A-level

Business Studies

BUSS3: Strategies for Success

Report on the Examination

2130

June 2014

Version: 1.0

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Overview

Overall this paper proved accessible for the majority of students. As usual the strongest students showed both good subject knowledge and an understanding of the main issues in the case study. They would often spend time planning their answers which were directly focused upon the question, using selective arguments that were well applied and analysed. Relevant calculations and/or data from the appendices were used to support arguments. Conclusions directly answered the question and were based upon previous arguments.
In comparison weaker students often provided largely descriptive answers with limited analysis. Although answers would often contain many relevant points, generally these were not developed in sufficient depth. Calculations were either incorrect or not utilized to support arguments. Conclusions tended to be too brief and would often include additional points which did not add to the strength of the answer. This was often indicative of a lack of planning before answering the question.

Question 1

Better students were able to define a marketing strategy and relate the limitations of the database to the app proposal. Two well developed arguments which made effective use of the case study was usually sufficient to gain full marks.
Some students disadvantaged themselves by discussing the benefits of the database. While others either wrote mainly theoretical answers or made relevant points but failed to explain them.

Question 2

Most students were able to examine the arguments both for and against Zak's strategy and write a valid conclusion. There was often good use of the appendices to illustrate arguments with effective linking of HR, Operations and Financial data.
Disappointingly many students wrote rehearsed generic arguments often linked to the problems of low morale. For example a common argument was that low morale would lead to poor productivity and profitability, whereas in the case study it stated that there was increased revenue generated per employee and profits rose. It is important that students ensure that they have a good understanding of the case study when planning their answers.

Question 3

This question proved to be the best discriminator between students. Good answers calculated the 2013 payables and receivables figures correctly and made valid comparisons with the 2012 figures and/or the industry average. The implications of these figures were then well analysed. Only a minority of students however were able to identify reasons why the Finance Director should not be concerned. Consequently this often led to a one sided conclusion.
Unfortunately there were a significant number of students who were unable to calculate the 2013 figures despite being given the formula. Often students would simply compare the 2012 figures with the industry average. Many students misread the data and assumed that the industry average figures were the 2013 figures.

Question 4

Most students were able to provide creditable answers. As always the strongest answers revealed evidence of planning and use of selective arguments both for and against the proposal. The best students were able to fully develop their arguments and consistently support them with relevant material from the case study. Many students scored highly by using the financial data to calculate the ARR and payback. Conclusions made a justified recommendation based upon prior analysis that either supported or rejected the proposal.
Weaker students tended to offer a 'scattergun' approach. Their answers usually contained too many arguments, which tended to be mainly descriptive. The data in the appendices was not used to perform relevant calculations. Conclusions were often a summary of previous arguments and did not make a justified recommendation.

Summary

When preparing students for this exam, it is important to emphasise the importance of planning and spending time understanding the case study. When answering questions, selectivity is key, a few well developed and applied arguments will always result in higher marks than many poorly developed ones.
Centres should also spend time developing the student's numerical ability. Arguments supported by relevant calculations will often gain higher level marks for application and analysis, as well as providing the basis for a well-supported conclusion.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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

Converting Marks into UMS marks

Convert raw marks into Uniform Mark Scale (UMS) marks by using the link below.

UMS conversion calculator