits and reputation of the business may be seriously damaged.

### OCR support



Although there has been a small improvement year on year, many candidates gained 3 or less marks on this question. There is plenty of evidence that candidates are still not being adequately prepared for this question. In particular, the need to show specific knowledge and understanding of the basic concept (in this case, ethical behaviour), the need to show application to the synoptic context (in this case, shareholders' objectives) and a supported decision at the end.

Centres are reminded of the discussion and exemplars provided for this type of question in previous Examiners' reports.



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