A-LEVEL
Business Studies

BUSS3: Strategies for Success
Report on the Examination

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Overview

Successful students revealed good subject knowledge and understanding of the main issues in the case study. They had an impressive appreciation of the proposed strategy as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the business. Their answers were well planned and directly answered the question set. Selective arguments were used and these were well developed in relation to the actual question. Numerical data was used effectively as well as relevant calculations to support arguments.

Less successful students often revealed weak subject knowledge and a superficial appreciation of the case study. However a significant number revealed only limited understanding of investment appraisal and/or critical path analysis. Their answers would often contain relevant points, but usually these were not well developed. There was a tendency to 'pad out' answers by simply repeating information from the case study, rather than using it to support an argument. Many weaker answers lacked an overall structure and did not specifically answer the question. Often additional points would be added to the conclusion, indicating a lack of planning.

Question 1

This question produced a wide range of responses. With students who revealed understanding and numerical ability scoring well.

A common error was students who failed to calculate the net return per year. Also a significant number struggled with the payback calculation, specifically the number of months in addition to the 2 years. Despite this, as long as students showed their calculations, they were able to gain marks. Of more concern were those students who showed no understanding of investment appraisal and/or presented an incorrect figure with no calculations, making it impossible for examiners to award any marks.

Question 2

This proved to be an accessible question. Most students revealed good understanding of a 'soft' human resource strategy and/or identify relevant points.

Successful students assessed both the strengths and weaknesses of this strategy, using selective arguments that were well developed and supported by relevant data from the appendices. The conclusion directly answered the question and was supported by the previous arguments.

Less successful students' answers were often generic, for example 'soft HR creates high morale which leads to greater efficiency'. This revealed a fundamental lack of understanding of the case study, due to the fact that labour productivity was less than the industry average. A common mistake was that students misread the question by discussing the benefits of the strategy in the shops rather than the York factory. Also their answers tended to be descriptive, contained too many points which were not developed and provided a conclusion which simply summarized the previous arguments.

Question 3

This question generated a wide range of responses. There were many examples of impressive knowledge of critical path analysis, with students able to calculate the original duration of the project as well as the revised one. This was then linked to the consequences for the business if the deadline was not met. Conclusions directly answered the question and were usually based upon whether Kate's or the Operations Director's figures were more credible.

A common mistake was that students would correctly calculate both the original and revised figures, but then fail to analyse the consequences. Less successful students' answers revealed a fundamental lack of knowledge of critical path analysis, with no attempt at calculations. Relevant points were identified but not developed or they raised issues regarding producing in Poland rather than York.

Question 4

The key to answering the final question well is planning and structure. Due to the wealth of information available, this question is generally accessible to all students.

Successful students were able to selectively use a few key arguments both for and against the proposal. These arguments were analysed using logical, well developed links. Relevant calculations such as gearing, ROCE, break even and potential profit were used to support arguments. Conclusions were justified and directly stated whether the strategy should be adopted, based upon the previous arguments.

Less successful students' answers tended to lack structure and coherence, indicating a lack of planning. Many relevant points would be identified but with little analysis. The case study and data tended to be simply described and the opportunity to make relevant calculations was missed. Often answers would be lengthy, but additional points tended to only gain knowledge marks, due to the fact that they contained limited development. Conclusions tended to simply summarise the previous points but failed to make a definitive decision whether or not to accept the proposal. Often additional points would be included in the conclusion, showing evidence of poor planning.

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