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Examiners' Report

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International Advanced Level in Business

WBS13/01

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Introduction

Overall, performance on this paper showed a mixed but generally positive grasp of business concepts. Many candidates were well prepared and demonstrated good use of business terminology throughout the paper. Better candidates applied their knowledge effectively to the context, while weaker responses relied too heavily on generic or common-sense statements rather than business concepts. Timing appeared good and most candidates completed all questions within the allotted time.

Report on individual questions

Question 01(a): Labour productivity

This produced a wide range of responses. Some candidates calculated the correct figure of 13.14 cars per employee, which gained full marks immediately. Many, however, omitted units or used incorrect units such as percentages, limiting the marks awarded. Others did not give the answer to two decimal places, again restricting the credit that could be awarded. A number of candidates reversed the figures or multiplied by 100, resulting in answers such as 7.60 or 7.61%, which could not be rewarded. Centres should continue to emphasise the importance of correct formulae, full workings and accurate units.

Question 01(b): Supply and demand diagram

This was generally better attempted than in previous series. Many candidates drew clear axes and labelled the curves correctly. The main issues were incomplete labelling of the original equilibrium or incorrectly shifting the curve. The majority understood that reduced subsidies would shift supply to the left. Some added unnecessary shifts or mislabelled elements, which limited the marks. Nevertheless, the overall quality was stronger than in past sittings.

Question 01(c): Total Quality Management

Most candidates began with an attempt to define TQM and were able to identify benefits such as improved quality, higher customer satisfaction and reduced faults. Stronger responses used the context effectively, referring to issues with the Cybertruck accelerator pedal or leaks. Evaluation was often weaker, with limited discussion of drawbacks such as high implementation costs or resistance to change. One-sided responses were common, restricting the level achieved. A conclusion is not required for 8-mark questions.

Question 01(d): Risk assessment

This was poorly answered and many candidates left it blank. A number of candidates misunderstood the purpose of a risk assessment and instead focused on preventing technical issues rather than addressing the potential loss of key staff. Better responses linked risk assessments to identifying risks related to working conditions, workload or pay and considered succession planning. Evaluation tended to be stronger, with candidates recognising that some staff departures cannot be prevented. Responses generally lacked development and application, and many fell into lower levels. A conclusion/judgement is required for 12-mark questions but was not often seen.

Question 01(e): Strategic decision to reduce the workforce

This question was handled more confidently. Most candidates could explain strengths such as lower labour costs and increased competitiveness for Tesla. The majority also identified weaknesses including the loss of skilled staff, reduced morale and potential production delays. Some candidates simply rewrote the extract, limiting marks. More developed answers integrated wider economic context, such as falling demand for electric vehicles or declining share price for Tesla. These responses were placed in higher levels. Again, a conclusion was required for this question but was this often missing.

Question 2: Porter's Strategic Matrix

Candidates were asked to evaluate whether differentiation or cost leadership was the best strategy for Superdry. Many responses described the two options without offering disadvantages or evaluation. Stronger answers provided balanced arguments, referencing branding, pricing and competitors. Some were able to integrate business concepts and develop chains of reasoning. As with previous series, largely descriptive responses are unlikely to access the higher levels. The highest-level responses reached a justified judgement, although many conclusions repeated earlier points.

Question 3: Employee consultation and productivity

Many candidates copied large sections of the extract and focused on general improvements to motivation rather than explicitly linking consultation to productivity. Better responses used theories such as Maslow or Herzberg and explained why communication and involvement could raise productivity levels for Mears. Evaluation was often focused on alternative strategies such as financial rewards or the practical limitations of consulting a large workforce of 5,400 employees. Candidates should be encouraged to develop chains of reasoning for evidence that they use, using several strands of argument rather than a superficial 'this will increase productivity' statement. Developed chains of reasoning and clear contextualisation characterised the highest-level responses. A justified conclusion was required but was often lacking.

Paper Summary

To improve performance in future sittings, candidates should:

- Read questions carefully and understand the command words.
- Ensure all calculation answers follow the required format, including decimal places and units.
- Quantitative Skills will be tested throughout the paper, and these may be in the form of calculations, diagrams or using the data from the Extracts
- Use the extracts to provide application rather than copying them.
- Develop chains of reasoning rather than making unsupported statements.
- Provide balanced arguments for 'Assess' and 'Evaluate' questions and reach supported judgements.