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UNIVERSITY *of* CAMBRIDGE
International Examinations

BUSINESS STANDARD LEVEL

> **Paper 5161**
>
> **Business Organisation and Environment**

General comments

Since most of the candidates undertook the examination in a second language incorrect spelling and grammatical errors were ignored in favour of the quality of their responses. The demonstration of business knowledge and, where required, the evidence of reasoning were considered more important than the quality of language. Teachers must reassure candidates that this is always the case. However, it must be equally understood that poorly expressed answers, especially those expecting the Examiner to guess the meaning, will not be very well rewarded.

The standard of difficulty of this examination was no different to its predecessors. The structure of the examination continued the change signalled in the May 2005 paper i.e. in order to encourage candidates, and to make this paper much more accessible, they were presented with the usual range of tasks but with a large number of assessment points – with the exception of only one task worth 10 marks, all the others carried 2 to 5 marks each. Candidates were offered, therefore, a number of short tasks calling for crisp and succinct answers that rehearse the knowledge and application required – as is appropriate at Standard Level.

There are still issues which require the attention of teachers when preparing candidates for the examinations:

- Candidates must ensure that they understand what the Examiner wants them to do. *This means they must read the Examiner's instructions very carefully.* All too often candidates fail to earn good marks simply because they either misread or fail to comprehend a task.

- It needs to be reiterated that candidates are allowed 15 minutes reading time in order to become acquainted with both the case study and the tasks. It is appreciated that an examination is a pressured experience but teachers need to encourage them not to panic because of the time constraint.

- There is still a significant minority of candidates who, despite a task asking for, say, two features, will offer more than is required. Not only is this a poor use of examination time but the candidate runs the risk of the Examiner accepting only the first two, regardless of the quality of the other points.

- Mostly, the tasks ask candidates to *describe* or *explain* and a typical problem is that candidates do not offer satisfactory descriptions or explanations. A number of answers were limited not because of any specific weakness in knowledge but rather because the explanations lacked substance. A description or explanation does *not* require a bullet-point answer; although the essential points are rewarded the candidate is likely to be denied access to full marks.

- The whole point of having a case study is to expect candidates' responses to be made in the appropriate context. Some tasks test general business knowledge but, mostly, they are related to issues in the case study and should be answered accordingly. Marks may be lost if context is overlooked.

- Clearly some candidates are not earning the level of marks they would otherwise deserve. *Examination technique must always be a matter of concern and teachers are advised to give it full attention when preparing candidates for the examinations.*

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

(a)   The key to this task was the term *external* but a number of candidates offered *internal* means like ploughed-back profits and additional share capital from existing shareholders. Other suggestions included becoming a public limited company or a partnership despite it being made clear in the case study that these were not acceptable options. Trade credit and leasing were not considered as appropriate responses given the size and nature of the company. Venture capital was awarded with just 1 mark because it is a highly risky option with many strings attached which would not meet with the approval of the two executive directors. As mentioned above, candidates ought to read and apply the case study. Ideal responses were drawn from *Debentures, Loans,* and *Overdraft*.

(b)   The task called for the knowledge of the features of the two business organisations but *not* a rehearsal of all the features. Candidates needed to identify *limited liability* which was *the* distinct advantage. *Candidates had to recognise the implicit point in the text that Ranjit and Jaspal needed security against bankruptcy which is not available in a general partnership.* 4 marks were allocated to this task and a candidate could only earn 3 or 4 marks if limited liability was specifically mentioned in the response. Mostly this was well answered.

(c)   The essential point to make here was that shares would be quoted on the stock exchange and so could be openly traded and readily available to investors (who may be individuals, companies, or institutions). Most candidates recognised this point. An investor could possibly acquire enough to secure a controlling interest in, or at least sufficient to influence, the company. Ranjit and Jaspal could be removed from their positions and lose what they had built up.

Task 2

(a)   This task covered a fairly familiar topic. The reason for the decision to centralise the business resulted from problems (unspecified in the text) in the branch offices. This was quite a successful task as most candidates understood the advantages of centralising. A total of 4 marks was allocated to this task so each of the two points earned 1 or 2 marks depending on the knowledge indicated. Examples of the advantages looked for suggested that Ranjit and Jaspal could maintain consistent policies; it would strengthen their control and direction; it would help to reinforce and maintain focus; it would ensure the maintenance of reputation, style, image, consistency of policy.

(b)   Generally, tasks dealing with company directors are not tackled very well at all. What was required was a statement recognising that the non-executive directors were not employees of the company whilst the executive directors were employed by the company in a senior role. Candidates mostly understood the role of executive directors but were not clear on the non-executive directors. They needed to point out that the non-executive directors were appointed from outside the company because of their skills and knowledge. In the case of Complete Business Support, the two non-executive directors were investors but this is not generally the case with this category of director. Some candidates described the non-executives as 'sleeping partners' which was not acceptable.

(c)   Those who interpreted the task correctly (i.e. identified and explained) scored quite well but a large number decided to draw an organisation chart to illustrate their responses. An example of a chart was not required and candidates wasted precious time on producing an element which formed no part of the assessment. This is just the kind of approach which candidates should avoid. Had any chart been supported by appropriate descriptions and related to the company in the case study then marks may well have been awarded. Examples of the purposes which could have been described include target setting, distribution of work, the chain of command, accountability, the span of control, and organising employees. Candidates were able to identify three purposes but with limited development.

Task 3

(a)   Teleworking was not entirely understood by all candidates despite it being in the syllabus. A small number of candidates offered benefits to *both* the employee and employer despite the clear instruction in the task. Teleworking is not a new concept but it has become a feature of some occupations owing to the advances in, and the relative cheapness of, computer technology. The essential point was that the CBS accountants did not have to attend head office to undertake their work. By using a laptop, an accountant could carry out projects, write reports, or ask for advice remotely from the office i.e. from home or a client's office, on the road. Teleworking enables employees to be more productive, makes better use of their time, puts them in charge of the work, and reduces travelling to and from head office in rush hours and so reduces stress. For the employers, teleworking may reduce overhead costs, make employees more productive, and enables the company to serve and develop markets a long way from base.

(b)   Candidates tended to appreciate the definition required in this task – namely that a fixed term contract would expire on a pre-arranged and agreed date – but they could have been stronger in their explanations of the advantage. The point here was that an employee might work harder in the expectation of a renewed contract; or that a poor performer could easily be replaced at the end of the contract; or that it could give flexibility of the working team i.e. as business prospects change so the numbers employed can be changed.

(c)   This task was quite general in that the issues raised could (hopefully) apply to any business but candidates needed to make some reference to the company i.e. context. The three points to be identified and discussed could have been drawn from, for example, cooperative attitude, working to an appropriate standard, commitment to the business, acceptance of the CBS code of conduct (and any professional code too), loyalty, ability to work with clients, self reliance, effective delivery (re skills), and integrity. The task offered a lot of scope for good responses reflecting knowledge and awareness. Mostly candidates were able to relate to this task and offered firm and appropriate points.

Task 4

Deep knowledge was neither asked for nor expected for **(a)(i)** and **(a)(ii)** but some understanding of the impact of external factors on a business organisation was required. Responses were not full enough for 4 or 5 marks.

(a)(i)   Mostly the responses to taxation of small companies were negative and suggested that taxation could reduce profits, or force the company to close down, or make it raise its prices. It was hoped that candidates would offer a balanced comment pointing out that, on the one hand, taxation could restrict investment and deter risk-taking but, on the other, it could also be used to encourage growth, initiative and enterprise. CBS needed to be aware of the effect of tax policies on the small business sector i.e. its clients, and to update its procedures and knowledge continuously.

(ii)   This task also dealt with an external factor that can influence the business environment. No specific example was given to the candidates so the task was quite general. The explanation needed to suggest that legislation may encourage or inhibit small companies; a new law may impose additional costs and/or paperwork; there may be a new measure on, for example, employment regulations. CBS would need to be fully aware of the impact of any new legislation. Essentially the candidate needed to appreciate how, in general terms, CBS would be affected as an adviser to business.

(b)   Responses to this task could be made in general terms for up to 5 marks but to earn 6-10 marks candidates needed to answer in context and show clear understanding. Overall, the treatment of this task was weak with no effective use of any detail in the case study. There were a number of responses which dealt with the subject of location as if CBS was a manufacturer and reference was made to, for example, raw materials. The main issue could have been picked out of the text i.e. Ranjit's views that a good location brings in business; better premises and a good location offers clients a reassuring image; location is important along with accessibility to transport, clients, and the supply of staff. Candidates might have ventured to suggest that location was less important with the introduction of teleworking. It did not matter whether location was considered important or not so long as candidates offered a clear explanation. Some responses were written from the candidates' own local experiences of location and these points were assessed positively.

Task 5

(a) This task ought to have been tackled better but mostly candidates identified the appropriate influences. Clearly an appreciation of the influences on marketing was both expected and related to CBS's situation. Only a limited explanation of each factor was required and the two points could have been chosen from the following examples: the quality of CBS's services; competition; CBS's pricing structure; government legislation and controls; and the economic health of the small business sector (this last point was quite important and reference to it would have indicated strength of knowledge and awareness).

(b) As with **(a)**, some appreciation of the marketing function and how it was related to CBS was expected here. Responses needed to point out that the marketing campaign might, for example, encourage repeat business, inform the competition, result in extending product/service range, extend the client base, develop and promote the company image. Generally, candidates understood the task.

(c) The three points required here could have been chosen from the following ways: the recognition that the client *is* the business; the high quality and reliability of CBS's services; the employment of appropriately qualified and skilled staff; the ability to meet promised deadlines; and client confidentiality including data protection. Responses should have reflected the essential point that CBS's clients pay fees for the accounting and advisory services and so expected a professional approach in return.

Paper 5162

Effective Business Communication

General comments

There continues to be some improvement in examination performance overall this time around, and it would appear that the Examiner reports are being closely observed for guidance. There was, in particular, a more steady approach to letter writing, although there still appears to be some problems with the use of salutation. Many candidates did perform well, however, there is still a tendency to work on bullet point answers, without elaboration or use of examples, which is disappointing and does not show the true extent of knowledge and understanding that may exist.

As cited in previous sessions, there are some consistent areas of weakness that need to be addressed.

Misinterpretation of task requirements – This was particularly evident with **Task 3 (a)** relating to preparing for a presentation in context of verbal and non-verbal communications. As a result many candidates went off at a tangent and discussed resourcing issues and room layout. This was not the focus of the task.

Time management – Many candidates seemed to perform quite poorly in **Task 5** because they had run out of time. As this is a three part question, it is quite unfortunate. By the time candidates get to the end they are producing bullet points only, if answering at all. Added to which, many of the graphs required for **5 (b)** were extremely untidy.

Candidates need to be able to differentiate the requirements of a 2 mark task as opposed to a 10 mark task. Quite often the volume of writing is excessive for the marks available, whilst a 10 mark answer might only attract a couple of brief paragraphs or five bullet points. It is important that candidates realise the various demands of tasks based upon volume, in order that they can identify the type and length of response required.

Comments on specific tasks

Section A

Task 1

(a)   The task focused upon being able to identify the typical issues that must be considered when trying to find the most appropriate method of communication for both internal staff and external customers, in relation to the InterFlower business. In most cases this task was answered reasonably well, and there were some exceptional answers, where full marks were awarded. However, this was a task that candidates did not really adhere to the mark allocation, and often wrote many pages of answers for what was an 8 mark task.

Typical answers should have included an equal split in attention to detail of the internal employee and the external customer, and focused upon issues such as organisational issues, reasons for communication, level of importance and whether or not it should be one or two-way communication. These were just some of the issues.

(b)   Again, in the main candidates did quite well with this task, which was asking them to identify the best method(s) of communications to use in a given situation, in this instance a split between internal and external communications was provided. Many candidates provided quite sensible answers, both in relation to internal and external communications. However, some candidates perhaps did not realise the size and scope of the organisation and as a result tended to be quite ambitious in the answers it provided, for instance, large television campaigns, something that was not relevant to this case study. Therefore, it would be helpful if candidates could be taught not just about communications in relation to the situations shown, but also taught about the cost of communications in some instances, so that they understand the scope of what they are able to suggest.

Task 2

(a)   In this part of the task, candidates were required to write a letter to customers announcing the availability of InterFlowers products for Christmas orders. As indicated in the introduction to this report, there was a vast improvement overall in terms of letter writing but, there were still some very poor answers. There are still some problems in relation to writing a letter, and the main one is the appropriate use of salutation and sign-off on letters. Because this was a general mailing, it would have been acceptable to see either Dear Sir or Madam, or even named customers, this takes into account the varying use of databases on an international scale. If writing 'Dear Sir or Madam' then the letter should end 'Yours faithfully' and if writing to 'Dear Mr or Mrs', then the letter should end with 'Yours sincerely'. There was a lot of letters than started with 'Dear Valued Customer' and ended with 'Yours truly', which has a completely different connotation and is not generally appropriate. If a customer is so valued it is likely that you would know their name, through the use of databases therefore the terms 'Valued Customer' and 'Yours truly' should be avoided.

In terms of the body of the content, this was very variable. In the main candidates were managing to get the right detail across, but perhaps in a very limited way. It is important to include the appropriate closing phrase also to encourage the recipient of the letter to respond. Candidates continue to fall down on this, and it is a very important part of communications, to try and gain the necessary response.

As guidance, the answers should be along the following lines:

Business letter to confirm the following format:

- logo or letter heading of the company
- date
- reference number
- recipient's name and address
- appropriate salutation – Dear Mr/Mrs or Sir or Madam
- letter heading – RE: InterFlower's Christmas Orders.

The content of the letter – which should focus on announcing that customers can now make early Christmas orders for InterFlower products and encouraging them to do so by visiting a website or even sending them an order form.

The letter should then have an appropriate closure i.e. 'Yours sincerely' or 'Yours faithfully' depending on the salutation.

(b)   This task was very straightforward and required candidates to give three advantages of using an Internet site for the promotion of Interflower products. Candidates tended to put three very brief bullet points for six marks, which was insufficient and, therefore, poor marks were at times awarded. However, in the main a good level of understanding of Internet provision was evident, which was pleasing.

Typical answers should have been based around the following key points, but with elaboration:

- 24/7 access

- international audience

- easy to evaluate

- hot links, added value.

Task 3

(a)   The focus of this task was upon factors that need to be considered when preparing for a presentation, in terms of verbal and non-verbal issues. Unfortunately, many candidates failed to read the verbal and non-verbal arrangements and went on to discuss a range of other factors including the layout of the room and resources required. This is not what was asked for. The task asked for consideration of tone of voice, spoken word and how to present it effectively, along with consideration of non-verbal presentation i.e. body language. As a result performance in this task was much more variable.

Candidates must realise the difference and be able to demonstrate that knowledge effectively.

(b)   This task asked about the affect of different factors upon group performance, in respect of delivering good customer care. The factors concerned were relationships within the group; size of the group; group culture.

In the main candidates were able to answer this task reasonably well, and were particularly strong on the different facets of culture, which was encouraging overall. This ranged in particular between organisational culture and individual cultures, but was generally tied in to the impact of both upon the group. However, whilst the answers were good, few were tied in to the context of the task in relation to delivering improved customer care.

Task 4

(a)   As always this task attracted a range of good answers in relation to the steps that need to be taken when preparing for an interview. Candidates generally scored well in this task, for considering a range of factors including, considering the aims and purpose of the interview, who should be present, necessary documents, location, being aware of verbal and non-verbal behaviour, listening effectively and approaches to making the recruitment decision and appropriate feedback. This is a straightforward task and occurs regularly within the examination in one guise or another, and therefore, it is expected that performance will be good. However, there is one weakness in answers to this task and that is that they are general and that no reference to InterFlower exists. This is almost without exception.

(b)   This task should be one of the easiest yet it was the poorest performing task across the paper. In essence candidates should be focusing on stating the differences between open and closed questions with examples of each. Answers stating such were few and far between. This is a fundamental aspect of any communications paper and there must be a much stronger awareness of open, closed and other types of questions.

Task 5

(a)   This task asked candidates to describe three types of visual aids which you could use to show the decline in sales. In essence the key visual aids included: Pie charts, line graphs, bar charts and tables. There were some other less obvious choices such as Z-Charts which were accepted. In the main candidates were very good at this particular task and scored well. However, time management of the paper was clearly an issue as some candidates failed to answer this fully before the end of the examination.

(b)   This task asked candidates to prepare a table based upon some figures in table one in the case study. This task was generally well answered, but the presentation of many answers was generally untidy and very rushed, which is not what is expected. The key to this task was not just being able to plot the numbers, but being able to ensure that all axes were labelled correctly, that there was a shading key and also clarity of labelling. Many candidates managed to plot the numbers correctly, but failed to complete the graph in its entirety in the way which was expected.

(c)   This final task attracted a variety of answers, many of which were quite poor, partly due to time and partly due to lack of knowledge. It is important that candidates are made aware of the increasing impact of technology on presentation, and that they are able to elaborate on such points and provide examples. Many candidates refer to very aged technology, and others completely miss the point of the task. This was disappointing, added to which a good number of candidates did not even answer the task because they had run out of time.

> **Paper 5163**
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> **Business Finance**

General comments

Overall there appeared to be some improvement in the performance of the candidates who sat the October 2005 examination when compared to the previous examination session. There appeared to be fewer gaps in the knowledge of candidates and it was also evident that the candidates had managed their time better and as a result most candidates had produced responses to all of the tasks on the examination paper.

However Centres and candidates are once more reminded of the need to provide a formula when undertaking tasks that require a calculation as a failure to do so can result in the loss of marks should the solution prove to be incorrect.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Generally the answers provided for **(a)** to **(g)** were satisfactory with many candidates achieving marks well above the pass mark for this task.

The answers to part **(a)** were the weakest as few candidates attempted to provide answers that were related to the difficulties associated with the death of the sole trader but instead concentrated on the general problems of operating as a sole trader.

The answers to the parts **(b)** to **(g)** were much more focused and as a result candidates scored high marks.

Task 2

Overall the responses to this task were rather disappointing. There appears to be some confusion regarding the status of internal and external users of accounts and the explanations as to how they might use the financial information provided by the firm were rather weak. Centres are urged to address this issue as a matter of urgency as it is a crucial topic within the syllabus.

Task 3

This task was answered very well by the vast majority of the candidates and the nature of profit is clearly well understood by most candidates. It was also very pleasing to see that most candidates could provide a well reasoned argument to answer part **(b)** and in many cases they were rewarded with full marks.

Task 4

The responses to this task were rather disappointing as too few candidates provided a complete explanation as to how the PEST factors would impact upon future profitability. To achieve the higher band of marks candidates need to show how changes will affect the revenues or costs and therefore the profit levels of the firm. Centres are urged to make this a priority for their teaching so that in subsequent examinations the candidates are given the best opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of this topic.

Task 5

The answers provided by the majority of candidates were satisfactory with several candidates scoring marks well above the pass mark. The task did require that candidates provided their own worked examples and this was not always complete. As a result candidates were not awarded full marks.

Task 6

Generally the responses to this task were good and it appears to be a topic that is being well covered by most Centres. There was, however, some confusion from a minority of candidates as to how to calculate the margin of safety. Centres are urged to explain to candidates the need to provide a formula whenever they are attempting a task that requires a calculation.

Paper 5164

Marketing

General comments

It is pleasing to see some improvements in overall performance at this level this session. However, there are still a number of areas in terms of both technique and knowledge of syllabus topics which could be improved. It is also important for teachers to stress the need to link answers to the situation posed in the case study. On this examination paper the situation was a business to business scenario. Unfortunately many candidates still quoted consumer marketing examples. Specific syllabus content areas are covered in the section on tasks below.

Examination techniques could be improved in the following areas:

- *Reading the task carefully*. In some cases, although the task required an explanation, many candidates simply listed the items requested. Candidates should be encouraged to practice answering tasks from previous papers to help them to understand the requirements of the tasks set. Note the difference between 'list', 'describe' and 'explain'.

- *List.* A simple list of the items identified in the task is required. Often there will be 1 mark for each item.

- *Describe.* This requires expansion of each list item showing comprehension of each.

- *Explain*. This requires not only expansion but usually an element of analysis or application to the case study scenario. An example of this can be seen in **Task 1 (b)** below.

- *Poor time management.* This is a common mistake. Candidates who fall into this category often spend too much time on a task with which they are comfortable, leaving insufficient time to complete all remaining tasks. Candidates should note the allocation of marks to each task.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

(a)   This part of was generally done very well. The features of the location were easy to identify within the case study and a full 2 marks for each of the four examples were available provided each was worded in terms of the benefit it offered to a company relocating to the area. For example: Overhead costs are low – the benefit of this is that the money saved can be invested in further innovation or resources.

(b)   This part proved more problematic. Although most candidates were able to identify examples of environmental factors using a PEST framework, fewer were able to provide a direct link to the case study, for example, Political factor – Singapore is an area of political stability. Biospace might promote this fact to attract companies from other less stable countries.

Task 2

(a)   This part was very straightforward. However, some candidates still described general reasons for carrying out marketing research without linking these to Biospace.

(b)   This was generally done well with examples of relevant advantages and disadvantages of the two types of questionnaires given. The task did ask for a comparison and for the specific use in measuring customer satisfaction. Stronger candidates were able to do this well.

Task 3

(a)   This part asked for an explanation of the term market segmentation. Many candidates defined the term well but did not explain it. More marks were available for identification of the fact that it allows an organisation to target its marketing activities, and in some cases, to achieve a competitive advantage by targeting a niche market.

(b)(i)   This section was generally done well. However, some candidates gave examples of consumer segmentation in what was clearly a business to business market.

(ii)   Candidates who either recognised the way that Biospace had segmented in the case study or recommended another suitable alternative were awarded the marks here.

Task 4

(a)   Some candidates very clearly explained the characteristics that are unique to services – intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability and perishability. Those who did often achieved the full 8 marks available for this part of the task.

(b)   It was disappointing to see how few candidates were able to describe how the three Ps of People, Process and Physical Evidence can be used to ensure that a good quality of service is provided by Biospace. Service examples should be incorporated into the teaching of this topic so that candidates have practice before entering the examination.

Task 5

(a)   This part required a list of the main promotional tools only and most were able to gain these marks.

(b)   While many candidates could give general examples of promotional activity, many lost marks by not giving examples that were relevant to the case study. For example, although advertising might be used, it may only be used in appropriate trade journals or business press rather than TV advertising. Equally, sales promotions of 'buy one get one free' are totally inappropriate when the product is serviced premises. However, the first six months rental reduced to the cost of three months would have been a suitable example.

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Paper 5165

Human Resource Management
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General comments

It is apparent that after almost two years candidates are beginning to understand the requirements of this paper and are responding appropriately. This paper produced a number of very good answers but there are still areas of obvious weakness.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Section 1.0 is an obvious area of weakness and candidates should spend more time ensuring they understand the basic concepts involved. It is a concern that when candidates are asked to produce anything other than pure knowledge they perform poorly. Making judgements and evaluating situations is a very important skill that candidates need to be taught.

(a) This required a reasonable definition but on the whole was poorly answered. There is confusion over meaning and purpose.

(b) This was well answered with the best candidates offering a contrast and highlighting the differences.

(c) Much of the answer to this part of the task is contained in the case study but many candidates were unable to extract this and make the judgements required. Many answered the question "Why is TEL ineffective?".

Task 2

This area of the syllabus appears to be well covered and understood by the candidates.

(a) This was poorly answered with candidates providing prose rather than a list as required.

(b) This part of the task was extremely well answered with nearly all candidates mentioning Equal Opportunities and Health and Safety. There were some excellent answers.

(c) This part was also well answered with points made about the need for new skills. Fewer candidates considered the threat of redundancy and even fewer mentioned the concept of Lifelong learning.

Task 3

This task was generally well answered but part **(b)** was by far the weakest proving that where a task requires pure knowledge the candidate is able to respond. Where the task requires use of the case study problems arise.

(a) This was well answered but some candidates are still confused about the difference between selection and recruitment.

(b) The weakest part of this task. Candidates interpreted this as "ways to leave a company". The better candidates used the case study and produced good answers.

(c) Some good answers here although many did not explain the difference, preferring instead to explain the whole process.

Task 4

This was one of the better answered tasks however there is a reliance on the role of trade unions and this often provided inappropriate answers.

(a)   Some good answers but too many candidates ignored the list and discussed the role of the trade union.

(b)   Well answered with some good descriptions of both shift working and flexitime working.

(c)   This part of the task provided a total contradiction. In other parts of the question paper the case study was ignored when it was required. In this part of the task the problems with grievances in the case were highlighted and discussed when it was not required. The candidate needed to look at an ideal system that TEL should have used.

Task 5

This task although in the same section of the syllabus cut across a number of different areas but was answered well by the majority of candidates.

(a)   Well answered with many candidates providing more than four methods of payment.

(b)   Candidates chose to ignore the case and look at motivation theories and general factors that improve motivation, these answers did not score highly.

(c)   This part of the task was accurately answered and shows that candidates understand this part of the syllabus fully.

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Papers 5166, 5167 and 5168

Interpersonal Business Skills,

Business Start-up and

Customer Care
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General comments

In general the quality of the assignments submitted during the past twelve months, 2005-2006, has been much better than previous years. The majority of candidates have worked hard and, with excellent teacher guidance and advice, have produced some excellent work. Assignments have been professionally produced and very business-like in their layout and presentation to the Examiner.

The use of the Assignment Cover Sheet for candidates is strongly recommended and has great benefits for the candidate, teacher and Examiner. It is a proper record and a check as to what should be found in the pages of the attached assignment. It helps to simplify a number of tasks and acts as a constant reminder to candidates as to what they need to include in their work. However, page references on these sheets must match the actual pages of the assignment submitted.

Centres are strongly advised to use the latest versions of the module booklets and not rely on older booklets. The latest versions contain the assignment cover sheets mentioned above. Candidates and teachers should check work against the Assessment Objectives and Competence Criteria for the year in which they are submitting work.

The requirement for all candidates to demonstrate and evidence all the objectives mentioned in the booklets under 'Criteria for Assessment' is very important. Candidates have been unsuccessful because objectives were omitted.

All Centres are reminded that they must constantly refer to the 'Assignment Guidelines' for each module in the syllabus booklet as these give general advice about how candidates should go about their research and analysis, how to present their assignments, when and to whom they should make presentations and other important matters.

Paper 5166

Assignments submitted under this module had some weaknesses including incomplete assignment cover sheets, some objectives not evidenced, no reference sources and SAR sheets missing or incomplete.

Agendas and minutes should be complete and accurate, with the use of proper business conventions for their layout.

A number of candidates struggled with the theory of 'assertiveness' and its use within business settings. This is an essential part of the module and a good understanding of this is required. Even if it is not appropriate to the research carried out, or for other cultural reasons, then this should be clearly stated in the assignment. An example of 'assertiveness' in the business world can always be given to indicate to the Examiner that the candidate has a complete understanding of this objective.

Paper 5167

Some candidates placed too much emphasis on the business project as opposed to the plan. The business plan is the main element of this module. The Assignment Guidelines state "Prepare a **report**, which must include a **business plan**, on the development of a business proposal". The advice given in the syllabus is that the actual business idea is less important than the ability to discuss and assemble a business plan.

In some cases the contents page was very vague. There needs to be more focus on section headings and page numbering to improve the quality of the documents submitted.

Self evaluation was weak in some cases or even omitted from the assignment itself. This is a requirement and details can be found on the assignment cover sheet.

Reference sources used by candidates were sometimes omitted, and occasionally where these were included the references could have been extended.

One candidate used the numbering system for Assessment Objectives and Competence Criteria and matched these with paragraph and section headings in their own work. This was a good idea which could be adopted by other Centres.

It is important to fully complete assignment cover sheets with the appropriate page numbers and in addition teachers/assessors must ensure that the SAR sheets are complete.

Paper 5168

Some candidates had not used the assignment cover sheets and these would have been helpful in checking that the assignments were complete and all objectives demonstrated or evidenced in the text of the candidates' work.

In one batch each of the assignments exceeded the maximum number of words for the module. This does not affect the marking process but Centres are advised to encourage candidates to keep within the parameters recommended for each module. In another batch there were some excellent computer generated diagrams and charts which added a good business-like dimension to the work. However, mixed font styles should be avoided as this gives a poor impression to the reader.

The findings/summary/conclusions in some candidates' work were brief and there was insufficient discussion on the research carried out.

An old syllabus (1999) was used by one Centre when it would have been more appropriate to use a recent version which includes details of the assignment cover sheet and the advantages of its use. Centres must refer to the syllabus for the year in which candidates are to submit work.

A large batch of assignments from a particular Centre demonstrated very good teaching and learning practice. Every candidate had selected a different business, company or organisation to carry out research on. This was an excellent idea resulting in a good variety of interesting projects.

It is important to label all sections of a report and in particular diagrams and charts; in the case of the latter a brief explanation or title is appropriate.

It is pleasing to note that all the assignments in one batch were of a very high quality. It was evident that candidates had received excellent teacher guidance and support as to what was expected of them, and what the module required them to do. All the work was thorough and business-like and the candidates had gone beyond the basic requirements of the scheme. The Centre and candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of the work submitted.

Paper 5191

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

The general standard of entries for this module was high, although there were a number of errors which included:

- Errors in sorting the data as specified in the question paper, particularly by sorting only the specified field and therefore failing to maintain the integrity of the data. Candidates who made this error were usually using a spreadsheet package rather than a database. Some candidates confused ascending and descending sorts.

- Errors in searching, either by trying to search using the results of a previous search rather than all the data, through errors in the search criteria, or in the selection of the data for the database extract.

- Errors in page layout with the failure to set margins or column widths as specified.

- Some candidates could not correctly align text, especially when asked to fully justify the body text of a document.

- The failure to include a calculated control in the data manipulation report, or where a calculated control was included it was not the one specified on the question paper.

- Errors in page layout with the failure to set margins or column widths as specified.

- The failure to resize the imported graphic or to text wrap around this graphic.

- Widows and/or orphans were not removed by inserting page breaks.

- The failure to understand the generic terms serif, and sans-serif. Many candidates tried to locate these as font styles rather than understanding that fonts such as Times New Roman contain short strokes or serifs on each letter, and that sans-serif fonts are without these.

Paper 5237

Organising Meetings and Events

Overall comments

The overall performance of the candidates ranged from very good to quite poor. Some candidates were obviously well prepared and correctly organised *a meeting*, as required. They then produced reports detailing how they had organised their meetings and the documentation and methods of communication they had used.

Some candidates did not submit completed Student Assessment Records and/or completed Assignment Cover Sheets. These should be completed and signed by all candidates and their teachers.

Comments on the work of candidates

Most of the reports produced were legible and detailed. However, some candidates only included information on how a meeting *should* be organised and detailed the various aspects that make a meeting successful. However, there was often no specific information on what the candidates actually organised, how they did it, when and where, with whom they communicated and how they did so, etc.

Some candidates did not mention the communication methods they used. Copies of letters, emails, agenda, notice of meeting, minutes, chairperson's agenda and transcripts of telephone conversations were usually attached. There was often no detailed information of what communication methods were used and the factors that influenced their choice. (For example, a need to inform someone urgently of a meeting would most likely be dealt with by telephone. However, if the person was not available, a message could be left on the person's telephone answering machine and then an e-mail or a text message sent to ensure the person receives the information as quickly and efficiently as possible.)

Candidates are required to assess the planning, organising and monitoring methods they actually used. They should then state whether or not these methods were successful and what they would do differently when they organise their next meeting.

Many candidates included lengthy descriptions of the secretarial and chairpersons' roles and procedures and lists of meeting terminology. These are not required, but candidates were not penalised for including them in their assignments.

Occasionally, it was difficult to determine what event the candidates had actually organised. A brief introduction describing the event would be very helpful. However, a comprehensive description of the business for which the meeting is being organised is not required.

A number of candidates produced some documentation but did not include a work schedule or action plan.

General comments

A Student Assessment Record (SAR) should be completed when the candidate has achieved all objectives reliably, consistently and without help. The SAR should be signed and dated by both candidate and teacher. Each candidate must submit a completed SAR with his/her assignment. Assignment Cover Sheets should also be completed and submitted by every candidate. These confirm that the Assignment is the candidate's own work and should indicate that work taken from another source is appropriately referenced and acknowledged. Assignment Cover Sheets have also been designed to enable candidates to check that their work is complete and has covered all the required competence criteria.

Candidates and teachers are advised to read the Assignment Guidelines given in the syllabus very carefully. The step-by-step approach to the final Assignment is highly recommended, as this will help candidates in the planning and undertaking of their Assignments.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their teachers the meeting they are able to organise. Some candidates were too ambitious and attempted to organise a large, complex meeting. They are advised to organise a small, informal meeting if at all possible. Once they have decided the meeting they intend to organise, they should then work out how this could be done. They should write a plan of how they intend to carry out the various tasks that will be required. (Those candidates who cannot organise an actual meeting may organise a simulated meeting. All the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus, however, should still be met.)

Candidates may choose to work on their own or may wish to work with a fellow student or work colleague. They should plan their duties and negotiate the allocation of these duties. However, each candidate must produce evidence *of his/her own* planning and work schedule. Copies of documentation such as agendas, minutes, notes, short reports, notices of meetings, chairperson's agendas, transcripts of telephone calls, etc. should be included in the report.

Candidates should consider:

- what type of meeting they will be organising

- the documentation which would be appropriate for that meeting

- the time, date and venue for the meeting

- how they propose to organise the meeting

- what facilities they have to help them in this task

- how to ensure everything required is organised – methodical working is essential

- production of clear documentation

- what communication methods would be appropriate and the factors that influenced their choice

- timescales involved.

The production of the report should be considered from the beginning, not left to the last minute. Candidates who made notes and who thought out the organisation of the meeting and the report from the outset were often the most successful in their assignments.

Candidates may wish to note the following points for successful report writing:

- a brief introduction at the start of the report should describe exactly what the candidate has organised

- the actual planning and organisation of the meeting

- full details on the organising and monitoring methods that were used

- a brief statement as to whether or not the organising and monitoring methods were successful

- a short paragraph of what the candidate would do differently next time, if appropriate

- a brief paragraph giving the communication methods used by the candidate, together with an explanation of the factors that influenced the communications they used

- copies of all documentation – including a chairperson's agenda, if appropriate, and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations

- a conclusion on the success of the meeting.