A-LEVEL
BUSINESS
7132/3: Paper 3
Report on the Examination

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General Introduction to the November Series

This has been an unusual exam series in many ways. Entry patterns have been very different from those normally seen in the summer, and students had a very different experience in preparation for these exams. It is therefore more difficult to make meaningful comparisons between the range of student responses seen in this series and those seen in a normal summer series. The smaller entry also means that there is less evidence available for examiners to comment on.

In this report, senior examiners will summarise the performance of students in this series in a way that is as helpful as possible to teachers preparing future cohorts while taking into account the unusual circumstances and limited evidence available.

Overview of Entry

A key element to this series is the substantially reduced number of entrants compared to a normal summer entry. In essence this manifests itself in not presenting the same range and diversity of student entry. A common weakness on this paper was that although students were able to access the material many struggled to follow this through with suitable development due to a failure to address key aspects of the question asked. This suggested a lack of preparation in exam technique and understanding of the demands of individual questions.

A number of students built arguments effectively but their final judgement let them down; the conclusions, or lack thereof, often restricted potentially very good answers. Students should note A04 accounts for 7, 8 or 9 marks respectively on 16, 20 and 24 mark questions, therefore the absence of a conclusion/judgement severely restricts the maximum mark they can achieve on that question. If repeated across the paper this then has a major impact on any final grade. In contrast there were some clear cases of students who understood the demands of individual questions and were able to structure responses well, answer the question asked and when relevant give conclusions based on their prior arguments.

Comments on Individual Questions

Question 1
A surprising number of students struggled to address this question effectively. A large number of responses showed misunderstandings of the consequences of a rise in share price, most notably believing that a business will have more money as a result. Straightforward responses scored well – the question was not complex – with those focusing on shareholders and senior managers usually managing to achieve well over half marks. It remains troubling that the impact of a change in share price was so often misunderstood and implies that this may be an area of the specification that needs more careful study for many students.

Question 2

Although some students showed little or no understanding of Bartlett and Ghoshall's theory, the majority were able to build effective answers to this question. The very best answers clearly drew on the information in the case study to address the two axes of Bartlett and Ghoshall's matrix using information from both appendices referred to in the question. The very best answers specifically

addressed the question of why the business chose this strategy, whilst less good responses simply explained advantages of tailoring marketing strategies to local market needs.

Question 3
This question proved to be accessible to all, but allowed better prepared students to gain far higher marks through effective use of the context when developing their arguments. Weaker responses frequently offered only generic analysis of the benefits and drawbacks of choosing cheaper suppliers. On the other hand, students who recognised the relationship that Sunport had developed with its suppliers and used this to build an effective contextualised argument were able to score very well.

Question 4
As with question 3, the best responses recognised the importance of the context when addressing this question. With a clear indication that Sunport used the Balanced Scorecard as a measure of success, there are arguments on both sides of the question, whilst the ability to form a contextual-based judgement was readily available. The best responses did this, whilst weaker responses tended simply to describe the data provided in Appendix D and make discreet judgements on each piece of data.

Question 5
The quality of responses to this question varied widely, with the key determinant of marks earned being the extent to which the answer had remained fully focused on the question set. There is no ambiguity in the wording of the question to suggest it is asking about anything other than the effect of a change in leadership style. Students who remained focused on the effects of the change on leadership style could construct excellent responses to the question. Unfortunately, a sizeable proportion of students built answers around the strategic changes proposed without addressing the specific question asked. Once more, it is worth reiterating that the key determinant of success on A Level Business papers is to answer the specific question that has been asked.

Question 6
A question that almost all students found highly accessible once again offered the opportunity to build good responses when students maintained a focus on the question. Exploring scenarios in which commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility will and will not decrease profit should have formed the bulk of responses. However, many students tried to introduce scenarios where a failure to commit to CSR led to a decrease in profit – which is not addressing the question set. The very best answers even managed to show an understanding of the fine difference between ethical decision-making and commitment to CSR. Again, at the top end, judgements were made that addressed the 'all business' aspects of the question by drawing on prior analysis to show in what contexts profits would or would not be decreased.

Concluding Remarks

The demands of the paper, expectations from students and type and range of questions asked were entirely comparable with those of previous series. This paper proved to be accessible for students on all questions. Students were able to respond well across all of the paper and most used the stimulus material appropriately in their responses. Issues of timing were not apparent. Perhaps more apparent in this series than previous were gaps in knowledge/understanding as evidenced by either no response answers or very low to zero marks awarded, notably on questions 1,2 and 5.

There were some very well considered and developed responses, but many students who did possess the base knowledge lost marks through either providing very generic answers which did not consider the context in the case study. A final common weakness for some occurred in responses to questions 3-6 failing to recognise the importance and weight of an in-depth conclusion/judgement that has its foundations in the analysis provided. Too many students still approach this key AO4 skill by offering a simple limited statement instead of looking to weigh up their arguments as a means of justifying their judgement.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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