GCSE
BUSINESS

8132/1 Paper 1: Influences of operations and HRM on business activity
Report on the Examination

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General

Overall, the paper effectively discriminated between students, with the most successful students being able to offer responses to all the questions.

The less successful students tended to demonstrate a lack of application skills and analysis was superficial or generic. The responses that failed to access the higher levels of the mark scheme for extended responses generally made too many undeveloped points, sacrificing depth. In addition, such responses were often descriptive, and made very limited, if any ,use of the context.

When answering questions requiring the extended responses students must remain focused on the topic and links to profits, sales etc must be fully explained and justified. Generic lines of argument will limit the analysis to basic or sound. Detailed analysis of the topic requires a line of argument closely linked to the question.

Whilst definitions are not rewarded in extended responses it could be useful for students to make it clear they understand the topic with a brief explanation of how it works. This proved more of an issue with the 6-mark responses which often lacked effective links with the topic eg JIT or quality assurance.

A stem is given for the 6 and 9 mark questions. This is written to help students focus their responses. Many students failed to use this and particularly in evaluative questions they could have used this to consider the most important factor.

When answering the 9-mark evaluation questions students can follow a number of different approaches. For example, in response to the question should Xanthe create a taller organisational structure, if students are choosing a taller structure, they can analyse an advantage and then give a conclusion drawing on a disadvantage to give a balanced response and justification for their decision. Equally they can give an advantage of the tall structure and compare this with a flat organisation to add balance in their conclusion.

A number of students did use additional pages. However, in most cases when additional pages were used to answer the longer evaluative questions students tended to add more reasons rather than extend their line of argument and therefore struggled to add any real value to their answers. Consequently, it was unusual that the use of additional pages enabled an answer to move to a higher level. In general, students should only look to use additional pages if they have large handwriting or need to replace an answer or a part of an answer.

If students do use additional pages, it is vital that they make it clear which question they are answering and indicate in the exam question that their response has been continued on another page.

The quality of handwriting was a major concern this year and students must ensure their responses are clear. Far too many were illegible.

Overall, the most effective responses tended to display a number of common characteristics that included:

- a demonstration of relevant knowledge with concise development of this knowledge on shorter questions.
- evidence of using the information in the case study relevant to the question.
- a line of argument for one point/reason fully developed.
- a balanced argument for the evaluative questions leading to a clear, supported judgement based on these earlier arguments.

- a conclusion drawing together both options and the evidence for the 12-mark question and evaluating the most important information.

Section A

Section A was generally, well attempted, most students demonstrated knowledge for at least one mark. Very few answers were left blank.

Questions 1.1 – 1.6

The six multiple choice questions enabled students to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding across a range of the GCSE subject content. The most challenging question proved to be question two; almost two thirds of students incorrectly answered this question. The responses to question two suggested some lack of understanding between fixed and variable costs in relation to output, with response B proving to be the most common incorrect answer. A third of students were not able to correctly answer question 5; most of these students thought that it would decrease span of control. Question 4, on types of job contracts, elicited the most correct responses.

Question 1.7

Whilst the majority of students demonstrated knowledge in this question, some students failed to gain both marks for using different terminology for the same category of stakeholder. For example, some confused employees and managers as different stakeholders. Similarly, some identified shareholders and owners are two different stakeholders. The most common answers included managers, customers and owners.

Question 1.8

This question proved challenging for many students, with more than a quarter of responses failing to score any marks. Of those students able to complete the question many did not develop their responses sufficiently. This would seem to be down to not effectively reading the question. The question expected students to link their answers to maintaining quality in their explanation. The most popular responses focused on additional staff training and inspection costs. Stronger students were able to develop these answers to how this effects high standards and quality.

Question 1.9

A popular question with very few students failing to score at least one mark. However, some explanations were generic answers about the loss of customers without identifying the disadvantage. The most popular answer was that the business would gain a poor or bad reputation.

Question 1.10

On the whole a well answered question with a good knowledge of entrepreneurs demonstrated. The most popular answers in terms of characteristics of an entrepreneur were risk taking, hardworking and innovative.

Question 1.11

Another question which identified a gap in knowledge for many students, with many failing to answer or to score any marks. In addition, many students = failed to recognise it is for new employees when they first start. The best responses looked at how induction is used to help new employees meet colleagues they will be working with.

Question 1.12

Many students were able to identify at least one financial method. Students, however ,must be encouraged to use the space provided for the method and choose one method only for each answer space. Terminology used must be precise.

A majority of responses which focused on commission and profit sharing were then able to explain how this works. In a small number of responses students incorrectly focused on the benefits of rewarding staff. Students need to read the question carefully. The question is asking them to explain the financial method itself.

A common misconception was that fringe benefits and promotion are financial methods of reward. The specification clearly lists acceptable financial methods and only these will be awarded marks.

Students who correctly identified wage or salary were often not able to explain how this works.

Section B

Question 2.1

On the whole this was a well answered question. Most responses referred to where the training took place and gave an example for development.

Question 2.2

A majority of responses used method 1 as outlined in the mark scheme. A lot of answers were not labelled very well which at times limited the marks available to be given if it wasn't clear what each answer was for. A minority of students were able to calculate total costs correctly., Many then were unable to work backwards to calculate selling price. A common mistake was assuming the total costs were multiplied by 2 . The majority of response that were attempted were able to calculate the administration charge; however often one step was missed in the calculation of wages, with a number of students multiplying this by 30.

Question 2.3

The first 9-mark question proved more accessible to students this year. However, more use of the case study for these questions is an area that the majority of students would benefit from.

The better responses used the maximum capacity of 20 delegates of the face-to-face course and the s reputation of the business for quality to make their decision. Many students did not reach detailed analysis as points were not developed with the why or how. Many ended their chain of argument linking back to an increase in sales and profit without further explanation.

In some cases, students were also able to include their answer from 2.2 to support the decision of introducing the new course, demonstrating good evaluation.

Some students explained how internet access could be an issue ignoring the context in the question of an increase in internet usage, which limited the response.

Recommendations were generally clear, although some were simply repeating a reason from a previous paragraph.

Question 2.4

An accessible question demonstrating the students' knowledge of internal recruitment and the subsequent impact on the business. Very few students did not respond. Most popular answers were that internal recruitment motivates employees and that it provides opportunities for promotion. A common misconception was that internal recruitment meant that less training would be needed rather than being specific to induction training. A small number of students said it was cheaper, quicker or easier, without qualifying or giving examples of what it was cheaper, quicker easier than.

Question 2.5

This 6-mark question proved challenging for many students. They were often unable to analyse one reason in depth; they often listed several points instead.

Whilst the majority of students gave a response as to how it was a benefit to XTA, others explained how it was a benefit to Xanthe. However, many students gave generic responses about benefits to a business and did not include context in their response. Where context was used, students picked up on employees having responsibility for designing courses.

A number of students misinterpreted the question and gave the benefit as motivation, rather than how delegation motivates. Some students appeared to not know what delegation was or their responses did not show this sufficiently.

Question 2.6

This 9-mark question proved challenging for many students. Students understood the concepts of tall and flat structures; the issue was often that students either didn't develop their chains of analysis, often just stating separate points and/or they didn't specifically link their answers to XTA. Too many responses wrote general lines of argument without any reference to the case study. Therefore, a detailed response was not achieved.

Better responses analysed how a tall organisation would be beneficial to XTA, and were able to analyse how this would create a narrower span of control. Students were then able to explain how the structure impacts on delegation and motivation, and finally sales.

Evaluation on this question tended to be limited and often repeated previous points. Students must consider what is the most important factor for this business. They can consider long or short term consequences, or what the decision depends on.

Section C

Question 3.1

More than half of students did not correctly answer this question. The most popular answer was primary sector Common errors were confusing these with factors of production or describing the sector, giving examples rather than identifying it.

A number of students listed many answers. The question clearly asked for one sector and the first sector/term written will be taken only.

Question 3.2

The 4 mark extended responses are generally accessible to students. However, whilst many students were able to demonstrate a basic understanding of the fall in the value of the pound, they did not read the question carefully and did not use information from table 3. This table contained numerical information and this was necessary to gain sound application and to develop their explanation.

Question 3.3

he best responses to this question clearly demonstrated an understanding of what JIT is and the fact that it involves not holding stock and having parts delivered when needed. Better responses linked this to the case study and the fact that the business has been experiencing issues with supplier's late deliveries. Unfortunately, too many answers simply talked about issues with suppliers and the impact on NISTs reputation if production halts, with no clear link to why this is more of a problem when not holding stock. Students must show knowledge of the business terms in the 6-mark questions. They must be encouraged to think about what this term means and look for something in the case study to link the concept to, then clearly explain this in their answers.

Many responses jumped around between several reasons about why JIT or late stock can affect a business, with no connecting of sentences or flow of an argument.

Question 3.4

Students approached this in two different ways. Some developed an answer in terms of operations and how TQM is used to improve standards during production, as the question asked. However, many looked at the effect on marketing and reputation of the business whereas the question was asking students to link this to the production of the car. Understanding of TQM was not well demonstrated and several students confused it with quality control. Many did select information from the case study, such as 28 hours of production and giving employees responsibility, but this was often thrown in and not used as part of the argument. Equally many responses lacked context and generic answers even if fully developed will only be awarded sound overall using best fit.

Question 3.5

This was a question which proved accessible to many students with two thirds scoring both marks. Students did not gain second mark if they did not use the data or they did not read the data carefully, for example not giving the answer in millions.

Question 3.6

Very few students gained both marks on this question. Whilst many were able to explain how sales data can be used to estimate future sales, many did not link then to why this would have also resulted in a prediction of a decrease in profit. Many responses simply said "therefore this will also reduce profits" ; some further explanation was needed. A small number of students repeated their answer to question 3.5 or mistakenly talked about the graph predicting profit.

Question 3.7

More students were able to access the higher level for this 4-mark question. There were a small number of responses that drifted away from the context by linking to COVID. However, the context was well used in many responses. The best responses were able to consider needs and wants, and that new cars were a luxury item.

Question 3.8

Students struggled with the demands of the 12-mark question. When answering the 12-mark question students must cover both bullet points; in this case, the effect of producing cars in Spain and setting up an e-commerce site. An answer does not need to analyse both the advantages and disadvantages to achieve a detailed line of argument. The key to achieving level 4 for these questions is through an evaluation, therefore it is strongly recommended that students provide a detailed conclusion. The final part of the question must be answered ie, which could have the biggest impact on the number of cars sold. The conclusion is where the decision must be made with evidence of why. More effective responses weigh up both options in the conclusion.

Most students appeared to have had sufficient time to complete their answers to the final question. However, many spent too long covering l both the advantages and disadvantages of both options in detail at the expense of the evaluation which was then too brief. Students only need to produce three paragraphs for level 4, and the more detailed paragraph would be the evaluation.

Many students are using up valuable time trying to link their 12-mark answer specifically to all functional areas, often gaining little/no credit as it makes no sense and often detracts from their chain of analysis. The question is created to cover at least two functional areas. If the response draws these together in the conclusion it will be a synoptic response and meet the requirements of Interdependent nature of business areas and show integrated analysis. Throwing in sentences on finance or ethics will not gain credit unless there is evidence in the case study. Often these are learned responses such as "this will impact on the ethics of the business” or “this will impact on the finance of the business” without any explanation.

Analysis skills were not demonstrated sufficiently on this question, with too many responses jumping around with several points and not developing a line of argument using connecting words. On the whole few students were able to access the top level due to lack of analysis but also due to lack of evaluation.

- a wide range of information was given about both options and students did pick up on this and some used this in their responses;, others were listing the context.

- Option 2 of setting up an e-commerce website was marginally the most popular choice with students.

- some students misunderstood that the business was producing in Spain and then exporting the March back to the UK market.

- Most sound lines of argument centred around an increased European demand for electric cars and the fact that selling price would not be affected by exchange rates.

- Most used demand from taxi firms due to the daily charge as the main argument, but some related this to lower revenue/profits due to having to offer reduced prices rather than linking with sales.

- Minimal planning was demonstrated before the commencement of the question ; as a result, students’ responses often then drifted.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

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