CONTENTS

BUSINESS ADVANCED LEVEL

Paper 5171

Business Organisation and Environment

General comments

This examination paper followed the new approach set by the May paper in that candidates were offered 31 assessment points with marks ranging from 1 to 5 for each point with the exception of one response which was worth 12 marks. Candidates ought to find the present structure of the paper much more accessible.

Poor examination technique is an ongoing issue and still hinders the achievement of higher marks for many candidates. Teachers are strongly advised to address this matter when preparing their candidates for the examinations. Equally, it is imperative that the entirety of the syllabus is taught.

Despite an obvious overall improvement in candidates' performance, there are still areas of immediate concern arising from this examination.

- The object of having the case study is to encourage responses to be made in *the appropriate context.* This means that responses, unless the task really calls for the rehearsal of general business knowledge, should be *clearly related* to the case study. Marks may be lost if context is overlooked.
- There are still candidates who do not read the tasks carefully enough. They must ensure that they understand what the Examiner wants them to do. All too often, candidates fail to do themselves justice simply because they either misread or fail to comprehend a task. It must be reiterated that 15 minutes' reading time is provided in order to help candidates become acquainted with both the case study and the general nature of the tasks.
- A number of candidates still copy out the tasks before composing their answers. There is no requirement to do this and it is not a sensible use of examination time. The process does not help the Examiner but rather candidates should ensure that each response is clearly identified with the identifier e.g. 4 (a)(i).
- Candidates must learn to differentiate between the demands of different value tasks. There is little to be gained from writing a detailed answer to a 2-mark task and then giving scant attention to one worth, say, 5 marks. At no point in the examination paper are candidates required to submit lengthy essay-type answers but they must write enough detail to demonstrate to the Examiner that they understand the tasks. A succinct and focused answer is preferable to one that is convoluted and offers little substance.
- Tasks mostly ask candidates to *describe* or *explain*, and a typical weakness is that candidates do not always submit a sufficiency of description or explanation. It is acknowledged that the majority of candidates undertake the examination in a second language. Incorrect spelling and grammatical errors are not taken into consideration. The demonstration of business knowledge and, where required, the evidence of reasoning, is more important that the quality of written language. However, it must be emphasised that very poorly expressed answers, especially those which expect the Examiner to guess the meaning, may not be marked very favourably. Teachers need to emphasise these points when preparing candidates for the examination.
- Layout is a continuing issue. The instructions on the front sheet of the examination paper are clear enough and it would be helpful if invigilators referred to them when briefing candidates prior to the commencement of the examination. No marks are deducted from scripts where candidates have ignored advice about, for example, leaving margins clear, or starting each task on a separate sheet of paper, but teachers and candidates must acknowledge that the instructions have a purpose.
- Time management is an area that must be addressed by the candidates. It is obvious that an examination will put candidates under pressure but teachers need to instruct them on how they can pace themselves and not panic because of the time constraint.

<u>Comments on specific tasks</u>

Task 1

(a) In the case study reference was made to Unique experience Plc having been taken over by Shogun Investments, a holding company. *This was not altogether a very successful task as a number of candidates addressed the features of a public limited company rather than a holding company.* It was clearly a case of candidates not approaching both the task and case study with much understanding. Candidates needed to demonstrate their knowledge by explaining that, for example, a holding company owns the majority of shares in a company; is able to control or influence its companies without being directly involved in their day-to-day management; tends to keep its companies separate so they remain independent of each other. Those who understood the task tended to answer well.

(b) This task was quite well answered as most candidates understood the reasons or features e.g. being a public limited company enabled 'Unique Experience' to be listed on the stock exchange, its shares to be freely transferable, the opportunity to raise a larger amount of capital through the public sale of shares. Being a Plc may also have conferred greater status on the company and given it a higher profile; also it could have been argued that the directors would have had more experience to offer.

(c) Whilst this task could have been tackled in general terms, candidates should have applied the objectives to the company. Only 1 or 2 marks were awarded for a limited understanding of an objective whereas 3 or 4 marks were available to a response made in context. Each business objective needed to be fairly well explained and the responses could have been drawn from, for example, being profitable; economic survival; satisfying client demand; improving sales revenue; increasing market penetration. Candidates tackled this task quite well but mostly there was a lack of development in the responses and poor use of the case study.

Task 2

(a) Many responses merely suggested that team working meant employees working together. This limited definition overlooked the essential point of teamworking being a means of encouraging a team of employees to carry through a complete project rather than each member contributing elements to it. The case study suggested that a team would assemble and manage an entire project. One *benefit* to the employees of teamworking was asked for: e.g. *it enabled* a more effective use of an employee's skills and experience; easier management and supervision of employees on a project; the sharing of responsibility and ideas. It was also an effective means of motivation. This task ought to have been more successful but many responses did not define teamworking completely not was there much use of context.

(b) A number of responses betrayed a lack of awareness and knowledge of management styles. Candidates needed to point out that the paternalistic style was essentially autocratic although the decisions and the leadership style were intended to be in the best interests of the employees; and that senior management may consult staff before announcing a decision but would not encourage participation. 'Unique Experience' *benefited* by not supporting time consuming 'democratic' processes in the company as the managers were paid to take the decisions; paternalism was concerned that employees were happy in their jobs and, if that was the case, then time and money were saved by low rates of staff turnover and dissatisfaction.

(c) This task could have been tackled in a general way but some context was required if any factor was to be awarded more than 2 marks. The text only says the Directors were unhappy with the structure of their company and were currently reviewing it thus leaving the candidates scope to discuss appropriate factors which could be drawn from such issues as the chain of command, the span of control, the extent of delegation, the nature and size of the company, hierarchy or matrix, centralisation versus decentralisation. Candidates displayed a reasonable amount of knowledge and awareness but, as with **1 (c)**, there was a general lack of development in the responses.

Task 3

(a) The first part of this task was not very well answered as many candidates did not seem to appreciate that hunting trips were potentially very dangerous and, further, that weather conditions could be extreme. The working environment was obvious from the text. The second part of the task was tackled with more confidence and candidates were able to identify the training needs e.g. personal survival, safety procedures, first aid, local customs, language, driving off-road vehicles, customer care, and project management.

(b) The focus of this task was on the incentives that could be offered to the local staff employed on hunting trips. Some candidates used the case study to good effect whilst others failed to take into consideration that the company's treatment of casual and local staff would be different to its permanent staff. As a consequence the incentives identified were not always appropriate. The local staff would be the bearers, beaters, servants, trackers, and bodyguards. The basic approach would be to promise benefits given the satisfactory conclusion to the trip. Although the pay was set above the average rate for the region, additional monetary incentives would be attractive and stimulate performance e.g. a terminal bonus or a specific reward for ensuring an appropriate kill or trophy. Other incentives could include free uniforms and equipment, the promise of further employment, appropriate gifts for the employees' families.

(c) This task was general in that the expectations raised could apply to virtually any employment situation but for higher marks each one should have been discussed in the context of the case study. Candidates were able to identify three apposite expectations but, it has to be reiterated, did not develop their responses enough. A total of 12 marks was available for this task and, bearing in mind that it could have been predicted, the overall response ought to have been better. The candidates could have chosen three from the following list of expectations e.g.: fair wages and salaries, suitable and safe conditions of work, training and retraining if necessary, opportunities for advancement, appropriate incentives, provision of channels of consultation and negotiation. Some candidates overlooked the point that the focus was on permanent members of staff and so did not include the casual employees. There were some instances where candidates reversed the meaning of the task and talked about the expectations an employer might have of employees.

Task 4

(a)(i) and **(ii)** addressed the external influences (i.e. the PEST factors) of the environment on business organisations. Candidates were offered two influences to consider. No number of points was specified but candidates were expected to offer brief but clear explanations. Overall the responses could have been more encouraging but suffered from a lack of argument and structure.

(a)(i) The first influence concerned pressure groups and public opinion. Bearing in mind the nature of the company's business, 'Unique Experience' was likely to be targeted by protesters and media criticism. Pressure groups represent organised public opinion and through their activities seek to influence Boards of Directors, share-holders, councils and Governments, the public, the media. 'Unique Experience' could be affected by the direct action of animal rights protesters interfering with, for example, a big game hunt. Their actions could encourage a lot of adverse publicity in the media; influence a government to refuse to licence the company's activities; disaffect the people who work for the company; discourage business and drive away potential clients. Responses tended to be rather limited and candidates did not develop their arguments.

(ii) The second influence for candidates' consideration was fluctuating exchange rates. Clearly the company was concerned about this issue as it operated throughout the world selling activities and making payments in different currencies. The exchange rate is the price of one currency in terms of another (in this case the dollar $), and as there are always some variations in exchange rates it means that a company has to monitor the movements. Once 'Unique Experience' had agreed a price for an activity, then a change in exchange rate could affect the company's revenue one way or another. However, the price could always be changed to take into account any movements in the rate and this is why it operated the cost-plus pricing method. Most responses looked at the issue from a negative aspect i.e. that the exchange rates would never be in the company's favour and very few candidates made the connection between the rates and the cost-plus pricing.

The next two tasks dealt with externalities. Although the responses were competent, there was the suggestion that many candidates did not really understand what was meant by externalities or at least they did not express themselves clearly enough.

(b)(i) This task asked for a definition of externalities and candidates needed to explain that they could be either positive (conferring benefits) or negative (incurring costs) factors which arise as a result of an activity undertaken by an individual, government, or company e.g. a company may provide many jobs (positive) but it might also pollute the area with its waste (negative) and the community would bear the costs. 'Unique Experience' provided jobs and tourism but at what cost to the various communities?

(ii) Negative externalities would include e.g.: the reduction of wildlife populations; the wear and tear on beaches, forests and areas of outstanding beauty; possible pollution of the rivers and the sea; the prospect of illegal hunting and the encouragement of local populations being involved in the illegal trading of fur and ivory. The point to be made here is that the impact or cost of negative externalities is borne by the community.

Task 5

(a) This task was successful in that most candidates were able to offer two appropriate benefits or advantages: as an agent was an independent expert appointed to represent 'Unique Experience' in another country, s/he should have in-depth knowledge of the region/country and be able to advise the project team(s), and ought to know how to secure the appropriate licences to undertake the activities, especially the hunting trips. Using an agent was cheaper for 'Unique Experience' than setting up its own office or network. Agents work for fees or commission rather than salary.

(b) Many candidates struggled with this task and few offered firm and knowledgeable answers. Candidates needed to have argued that cost-plus was a simple form of pricing method – it sought to ensure that 'Unique Experience' covered its costs and made an acceptable profit. The benefit to the company was that any cost increases were passed onto the clients in the form of higher prices. It was suitable because each project or activity may have had a number of unforeseen costs and the company could recover these by building contingency costs into the price. The candidates should have appreciated that the company was dealing with extreme activities designed to attract wealthy people and the situation favoured cost-plus.

(c) This task was different to the others in that it had no component parts and carried 12 marks. Candidates were invited to discuss how the company should ensure a high level of customer service. Since all the clients were wealthy, a very high level of customer service was required. Clients were prepared to pay upwards of $40 000 for the hunting trips and also the high fees for the other activities. Candidates should have appreciated that it was not surprising that the clients were very demanding and expected high standards of delivery. The clients were aware of how important they were to the company and it was imperative that the company, in turn, readily acknowledged they were the lifeblood of the business. The company had to ensure that its staff were properly trained and suitable for the tasks, and that the focus was on the clients and their specific needs. Should anything go wrong or clients appear to be dissatisfied then senior management had to be prepared to go to the site and remedy the situation. All activities and projects had to be carefully planned in advance to minimise problems, and appropriate insurances taken out to cover such elements as theft, injury, loss of equipment in transit, even death. The responses to this task tended to be pedestrian and identified the basic elements; few candidates exploited the opportunity to develop ideas and make positive use of the case study.

Paper 5172

Effective Business Communication

General comments

The overall standard of performance for this session showed some slight improvement from previous years, with a better quality of answer provided in the main, although there is still considerable scope for improvement.

However, there are some areas of the syllabus that still cause some discomfort, not least of all press releases, which were a factor in **Task 2 (a)**. Very few candidates did well in this particular task, and this has been something continuously problematic, and something that needs to become the focus of teacher support and in-class activities. Any distance learning materials should also be re-examined to ensure that they include sufficient detailed input on press releases also.

Time management – Many candidates seemed to perform quietly poorly in **Task 5** because they had run out of time. This was most evident in terms of the quality of answer in **Task 5** across the board.

On a more positive note, the *format and presentation of material* continues to see some improvement, and there was evidence to suggest that candidates had been well prepared for the exam. There were clear heading and subheadings and plenty of space between writing. This is evidence of good practice and should continue.

Finally, candidates need further coaching on how to address the allocation of marks within an examination. There is plenty of evidence to suggest that candidates do not know how much to write and include for two marks versus ten marks, and often there is little difference. This is an important factor to consider, and will have a particular affect on time management if candidates continually spend too long answering two mark tasks.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

(a) The focus of this task was to explain the different types of communication and how they could be used to tell customers about the cereal bars. In the main candidates answered this task quite confidently, although one downfall was that they potentially spent too long on it based around the allocation of marks provided. Often candidates would write upwards of two pages for six marks, something to be avoided.

(b) This task focused upon selecting appropriate methods of communication for reaching customers. There appeared to be some confusion here with some candidates, who at times forgot the concept of customer, and reverted to internal forms of communication. The focus here should have been on letters, emails, direct mailings, meetings or websites, to name but a few.

(c) This question tested the concept of different types of communications i.e.:

- non-verbal communications
- meta communications.

There continued to be a distinct improvement in the candidate responses from previous sessions, which hopefully indicates the usefulness of these reports. However, some weaker candidates do still struggle with the concepts. Furthermore, many candidates included standard answers and did not apply the concepts to communicating effectively with the customer, which is what the task demanded. As a result, it was rare that full marks were awarded for this task.

Task 2

(a) This task required candidates to prepare a press release, which clearly many were unable to do. There are a number of issues to consider here:

- how to lay a press release out
- the purpose of a press release
- to actually present something meaningful
- to present something meaningful in an appropriate amount of words.

There is a clear indication in the answers provided that teaching and learning in relation to press releases needs some additional focus and practice, holistically and not partially. This is a very strong recommendation.

(b) This particular task also met with a few problems. Some candidates read the task properly and discussed the purposes of sending press releases via emails, to names recorded on the databases; others saw it as an opportunity to answer a task about the benefits of databases. This was an easy task overall, and candidates lost a good opportunity to discuss in some detail the benefits of email to the organisation in the case study. No application was evident.

(c) Again, this task which asked for a description of a structure of a report, which was straightforward, resulted in some candidates presenting their answers as reports. This is not what was requested, and again resulted in some candidates failing to gain the available marks.

Task 3

(a) This task was a very straightforward task about developing effective communications within groups, to aid group working. Candidates in the main answered quite sensibly and seemed confident in relation to the issues of group working and associated communications. Stronger answers included:

- group structure
- group culture
- mutual trust and support from both parties
- consultation
- involvement in decision-making
- think more creatively and innovatively as a group.

(b) This task asked candidates to identify question types that could be used in interviews to identify reasons for low morale. Firstly, there is still a lot of confusion about what different types of questions can achieve, in particular leading questions. Candidates clearly did not understand what a leading question is, and generally offered an open question as an example of a leading question. Centres should therefore focus energies on developing typical question approaches.

An additional problem was the types of questions provided for example. In many instances the sample questions provide by candidates were not applied to the context of the case study scenario, and some very interesting options were offered, but completely unrelated. Where this was evident, candidates failed to gain full marks.

(c) In this final part of **Task 3**, candidates were asked to identify five main methods of ensuring effective group meetings. There was obviously a good understanding of the key issues of setting up and managing a meeting. However, the depth of the answers was generally quite poor; indeed, many of the answers provided more than five methods, but only in bullet point form. There was little explanation or elaboration in the answers provided, which resulted in candidates not being able to maximise the full marks available. When a task asks for five points, it means five points, not eight or nine. When the Examiner is marking the paper, they only accept five points. This in essence is a discipline in answering tasks and doing exactly what the task asks for.

Task 4

(a) The focus of this task was upon the use of technology in the context of business communications. It is pleasing to report that in the main candidates were able to define each of the three methods asked about in the task well, i.e. the Intranet, Extranet and Emails. The answers tended, however, to be definitions with little by the way of practical application of examples. Again candidates who answered in this way would only achieve mid-range marks and will not have been able to maximise their potential to earn full marks for each point.

(b) This task required candidates to think carefully about different types of questions that could be used to collect optimum data from Klegg's trade buyers. The focus was on interviews and not questionnaires, and it was pleasing to see that candidates did take the interview into account and the nature of it. In some instances it was encouraging to see that some candidates actually applied the task to the case study and were mindful of the context.

Task 5

(a) In the context of customer requests for information, candidates were expected to explain one advantage and one disadvantage of different types of graphical forms of communication, which could be used to present data.

Candidates were given specific graphical forms as follows and should have been able to provide one disadvantage for each method for a table; pie chart; bar chart and line graph.

However, there was a further issue and that was the use of the word 'disadvantage'. Some candidates did not take that word into account, and tended to provide advantages of each method, which clearly affected the marks awarded. Therefore, in the main only half marks were awarded for the description of each method.

Those candidates, who managed time effectively, actually went on in the main to achieve the upper end of the spectrum in marks, which was encouraging. Those who did not tended not to because the answers provided were illegible or very brief, and showed a lack of understanding or as stated above did not read the task properly and provided advantages as opposed to disadvantages.

(b) The answers to this ultimate task were generally quite poor and very basic. Those who did answer provided little more than bullet points. Many candidates provided incorrect answers, such as pie charts or bar charts, when the task was clearly asking for charts that assisted with planning, namely Gantt Charts and Flow Charts. Candidates should be able to identify at this level, the specific use of charts in given contexts, and many appeared unable to do this.

Paper 5173
Business Finance

<u>General comments</u>

Overall the performance of the candidates who sat the October 2005 examination was satisfactory with a large number of the candidates achieving at least a pass mark.

The majority of candidates appeared to manage their time effectively and produced answers to all of the tasks set. As a result they were awarded some of the marks available and this often contributed to them achieving an overall pass mark. However candidates and Centres are reminded of the need to study the marks allocated for each task or part task carefully so that they avoid spending too much time on tasks that carry a small allocation of marks.

Once again it is necessary to stress the need for all candidates to provide a formula when they are undertaking a task that involves a calculation. Marks are always awarded for showing the processes used to undertake the calculation as well as providing the correct answer.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

Overall the responses to **(a)** to **(e)** were satisfactory with the vast majority of candidates able to provide sensible and correct answers to most of the tasks.

The weakest responses were seen in the answers to task **(d)** with few candidates able to give credible explanations as to why the margins were likely to be similar.

Task 2

Overall the responses to this task were very satisfactory and it is clearly a topic that is being covered thoroughly by the teachers in the Centres. Many candidates scored high marks for their responses but they tended to lose marks on part **(a)** because they did not provide a complete answer by choosing to concentrate on the legal formalities and not producing answers that addressed the issue of financial formalities. The answers to parts **(b)** and **(c)** were very satisfactory with many candidates achieving full marks.

Task 3

Overall the answers provided by the vast majority of candidates to this task were very good. Again this is clearly a topic that is being well taught and very few candidates were unable to attempt to provide answers to the tasks. The answers provided for parts **(a)** and **(b)** often attracted full marks but some candidates lost marks when their calculations proved to be incorrect and they had not provided a formula to show how they were undertaking the task.

The responses to part **(c)** were less satisfactory with few candidates able to give a reasoned explanation as to why the alternative method would be more suitable.

Task 4

Overall the answers provided for this task were very satisfactory with the vast majority of candidates clearly aware of the nature and format of the Balance Sheet. As a result the scores for this task were generally good.

Task 5

Overall the answers to this task were rather disappointing. Although the majority of candidates could identify the relevant PEST factors very few were able to argue how they were likely to impact on the future profitability of the firm. To provide a complete answer to this question it is necessary to show how the PEST factors would influence revenues/costs and therefore profits. In very few cases was this approach evident.

Task 6

Overall the response to this task was satisfactory with the majority of candidates able to achieve high marks for parts **(a)** and **(b)**.

The answers to part **(c)** were either very good or very bad perhaps demonstrating that this topic may not have been fully covered in some of the Centres.

The answers to part **(d)** were very disappointing with many candidates providing solutions that were associated with enhancing the capital base of the firm rather than addressing the problem of effectively managing the working capital of the firm. Centres are urged to address this issue as a priority as it appears to be a major gap in the knowledge of the majority of candidates.

Paper 5174
Marketing

General comments

Some Centres demonstrated a very good overall performance this session, and it was very pleasing to see a few candidates showing a very clear understanding of marketing at this level. Unfortunately, other Centres still suffered from poor exam technique and/or lack of depth of answers as reported in previous sessions. Specific syllabus content areas are covered in the section on tasks below.

Examination techniques could still 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. In most tasks part **(b)** follows on from part **(a)**. Candidates should be guided to read the whole of a task before starting to answer it as some candidates wasted time by starting to answer the second part of a task in the first section. They then went on to repeat this in part **(b)**, wasting valuable time. Centres are encouraged to give candidates practice in answering tasks from previous papers to help them to understand the requirements of the tasks set.
- *Poor time management.* This continues to be a common mistake. Candidates who fall into this category often spend too much time on a task, or part of 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 asked for a definition only and most candidates were able to answer this well.

(b) Most candidates were able to identify six reasons why marketing was important to Involve but few expanded these points as required by the task, and very few presented their answer in the format requested – i.e. slides plus presenters notes.

Task 2

This task explored the syllabus area which covered marketing research. In part **(a)** the main reason looked for was that research could help companies make better marketing decisions and avoid costly mistakes.

(a) Many candidates identified types of business decisions that companies need to make. Full marks were only awarded to those who mentioned better decisions and avoidance of risk, and suggested suitable reasons for 'Involve'.

(b) In this part there were 3 marks available for each stage of the research process correctly identified and explained. Some candidates did this well and linked their answers to the case study. Other candidates merely listed the stages of the process. This was not enough to gain full marks.

Task 3

This task in particular was one where candidates wasted time by starting to answer the second part of the task when answering part **(a)**.

(a) This part required candidates to explain the stages of the Consumer Buying Process and it was very pleasing to see that most were able to do so well.

(b) This linked back to part **(a)** and asked for recommendations for marketing actions that the company might use at each stage of the process. Most candidates did this very well indeed, recognising promotional activities in particular that would ensure consumers kept them in mind when moving through the buying process.

Task 4

(a) Relationship marketing proved to be an area of weakness this session. While many candidates were able to define the term, very few were able to explain it.

(b) Again, the vast majority of candidates were able to name parts of the planning process (although many listed seven and did not stop at the five asked for). While it was pleasing to see some candidates suggest specific examples that were relevant to relationship marketing – for example, carrying out customer satisfaction surveys during the marketing audit stage – many only described the planning stages generally.

Task 5

(a) There were many examples of objectives that promotion can achieve and candidates were only asked to list four of these. Most were able to do so very well.

(b)(i) This part asked for the advantages and limitations of advertising specifically. Many candidates achieved high marks for this task, linking their answers to the new product launch for Involve.

(ii) This part was also done well although some candidates suggested sales promotion activities that were inappropriate to the context of the case study. Few mentioned incentives for the Trade/channel, to encourage them to stock and sell the new product. Candidates should be encouraged to think broader than just the consumer context.

Paper 5175
Human Resource Management

General comments

It is a continuing and worrying trend that candidates are not reading the task fully. Many of the errors made on this paper are as a result of the candidates failing to understand fully what the task requires.

Candidates need also to remember that this is a Human Resource Management paper and so all of the tasks set are in the context of HRM and are not general business questions. This requires the answers to focus on the issues of HRM and not explain or describe general business issues.

On the positive side the quality of the answers produced this year was of a higher standard with fewer papers failing to complete the required number of tasks.

Comments on specific tasks

Task 1

This section of the syllabus, section 1.0, remains the weakest part of most candidates understanding. Confusion exists between the meaning and purpose of HRM and the strategic and operational roles.

(a) The majority of candidates responded to this task at a very basic level, explaining the move from a centralised to a decentralised system. Few candidates managed to go beyond this very basic point.

The better candidates did highlight the fact that only the operational part of HRM was decentralised. A few then went on to explain what that actually meant.

(b) This was a classic example of the candidates not reading the task properly. The majority explained how the system changed in 2005 and not the effect that it had. Even more candidates simply related all of the changes in 2005 without any reference to HRM, which was the point of the task.

Task 2

There appears to be two areas of confusion in this section of the syllabus. Many candidates do not understand what the legal environment is and many more have no understanding of the term "the local Labour Market".

(a) The majority of the candidates struggled with the legal environment and simply explained anything to do with the law. Others discussed contract and working hours and a few managed to describe employee rights, pay legislation and Health and Safety. The point of the task, how the legal environment may affect, or stop Bikz was totally missed by the majority.

(b) Many candidates see the local labour market as an employer and clearly do not understand the concept. Only the very best candidates cited the lack of skills and age of workers in the market. The range of external organisations was quoted in the case but rarely used. The candidate's knowledge of trade unions was good but not always used in the correct manner.

Task 3

The answer to this task was disappointing because it is an area of the syllabus that traditionally candidates find easier to understand.

(a) The task required candidates to produce a list of methods to reduce staff and explain these methods. For some unknown reason many candidates decided to discuss the issue of training which is totally inappropriate.

(b) There exists some confusion between working patterns and employment contracts hence many candidates explained the move from day work to shifts and flexitime. The emphasis was intended to be on the ending of permanent contracts and the move to one year temporary contracts and how this would affect the company and the individuals.

Task 4

This task also highlighted the fact that many candidates did not read the task properly and instead of answering the task set they simply repeated parts of the case study.

(a) Candidates fully understood the proposals made and many could see the possible effects the actions taken had. However, too many candidates simply discussed the changes with no attempt to evaluate the effects.

(b) Again confusion existed between the change in working patterns and the change in contracts. Those that understood the changes in the working patterns simply explained them. Too few candidates were able to assess the impact of the changes.

Task 5

The standard of answers to this task was better than for any other task on the paper. Candidates clearly understand the difference between payment and reward and the concept of motivation, both in theory and practice.

(a) Candidates answered this task well with clear explanations of both rewards and payments.

(b) A few candidates tried to use motivational theories, which were not required, but generally the standard of answer was good. The majority understood how the changes could affect motivation and many saw the motivational and de-motivational factors.

Papers 5176, 5177 and 5178
Interpersonal Business Skills,
Business Start-up and
Customer Care

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 5176

This is a popular module and Examiners hope the comments below will be helpful to all Centres.

Candidates did not always use assignment cover sheets, and sometimes the page numbering on these sheets did not match the pages of the assignment. Centres should work with the candidates to ensure that cross references are correct and inclusive.

Some candidates did not include a self evaluation of their performance on completion of the assignment or their presentation. Others failed to provide evidence that an actual survey had been conducted or a presentation had been made to a group.

As with other modules, it is important that all the objectives mentioned in the ‘Criteria for Assessment’ section in the module booklet are demonstrated and evidenced in the submitted work. Failure to do this will often lead to a ‘fail’ result since there has been no check that the submission is complete.

‘Praise and criticism’ were omitted from some assignments, yet these are important elements of this module and should be included and discussed in the assignment. Again, teachers and candidates should be encouraged to check that all the required objectives and criteria are met.

Some candidates had entered ‘not applicable’ on their assignment cover sheets without giving an explanation. In these unusual and rare circumstances the person must say why and give evidence or demonstrate knowledge of that particular objective.

Assignments were not always written in the first person and appeared to be the work of a group of candidates. Although candidates are encouraged to work in groups during the course, assignments submitted for assessment must be an individual’s own work. Candidates might share research and discuss ideas with others, but the assignment must be the work of one person, that is, the individual candidate.

Different font styles had been used in some assignments and this is not appropriate for a business style document, in a similar way colourful decorations and lettering are not conducive to this scheme.

Paper 5177

Many of the more general comments made for the Standard Level could also be applied to Advanced Level.

One Centre encouraged candidates to use a very good numbering system to ensure that all the objectives were included in the submitted work.

Usually, self evaluation is included as a separate item but some candidates included a simple system that encompassed comments and observations within the text; this was appropriate for the work submitted.

Centre and candidates are to be congratulated on the quality of the work submitted.

Paper 5178

Some common weaknesses included lack of self evaluation, SAR sheets not fully complete and no reference sources quoted. Some Centres did not use the assignment cover sheets, and therefore, there was no check of candidates' work. Centres should be encouraged to use these sheets to ensure assignments are fully complete before submission.

It is important that if a survey is conducted then a complete analysis of the results obtained should be included in the text of the assignment; it is not sufficient to make brief reference to what was discovered. One assignment had a poor analysis of the survey that had been conducted and on another occasion it was not clear how the survey had been carried out.

A Centre had submitted an assignment using an SAR sheet which was relevant to another module, amending various headings. This should not be used as each module has its own unique SAR sheet.

Some assignments were poorly presented and did not have a conventional layout of heading, contents page, introduction, main text, summary/conclusions/recommendations, appendices and bibliography. These are basic requirements of an assignment submitted under this scheme. Please refer to the syllabus for details.

On marking one piece of work the Examiner was unable to determine whether or not a presentation had been made to a group of people. Details of a presentation, together with all the facts, must be included as part of the total submission.

Paper 5201
Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

This module continues to be popular. The most common error was:

- The failure to submit all the required printouts, particularly the two different copies of the document production section. A significant number of candidates completed and printed the final version of the document but failed to submit the intermediate printout of their work.

Other errors included:

- Errors in searching and sorting the database extract (particularly in maintaining the data integrity).
- 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.
- 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.
- Errors inserting new text into a numbered list and renumbering as specified in the question paper.

Paper 5247
Organising Meetings and Events

Overall comments

The candidates' overall performance ranged from very good to poor. Some candidates were well prepared and correctly organised *an event*, as required, although a small number of candidates produced reports detailing the organisation of a meeting.

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 teachers (pages 64 to 68 of the Advanced Syllabus refer).

Comments on the work of candidates

Most of the candidates produced reports that were legible and detailed. However, some of the information contained within the reports appeared to have been produced from textbooks and explained how an event *should* be organised, rather than detailing how they organised their event. Centres should note that a description of best practice is not sufficient evidence for success in this Assignment.

Candidates often did not give specific information on what they actually organised, how they did it, when and where, with whom they communicated and how they did so, etc. Various documents had been produced but candidates' organising skills were not always apparent. Candidates, especially at Advanced Level, should be using monitoring aids efficiently. These would include action plans, schedules and checklists. One of these aids should be used and copies submitted as part of the candidates' reports, as clear evidence of the organisation process followed by candidates.

Some candidates mentioned the communication methods they used and the reasons they chose these particular methods. Copies of letters, emails, agendas, notices of meetings, minutes etc. (where meetings were held as part of the organisation of the event), invitations, venue brochures, name cards, banners, notices and transcripts of telephone conversations had been submitted. However, often no specific detail had been given of what communication methods were used and the factors that influenced their choice. (For example, a memo written to a colleague would use an informal approach and style of writing, whilst a memo to a Managing Director would be more formal and take account of that person's role in the organisation.)

The selection and use of effective monitoring aids such as checklists, diaries, work schedules, etc. as a means of effective and efficient event planning should also have been highlighted. Candidates are required to assess the *planning*, *organising* and *monitoring methods* they actually used (Competence Criterion 2.2, page 61 of the syllabus refers). They should then state whether or not these monitoring aids were successful and what they would do differently when they organise their next event.

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 this information 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 event is being organised is not required.

General comments

Candidates and teachers are advised to read the Assignment Guidelines given in the syllabus very carefully. The step-by-step approach included in the Introduction is highly recommended, as this will help candidates to plan and carry out their assignments.

It is also recommended that candidates discuss with their teachers the event they are able to organise. Some candidates have been rather ambitious and would be better advised to organise a *small* event. Once they have decided the actual event that they intend to organise, they should then work out how this could be done. Candidates should write a plan of how they intend to carry out the various tasks that will be required. Centres should note that candidates who cannot organise an actual event may organise a simulated event but all the assessment requirements listed in the syllabus must still be met.

Each candidate must produce evidence of his/her own planning and work schedule. Copies of documentation such as invitations, agendas and minutes of meetings (if appropriate), emails, notes, short reports, transcripts of telephone calls and face-to-face conversations, publicity for the event, etc. should be included in the report. Evidence can include video and/or tape cassette material but this should be authenticated by a teacher's observation statement.

Candidates should consider:

- what type of event they can organise
- the documentation which would be appropriate for the event
- the time, date and venue for the event
- how they propose to organise the event
- what facilities they have to help them
- how to ensure everything necessary is organised – methodical working is crucial
- production of documentation that is complete and clear
- what communication methods would be appropriate and also the effect work roles and relationships will have on the communication methods they choose
- timescales involved.

The production of the report should be considered right from the start of planning, not left to the last minute. Candidates who made notes and who thought out the organisation of the event 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 event
- 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 and transcripts of telephone and face-to-face conversations
- a conclusion on the success of the event.