RECOGNISING ACHIEVEMENT

GCSE

Applied Business

General Certificate of Secondary Education **J213**

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

OCR Report to Centres

January 2013

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General Certificate of Secondary Education

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OCR REPORT TO CENTRES

Overview

Controlled Assessment Units A242 and A244

With regards to the controlled assessment tasks (see OCR's Guide to Controlled Assessment pages 8, 9 and 10), centres are reminded that during the write-up phase (Unit A242 Tasks 1, 3, 4 and 5 and Unit A244 Tasks 2, 3, 4 and 5) candidates should only have access to the research notes which they made during the research phase of task taking (Unit A242 Task 2 and Unit A244 Task 1). It is the responsibility of the centre to ensure that these are only research notes and that they do not include a draft or final version of the tasks. During the write-up phase the candidates must not have access to the Internet or to an intranet, to email or to a mobile phone. A breakdown of time limits is contained in the Controlled Assessment tasks for units A242 and A244. If a candidate is absent when an assessment is carried out, the Controlled Assessment task may be sat at an alternative time – provided that the centre is satisfied that security has been maintained by keeping all materials secure. The teacher may give appropriate support and guidance to the candidates during the research phase but verbal and written feedback are not permitted during the write-up phase.

Examined Units A241 and A243

Centres appear to be using the full range of resources available. At this series, more candidates were able to write their responses in context and, hence, access the higher marks. Candidates had been well prepared with theoretical knowledge of the units. However, some of them needed to develop their examination technique and to apply their answers to the scenario and also, in the case of unit A241, to a business which they have studied. For A241, when questions ask candidates to respond using a business they have studied, then they must apply their answers to the selected business. It is not sufficient merely to name the business and provide a theoretical response.

Centres are reminded that calculators are allowed in both unit examinations. Candidates will be disadvantaged if they do not have access to a calculator, particularly when carrying out calculations within unit A243. Centres must ensure that all of their candidates are suitably equipped with a pen and a calculator. When candidates cross out a response and insert a revised answer, it must be clear to the examiner which response should be marked. Centres must ensure that the responses of their candidates are legible. Increasingly, there are scripts which are difficult to decipher as a result of poor handwriting.

A241 and A244

Centres should note that the Equality Act 2010 is now in place. The Equality Act supersedes all of the following pieces of equal opportunities legislation: The Employment Equality (Age) Regulations, Disability Discrimination Act, Race Relations Act, Sex Discrimination Act, Equal Pay Act. From January 2013 series candidates will be assessed on the new legislation. A notice to this effect can be found on OCR's website.

A243 and A244

There were few entries for the Double Award Units, A243 and A244, this examination series.

A241 Business in action

General Comments

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

Questions on this unit will either be purely theoretical, applied to the business given in the texts within the question paper itself, applied to a business such as … (business name), or applied to a business which the candidate has studied. The introductory texts need to be read very carefully by the candidates and used as appropriate when answering the questions. The texts put the business, in this case MD Transport Ltd, in context and give candidates invaluable information which allows them to apply their answers and enable them to access higher levels of the mark scheme.

When a question asks the candidate about a business which they have studied, then their answer must clearly relate to that particular business. It is not sufficient to simply write the name of the business, state the activity of the business and then write a general, possibly theoretical answer. Candidates are asked to state the activity of the business, this is to help them focus on what their business actually does and to then apply their answer.

Some candidates, when identifying a business which they had studied, had obviously learned a lot about their chosen business, and were able to relate their findings to the questions on the paper, but often there was a limited understanding of how the chosen business actually operated.

On the 10 mark questions, responses were able to access Level 2 by demonstrating application of knowledge (not necessarily in context). They scored a maximum of four marks if their answer was applied knowledge in theory only, rather than in the context of MD Transport Ltd or their chosen business (depending on the question).

Questions asking candidates to explain a way or a reason are generally marked on a one plus one mark basis. This means that the first mark is awarded for stating or identifying the way or reason. The second mark is for developing that reason (in context, if that is required in the question). It was pleasing to see that a smaller number of responses than in previous series stated two or three different reasons rather than developing one of them. Stating two or three different reasons limits the candidate to a maximum of half marks on such questions because they are not developing their reasons.

Within the specification there are easily identifiable aspects where evaluation questions can be asked. Some of these elements include reference to a business the candidate has studied and some do not. Careful study of the specification will enable centres to plan their visits to businesses to their advantage. The use of the centre as a business is not always beneficial to candidates. An approach to planning the course could be to select a business or case study to cover each area of the specification where '*a business candidates have studied*' has been mentioned.

Answers presented for the higher tariff questions seem to indicate that the candidates had been prepared well. Teachers are clearly using past mark schemes and OCR resources to help their candidates to appreciate how responses are marked, should a level of response mark scheme be applied. Many more candidates seemed to be able to write in context and therefore, access higher marks.

The range of questions presented gave candidates of all abilities the opportunity to demonstrate understanding. The vast majority of the papers showed that the candidates had at least attempted all of the questions posed. The questions suitably address all topics included in the specification and are a true test of ability. Extended answer questions give higher ability candidates the opportunity to fully demonstrate understanding using application and context. Candidates of all ability ranges are able to write at length on the 10 mark questions. The scenario set enabled the candidates to apply their subject knowledge in an applied and realistic manner.

Specific Questions

The amount of detail contained in the texts has increased. This is to provide the candidates with more background information, thereby assisting them to put their answers in context. The majority of the candidates gained a good understanding of the work of MD Transport Ltd, and were able to use the information supplied in order to access context marks, as appropriate.

1a, 1b and 1ci and cii

These parts of question were intended to be relatively straightforward introductory questions. They served their purpose on this paper as most candidates answered them correctly. It should be noted that growth and expansion are not aims when a business first sets up.

1d

This part of the question was marked so that those candidates who knew a number of reasons in outline could gain full marks and also candidates who were able to develop one reason fully could also achieve full marks.

1f

This part of the question required an analysis of the consequence, not of the work of the functional area itself. Some responses were not able to access Level 3 as the analysis was incorrect. However, more candidates are achieving 10/10 marks on such questions. Most responses were able to explain the impact of a dysfunctional functional area and could, therefore, access Level 2 marks.

2ai

A number of responses described about the benefits to the customer rather than to MD Transport Ltd.

2aii

The majority of the responses showed knowledge but then tended to extend this rather than describe the benefits. Some of the candidates did not appreciate from the information provided that the system was already in place, and so lost marks.

2b

Candidates were able to make a decision regarding the best option for MD Transport Ltd. The information provided for the candidates clearly gave enough support for them to at least attempt this part of the question. Good use of the information provided was made by most candidates, with a high proportion of them being able to access Level 3 and making valid judgements. Again more 10/10 marks were achieved than has been the case in previous examination series.

2ci&ii

The mark scheme for these two sub-parts of the question gave credit for a business practice which had already been introduced to the named business. A good range of ideas were presented. Candidates need to be encouraged to write about different consequences. In this case, unfortunately, many examples of repetition were evident in responses.

3b

This part of the question was generally well answered with most candidates recognising that their responses needed to reflect expanding the business.

3c

Most candidates were able to give at least two valid examples when responding to this part of the question.

3d

This part of the question asked about the consequences of not listening to stakeholders. Many responses simply stated what interests stakeholders had rather than considering the impact of not listening to them. When good consequences were provided they were often well analysed. However, the judgement marks were harder to access as the candidates had to evaluate which was the greatest consequence, not simply which stakeholder group experienced the greatest consequence.

4a

This part of the question required the candidates to respond on ways 'other than suggestion schemes and offering ideas….'. A number of responses gave these two ways for their answer, thus achieving no marks. .Some responses incorrectly focussed on the ways in which the organisation would implement the proposals or stated the normal duties/responsibilities of an employee.

4b

The candidates seemed to have a good understanding of charities. As was the case with Question 1(d), this part of the question was marked so that those candidates who knew a number of reasons in outline could gain full marks and also those candidates who were able to develop one reason fully could also score full marks.

4d

Many responses did appreciate the fact that if MD Transport Ltd had to obtain a loan, then there would be an increase in cost.

4e

As has been the case in previous examination series, exchange rates was found to be a difficult concept and, therefore, the majority of the answers were usually too vague to access many marks. However, some candidates used 'SPICED' effectively in order to achieve at least two marks but, unfortunately, their second way was often the reverse of their first response.

A242 Making Your Mark in Business

General Comments

The aim of the A242 controlled assessment is for centres to find a local business which is similar to one of the five scenarios. The controlled assessment materials are available via OCR Interchange. Candidates must use one of the five scenarios provided by OCR. It is acceptable for candidates to use the actual names of their selected business and competitors within their work, rather than using the names within the scenarios. Candidates must ensure that they follow the requirements of the chosen scenario. Scenario 3, for example, requires candidates to recommend ‘ideas of other products or services the business can offer both in its shops and through the Internet’. In the work of some candidates, the new products or services were not entirely clear.

Task 1 (AO2) Candidates must produce an action plan, addressing each of the bullet points within the task (2 hours allocated). Candidates would benefit from using a tabular format to design the action plan, clearly showing how each task will be approached. They may find it helpful to include actual and target dates for completion. Candidates would also benefit from focussing the action plan on Task 2, ie to obtain information on target market needs and competitor activity in relation to the business scenario. Following Task 1, candidates should use the action plan as a working document. They may need to make changes to the original plan as the investigation progresses. In order to achieve Level 3, the action plan must be comprehensive and fit for purpose. Monitoring must take place, with changes being made and reasons being given for the changes. Candidates should indicate how the changes have impacted on other actions.

Task 2 This task is based on research and carries no marks. However, it was apparent from some of the work moderated that questionnaire design was weak and that limited secondary research had been undertaken. As a consequence, some candidates had minimal information on which to base their controlled assessment tasks. These weaknesses were reflected in the marks awarded. In the design of the questionnaire, it was helpful if candidates had an understanding of the marketing mix of the selected business. Primary research could also take the form of an interview with a member of staff, observations, visits, focus group or acting as a mystery shopper. Primary and secondary research should focus on the marketing mix. It is not necessary for candidates to include all their research findings from Task 2. Relevant sections could be included as appendices and cross-referenced to the body of the text.

Task 3 (AO1) A brief introduction would be helpful stating which real business is being studied and which competitors are being investigated. Candidates are required to clearly identify and describe how the chosen business is currently meeting the needs of the target market. The current customers may not necessarily be the target market from the scenario and candidates should describe the target market the business actually has. There tended to be implied evidence but it needs to be more explicit in relation to what the business currently offers the target market. The final bullet point within the task requires candidates to describe **two** ideas of how the business could better meet the needs of its target market and be more successful than its competitors, making reference to the marketing mix. In order to achieve Level 3, candidates must suggest two relevant ideas for improvement, with explicit links to more than one aspect of the marketing mix. Candidates must describe how the ideas will impact on the target market. The two ideas must be based on findings from their research and may be derived from any aspect of the marketing mix: Scenario 1 (eg refurbishing salon, new product(s), price reduction); Scenario 3 (eg new products or services); Scenario 5 (eg new product(s), targeted promotion, price deals).

Task 3 (AO2) Candidates must present their research findings in appropriate formats in relation to both customers and competitors. It would be helpful if candidates included a copy of the questionnaire and a tally chart. When analysing questionnaire data, candidates should be encouraged to use percentages. The use of tables to compare products/services and prices is an effective technique. For Level 3, there should be accurate interpretation, with detailed coverage of both customers and competitors. Data should be presented in a variety of appropriate formats with supporting explanations, eg charts, graphs, tables, location maps. At Level 3, there will be few, if any, errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Task 4 (AO1) For Level 2, candidates must provide a comprehensive description of the reasons **why** it is important for businesses to promote. Descriptions are enhanced by the use of a range of examples from businesses. Some candidates had described **how** rather than **why** businesses promote.

Task 4 (AO2) The item of promotional material must link to one of the ideas from Task 3, eg producing an item of promotional material for the new product idea. For Level 3, the item of promotional material should be clearly applied to the business, the target market and based on research. Some candidates had included a second copy of the promotional material which had been clearly annotated and cross-referenced to show how it was fit for purpose, particularly with reference to research outcomes and target market. Annotations could also show reasons for the choices made, eg, font size, colours, images.

Task 4 (AO3) Candidates must address each of the three sections within bullet point three. A frequent omission was section one – why your chosen item of promotional material is more appropriate than any other. Links to the target market need to be made clear in the evaluation, including how the promotion will attract the target market. Evidence from research should support judgements. At Level 3, evaluation of costs may consider different ways of producing and distributing promotional material. Candidates may wish to include a comparison of costs with other promotional media.

Task 5 (AO3) Candidates must use their action plans to address both bullet points within the task. Some candidates would benefit from using a range of criteria to reflect on the positive and negative aspects of their skills and teamwork. For Level 3, candidates are required to reflect on a range of skills, supported by the action plan. An in-depth evaluation is required of their own contribution and a reflection on other group members' contributions, with strong and regular links to the action plan. There will be few, if any, errors of grammar, spelling and punctuation. For Levels 2 and 3, candidates need to make links to their action plan. This could include reflecting on the process of creating an action plan and any benefits they derived from this. They also need to reflect on the changes they made to the action plan and why they felt those changes were necessary. The candidate may consider whether or not the changes were avoidable had they worked in a different way. Candidates also need to make judgements about their contribution to the group. Did they have a large or small impact on the group? Were they effective as a team player? What evidence is there for this? Did they take a leading role? Did they solve any issues? Candidates need to support the judgements they are making with examples.

A243 Working in Business

General Comments

The content of this unit is wide in both depth and breadth; therefore, it is particularly important that candidates are well prepared for the examination. Revision guides and practice at examination questions are an important part of the revision process for this unit.

Due to the depth and breadth of the specification, and as noted in the specification document itself, not all aspects will necessarily be tested on each paper. The only constant will be the finance functional area, which will take up about one quarter of the marks allocated to each paper.

The use of a calculator is allowed and centres are recommended to urge their candidates to use one as this will assist in the accuracy of their calculations. These will inevitably take place in relation to the finance aspect of the paper, but could also take place in other areas; for example, as on this question paper, when candidates were asked to complete a pay slip or to total marketing data.

Centres should note that the application of specific ICT applications such as spreadsheets and databases will be tested within this paper. The accuracy of data was tested within this paper.

Centres still need to prepare their candidates to effectively answer the longer questions which are assessed using level of response criteria and also the candidates' quality of written communication. There is evidence that where centres have done this, the structure and style of candidate responses allowed them to attain the higher marks. Candidates must be reminded to make good use of the stimulus material which is provided within the question paper – either within the text boxes themselves or in the question stem. This information has been provided for the purpose of helping the candidates to tackle those questions requiring them to demonstrate the higher level skills of analysis, evaluation and supported judgement. Centres should be aware that questions have been designed so that all candidates have an opportunity to demonstrate the Level 3 skills of analysis and evaluation. **This session was the first in which the longer response questions had an eight mark tariff.**

Most candidates made an attempt at all of the questions on the paper and there were some very full and competent answers. There was clear evidence that most centres were familiar with the specification and had prepared their candidates fully; however, it seems that some candidates may have entered the examination room without a **calculator**. Calculators are identified as required additional materials on the examination paper. Centres need to ensure that all of their candidates are suitably equipped in order to enable them to reach their highest potential.

Candidates' handwriting was not always easy to decipher and centres are urged to impress upon their candidates the need for perfect presentation. Candidates should make use of additional sheets, rather than writing in the unlined space.

Centres should be aware that there was only a small cohort which sat this examination in January 2013.

Comments on Specific Questions

The use of a school scenario enabled all of the candidates to access all sections of this question paper.

Question 1

Part (a) was generally well answered by most of the candidates, although some thought that the answer was that the ‘chain of command was too short’. Part (b) was also well answered with the majority of the candidates able to use the information given correctly. With part (c) if the candidates knew the term ‘span of control’, then they were able to obtain one mark, however, some failed to gain full credit as they did not follow the instruction within that part of the question to use an example from part (b).

Part (d) explored a difficult concept and if candidates understood the concept of how the functional areas of *Mestoe High School* would be affected by the change from a hierarchical organisational structure, then they were able to answer this part of the question well.

Question 2

This question was well answered by the majority of candidates who made good use of the CV response material and linked it to the vacant role as Faculty Head of Maths. Most responses were able to access the Level 3 evaluative marks but only those who were able to apply the requirements of the question were able to achieve full credit. The candidates were required to suggest and justify a suitable candidate, whilst discounting the other two candidates. The stand-out candidate was Francis Napier but responses were not penalised if they selected either of the other two candidates, usually Jenny Urso, and could then justify their selection. Some responses made generalised statements and assumptions which were from candidates’ own knowledge and the CV information.

Question 3

Part (a) was well answered by nearly all of the candidates; however, some did not use the correct units for pence, eg £216.00 and **not** £216. The same error was found in part (b) and some candidates did not add the name of the payee, Benny Santiago. A distinct improvement was that the cheque was left unsigned as instructed. Most responses showed knowledge of a cheque as a payment method and were able to demonstrate the reasons why Benny Santiago would have to wait for his money.

In part (d) if candidates understood that raw materials was the cost of sales, then the profit and loss statement was correct. If this was not the case then that affected the other necessary calculations.

On part (e) responses showed a good knowledge of the advantages and disadvantages of the use of ICT – but often with no analysis even though judgement was made. If there was analysis, then it tended to stem from the disadvantages, or it was not in the context of preparing financial documents. Although the question only stated ‘such as a profit and loss statement’, most of the candidates did relate their response to the preparation of financial documents indirectly, but there were also some responses which gave generic information which did not allow the candidates to access the higher level of response marks, eg save storage space.

Question 4

On part (a) nearly all responses were able to explain the purpose of market research, however in part (b) very few were aware that the correct answer was primary research. Part (c) required extended writing, which was well attempted by all candidates. Candidates were able to identify individual items of data from **Text 4** and were able to make relevant suggestions for changes. Those candidates who did this were usually awarded full marks. There were a good number of candidates who extended their analysis of the data to a higher level.

Question 5

In part (a) the majority of responses achieved full marks for accurately identifying the errors on the database. There was a mixture of different responses in part (b). Most candidates tended to start by stating a possible error, before explaining reasons to check accuracy which, in some cases, had no extension or impact of the reason. Candidates had a general understanding of the importance of this, but there were a number of candidates who did not use the context of *Mestoe High School*. Candidates generally gained full marks on part (c). The main problem in part (d) was that the information for parents was written in letter format in the body and not laid out as an email. Other than that the email was generally well written in a logical order, with only a few responses lacking attention to detail when copying from the bullet points, which meant incorrect information would have been passed to the parents of the students at *Mestoe High School*.

Centres should be aware that candidates need to practice creating the methods of communication documented in the 'In-Tray exercises' in the specification as these are tested on a regular basis.

Question 6

On part (a) responses showed sound knowledge, with most responses reflecting the scenario of *Mestoe High School*. Responses showed a good understanding of customer service in part (b) and could show ways to improve and/or why improvements to reception were necessary. They managed this mainly by identifying and using the data in **Text 6** correctly. The higher level skills of analysis and evaluation were not often achieved. Most candidate responses considered the data and suggested improvements to the reception services without continuing to evaluate the impact of these on the school. Some candidates did notice from **Text 6** that the school's budget was limited and attempted to use this information in their response.

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