Version



General Certificate of Education (A-level)
January 2013

Business Studies BUSS3

(Specification 2130)

Unit 3: Strategies for Success

Report on the Examination

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General Comments

The paper proved to be accessible for to students, who were able to attempt all of the questions. As with previous exams, better students were those who revealed good subject knowledge and whose answers consistently focused on the question set. They revealed a good understanding of the case study and scored highly for application through the selective use of relevant examples and data to illustrate their answers. The best answers would focus on a few well developed arguments and, when required, would end with a conclusion based upon prior analysis which directly answered the question set.

Weaker students tended to misunderstand or have limited knowledge of the topics being specifically examined. They often revealed a lack of time spent understanding the case study, resulting in misconceptions in their answers. Often their answers would lack focus on the question and simply repeat information from the case study without any analysis of its significance to the question. Conclusions tended to be assertive or a simple summary of previous arguments.

Question One

The majority of students revealed an understanding of critical path analysis, but it is disappointing to report that there were a significant number of centres whose students appeared to have limited knowledge of this topic.

Better students were able to recalculate the critical path and recognise the significance of the delay in terms of not meeting the deadline. They scored highly for both application and analysis by explaining both the financial and marketing consequences that could result from missing the deadline.

Many students revealed good understanding of critical path analysis, but failed to link this with other relevant items in the case study, such as the fact that fashion houses would only place contracts if the magazine was launched in time for London fashion week and/or rival firms also had well developed plans to launch digital magazines.

Question Two

Most students revealed good understanding of both marketing budgets and marketing plans. However a significant number appeared to view a marketing budget as a form of budgetary control.

The majority of students were able to provide valid arguments why a marketing budget was needed. Weaker answers tended to lose focus on the question and did not use the marketing data in the appendix. Better answers recognised that this was a radically new venture which would require detailed market research and effective promotion.

Students often tended to struggle to provide relevant counter arguments. The best answers were well contextualised with a strong appreciation of the financial position of the business as well as Harry Gardner's reluctance to provide additionally funds. Typical examples would be an assessment of the overall marketing strategy and/or the need to coordinate with the HR and Operations department without referring to their relevance to the actual marketing plan.

Most students were able to write a reasonable conclusion but failed to pick up on whether a 'significant' marketing budget would be needed.

Question Three

Some students considered a number of relevant issues such as the proposed redundancies, increased use of temporary workers and the relocation but purely in terms of the effect upon employee morale or level of motivation. Better answers, however made good use of relevant HR data such as the high level of Trade union membership, the average age and length of service of the workforce and the greater than average days lost to industrial action, combined with Harry's different approach and the radical nature of his proposals. These students then focused their answers on the effect that these would have upon employer/employee relations.

Question Four

As with previous exams, the key to answering this question is based upon writing well-structured answers.

Weaker answers tended to simply repeat arguments from previous questions and/or made several relevant points, but failed to analyse them in sufficient depth. In many cases there would be evidence that candidates had failed to understand the case study properly leading to misinterpretations of the data. For example, many candidates assumed that the forecast 10 million subscribers to women's digital magazines by 2015 would all be reading the Roberts Media digital magazine. Conclusions tended to be a summary of previous arguments or based upon assertion.

Students who had spent time understanding the case study and recognising the key issues tended to score highly. For example, the key objective was to achieve an ROCE of 8%. Better answers used the data provided to calculate the ROCE for both the print and digital versions and analysed whether it would be possible to achieve this 8% objective. They then went on to make selective arguments both for and against the proposal which were well developed and contextualised. The conclusion was a justified recommendation whether or not the proposal should be accepted based upon the prior analysis.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Grade boundaries and cumulative percentage grades are available on the Results statistics page of the AQA Website.