GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Business

A Level

Summer 2026

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.[1]

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

[1] ***Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.***

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Exam Results Analysis	Eduqas provides information to examination centres via the WJEC Portal. This is restricted to centre staff only. Access is granted to centre staff by the Examinations Officer at the centre.	Portal by WJEC
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Executive Summary

All three examination papers were of a similar standard to previous examination series and provided high accessibility for candidates.

It was pleasing to see, that on the whole and across the three papers, knowledge and understanding was once again good. Although, improvements are still needed on candidates' precision of knowledge and showing fuller understanding for mid and high tariff questions.

The knowledge and use of the various business calculations in the specification continue to improve and there was a notable improvement in how candidates show their calculation workings and present their answer, though for some candidates, silly errors are still present.

Application remains a skill that causes problems for many candidates. Although many use the data well, still far too many use the data at a superficial level, and this has an impact on their ability to give good analysis and evaluation.

Across the three papers there was evidence of some improvement in candidates developing good lines of reasoning and improving their analytical responses to questions requiring AO3.

As with previous years, many candidates struggle with evaluation, however, it was pleasing to see more candidates attempting to evaluate throughout their answer and attempt at offering balanced evaluation. Superficial final sentences or unsupported conclusions do not meet the standard for AO4 Band 3.

Candidates need to take care in identifying the demands and specific requirements of the question and the command words in order to recognise the skills being assessed in the question and fully. Once again, there was quite a few responses where candidates are not responding to the question set.

It was pleasing to see across all three papers that handwriting appeared to be slightly better than previous series, with a lot fewer scripts being escalated with illegibility issues.

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COMPONENT 1: BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES AND FUNCTIONS

Overview of the Component

The examination paper was broadly accessible across the ability range, with attempt rates ranging from 91.5% to 99.9%. The high attempt rates suggest that timing was not a significant issue for most candidates. The mean mark for the paper was 49.8 out of 80 (62.3%), indicating that candidates were generally able to access the paper and that overall performance was broadly comparable with the previous series. While legibility was not an issue for most scripts, there were more cases where handwriting was difficult to read, which made it harder to determine whether marks could be awarded.

Performance on short knowledge-based and numerical questions was generally strong. Questions such as 5(b) (FF: 93.1%), 4(b)(iii) (FF: 91.8%) and 6(a) (FF: 85.5%) were among the most accessible on the paper, demonstrating secure understanding of familiar business calculations and core definitions. Many candidates showed confidence when calculating gross profit margin and completing parts of a cash flow forecast, and there was evidence of sound procedural understanding in these areas.

In contrast, questions requiring precise knowledge of particular specification areas proved more challenging. Question 6(b), which assessed Fiedler's leadership theory, had the lowest facility factor on the paper (FF: 24.7%). Question 5(a), on internal diseconomies of scale, was also one of the least well-answered questions (FF: 43.3%).

Application of context and use of data were variable. Candidates often used the case material effectively in questions such as 2(b) and 7(b), where the business contexts gave clear opportunities for relevant application. However, in other questions, responses were more theoretical or did not use the stimulus with sufficient precision. In Q.3, for example, stronger responses made effective use of both the break-even chart and the information in the stem, while weaker responses tended to make general comments about break-even, margin of safety and profit without developing clear links to costs, revenue and output.

Evaluation remained a key area for improvement. While many candidates attempted evaluation in the extended questions, it was often limited to brief or general judgements. In Questions 1(c), 5(c), 6(c) and 7(b), stronger responses were characterised by balanced consideration, supported judgement and the use of qualifying statements. Weaker responses often identified whether something was better or worse, or more or less important without fully explaining the circumstances on which this judgement depended.

The paper differentiated well overall. Stronger responses were characterised by accurate use of terminology, careful focus on the precise question set, effective use of the stimulus material, and clear chains of reasoning. Weaker responses often showed knowledge of related business content but did not apply it to the specific focus of the question, for example by discussing primary versus secondary research rather than methods of primary research, or general cash flow forecasting rather than decisions based on the forecast.

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Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) This question was generally well answered, with most candidates demonstrating some understanding of the need to avoid bias in market research. Many responses referred to more accurate decision-making, more reliable research findings, or reducing the risk of acting on misleading information. Where candidates did not achieve full marks, responses were often too brief or repeated the term “bias” without explaining why avoiding it is important. Stronger responses made clear that unbiased research is more likely to provide representative information that can support better business decisions.

(b) This definition was less well understood. Many candidates showed only a limited understanding of quota sampling, often referring generally to sampling or to selecting people based on characteristics. Stronger responses recognised that quota sampling is a non-random sampling method involving set proportions of participants from different groups. A common weakness was that responses did not include enough precise features of the term to access both marks. Some candidates confused quota sampling with random sampling or described sampling in very general terms.

(c) This question proved challenging for many candidates. Better responses considered a range of primary research methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observations or test marketing, and applied these to Power Gymnastics. Stronger answers used the case study selectively, for example by referring to children, parents, local competitors, Charlotte’s limited time and the aim of improving customer satisfaction. Analysis was often clearer where candidates considered both advantages and disadvantages of different methods. However, evaluation was less secure. Many candidates evaluated primary research as a whole rather than evaluating the relative suitability of different primary research methods. Weaker responses often focused on primary versus secondary research, or random versus quota sampling, which did not address the precise focus of the question. Candidates should be encouraged to read the question carefully and ensure that evaluation is directed at the methods being asked about.

Q.2 (a) (i)(ii) Q.2(a)(i) was generally well answered, with most candidates able to draw and label an upward-sloping supply curve. However, a minority confused supply and demand curves or failed to label the line clearly. Q.2(a)(ii) was less well answered. Some candidates were not able to show accurately the effect of suppliers increasing their prices. Better responses showed the effect clearly on the diagram, either through a correctly labelled movement along the supply curve or an appropriate shift in supply in response to the contextual wording. This suggests that candidates were more confident with the basic shape of a supply curve than with applying changes to a diagram.

(b) This was one of the best-answered questions on the paper. Most candidates understood how satisfying consumer needs and wants could benefit Earthwise and were able to provide two distinct points. Common responses referred to increased sales, customer loyalty, improved brand reputation, competitive advantage or growth in market share. Application was often good, with candidates using details such as environmentally friendly cleaning products, products not tested on animals, demand for sustainable products and Alfie’s social media presence.

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Where candidates did not achieve full marks, this was usually because the same contextual point was used for both benefits or because analysis was stronger for one point than the other. Stronger responses developed clear chains of reasoning that led to a specific benefit for Earthwise.

Q.3 This question was answered reasonably well overall. Many candidates demonstrated knowledge of at least two of the three required elements: break-even point, margin of safety and profit. Better responses used both the break-even chart and the information in the stem to support their analysis, including references to current output, increased production, planned price rises, fixed costs, total costs and total revenue. Some candidates did not make sufficient use of the chart or did not develop clear links between costs, revenue, output and the likely impact on break-even, margin of safety and profit. Margin of safety was the least well-understood of the three elements. Stronger responses dealt with each element separately and developed logical chains of reasoning, rather than conflating them or moving from one to another without explanation.

Q.4 (a) This question was answered well, with many candidates able to define capacity utilisation accurately. Stronger responses referred to actual output as a proportion of maximum possible output, often expressed as a percentage. Some candidates provided the formula, which was creditworthy where it demonstrated understanding. Weaker responses simply reworded the term, such as stating that it means “using capacity”, without explaining what is being measured.

(b) (i)-(iv) Candidates were generally more successful with the numerical parts of the cash flow forecast than with identifying the correct label. Q.4(b)(i) was the least well-answered of the four parts, with some candidates giving answers such as “profit” or “total profit” rather than “net cash flow”. This suggested some uncertainty about the layout and terminology of a cash flow forecast. Q.4(b)(ii), 4(b)(iii) and 4(b)(iv) were answered more successfully. Most candidates were able to calculate the missing figures, particularly in Q.4(b)(iii) and 4(b)(iv). Where errors occurred, these often involved adding figures incorrectly or failing to show negative values using brackets or a minus sign. Centres are encouraged to reinforce both the structure of a cash flow forecast and the correct presentation of negative figures.

(c) This question was less well answered. Many candidates described the general benefits of cash flow forecasting rather than explaining how the information in the forecast could help Naomi make decisions. Some responses focused on profit and loss, which was not appropriate in the context of a cash flow forecast. Better responses used the data in Table 1 to support specific decisions, such as delaying the equipment purchase, arranging short-term finance, controlling expenditure, or reconsidering the timing of the van purchase. Weaker responses tended to quote figures without explaining how they could inform decisions. Candidates should be encouraged to use financial data to support specific decision-making points rather than giving general explanations of financial documents.

Q.5 (a) This was one of the least well-answered questions on the paper, with a facility factor of 43.3%. Many candidates did not show secure understanding of internal diseconomies of scale.

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Some provided a general definition of diseconomies of scale, while others confused the concept with internal economies of scale, external economies of scale or general increases in costs. Stronger responses identified valid reasons such as communication, coordination, control or motivation problems, and described how these could arise as a business grows. Weaker responses often labelled a reason without developing it, which limited access to full marks. Candidates should ensure that, in short-answer questions, they provide the description required rather than relying on a brief list or isolated term.

(b) This was the best-answered question on the paper, with a facility factor of 93.1%. The vast majority of candidates correctly calculated the gross profit margin as 84%. Most candidates showed secure knowledge of the formula and applied the data accurately. A small number of candidates used an incorrect formula, such as dividing net profit by gross profit, or omitted the percentage sign from the final answer. Overall, however, this question demonstrated strong understanding of a core profitability ratio.

(c) Many candidates were able to use the profitability ratios in Table 3 to make relevant comments about the performance of Bytesize Ltd. Responses often referred to changes in gross profit margin and net profit margin over time, as well as comparisons with the industry averages. Evaluation was the weaker aspect of responses. Many candidates stated that performance had improved or worsened but did not develop this into a balanced judgement. Stronger responses recognised that the picture was mixed: gross profit margin remained above the industry average, but had declined over time, while net profit margin had fallen below the industry average in 2025. Better responses also considered possible reasons for the change, such as increasing supplier costs, research and development expenditure, and the expansion of the customer service department. Candidates should be encouraged to weigh the relative significance of different ratios rather than treating all changes as equally important.

Q.6 (a) This question was very well answered. Most candidates were able to show understanding of motivation, commonly describing it as a reason for doing something or a driving force that affects behaviour. Where candidates did not achieve full marks, this was often because responses were circular and used the word “motivation” or “motivated” without clearly explaining the meaning. Stronger responses used alternative wording to demonstrate secure understanding of the term.

(b) This was the most challenging question on the paper, with a facility factor of 24.7%. Many candidates did not show secure knowledge of Fiedler’s leadership theory. A common issue was that candidates wrote about leadership styles or motivation theories in general, particularly Theory X and Theory Y, rather than the specific theory being assessed.

Some candidates recognised that leadership style may depend on the situation, but relatively few developed this with sufficient accuracy. Stronger responses referred to Fiedler’s contingency approach, including task-oriented and relationship-oriented leadership and the importance of matching leadership style to the situation. Centres are advised to reinforce precise knowledge of named theories, as related but inaccurate content limited performance on this question.

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(c) This question was answered reasonably well. Many candidates demonstrated good understanding of the roles and functions of managers, including planning, organising, coordinating, controlling, motivating and decision-making. Most candidates were able to explain why managers may be important to businesses. Some responses also considered why managers may be less important, for example in flatter organisations, highly skilled workforces or businesses where employees can self-manage. However, other responses considered only why managers are important, which limited the balance of analysis and evaluation. Evaluation was often the weakest aspect, with many candidates concluding that managers are important without qualifying this judgement. Stronger responses recognised that the importance of managers may depend on factors such as business size, organisational structure, industry and employee autonomy.

Q.7 (a) This question was moderately well answered. Many candidates understood that 360 degree feedback was linked to employee appraisal or performance review. Stronger responses made clear that feedback is gathered from a range of people who are able to comment on an employee's performance, such as managers, colleagues, junior staff or customers.

Weaker responses repeated the word "feedback" without explaining the process clearly. Some candidates incorrectly described 360 degree feedback as a review of the organisation's overall performance rather than an appraisal method focused on an individual employee.

(b) This was the stronger of the two 10-mark questions. Candidates were generally able to apply their responses to Google by referring to the different job roles and selection methods in the case study. Many candidates appropriately linked methods such as tests, virtual chats, work trials and interviews to roles such as software engineer, director of global marketing, human resources apprentice and finance assistant. Analysis was often good, although not always sufficiently developed for the highest band. Stronger responses considered the positive and negative implications of different methods, such as the usefulness of technical tests for software roles or the value of interviews for assessing communication and leadership. Weaker responses sometimes discussed internal and external recruitment rather than recruitment and selection methods or referred to methods without explaining their suitability.

Evaluation was attempted by many candidates, often by recognising that the best method would depend on the role or that a combination of methods may be most effective. However, well-balanced evaluation was less common. Stronger responses considered qualifying factors such as the seniority of the role, the skills being assessed, cost, time, candidate experience and the need for role-specific selection.

Summary of Key Points

- Candidates should ensure that they answer the precise question set. A number of responses showed knowledge of related business content but did not focus closely enough on the specific requirement, for example discussing primary versus secondary research, general leadership styles, or general benefits of cash flow forecasting rather than the issue being assessed.

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- Definitions and technical terms should be revised with precision. Questions on quota sampling, internal diseconomies of scale, Fiedler's leadership theory and 360 degree feedback showed that candidates often had partial understanding but lacked the accuracy needed for full marks.
- Candidates should make full use of the stimulus material, charts and financial data. Stronger responses used case details, numerical information and the break-even chart to support analysis, while weaker responses often remained theoretical or quoted data without explaining its significance.
- Evaluation should be balanced, developed and supported by qualifying statements. In questions such as 1(c), 5(c), 6(c) and 7(b), stronger responses recognised that the best judgement depended on factors such as the business context, the role being recruited for, the relative importance of different ratios, or the circumstances in which managers operate.
- Quantitative skills were generally strong, particularly in the calculation of gross profit margin and completion of parts of the cash flow forecast. However, candidates should continue to practise the correct layout and terminology of financial documents, including cash flow labels and the presentation of negative figures.

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COMPONENT 2: BUSINESS ANALYSIS AND STRATEGY

Overview of the Component

- Component 2 was approached well overall and there were lots of candidates who were able to access the higher-level bands. Timings appeared to be managed well again, as most candidates answered all questions on the paper, and a 98.4% attempt rate on the final question, suggesting candidates were able to get to the end of the paper.
- Handwriting was better than in previous years, with less scripts being escalated for illegibility reasons. Presentation of answers was clear, with many candidates using paragraphs effectively which aids the marking.
- Less answers used the additional space at the back of the exam paper. This could be partly because additional space was provided with the question, and partly because candidates are writing more succinctly than in previous series. However, candidates were still approaching the AO's well to still be able to access the higher-level bands. When additional space was used, most candidates were labelling this correctly to allow for accurate clipping of scripts.
- The assessment objectives were addressed well across most scripts. Knowledge in general was strong with most questions being attempted across the paper, perhaps except for Q.2(a) and Q.6(a), where some knowledge gaps were evident from lower attempt rates.
- As commented in previous series', numerical responses are being well presented with clear laid out workings and on the most part expressed with the correct units of measurement, as there are marks available for both. It is good practice in responses which require lots of workings out to underline/highlight the final answer in some way, to make it clear to the examiner. This was particularly evident in Q.3(a).
- Definition questions were generally answered well, and it is pleasing to see most candidates including two credit worthy statements to ensure the 'detailed definition' is achieved. This appears to have improved from previous series. It is also good practice to start any longer response that has a key term included in it with a definition as this helps award the AO1 marks, but this was only really relevant to Q.7 in this years' paper.
- Analysis chains appear to be more detailed this series, with a higher number of candidates able to develop chains of reasoning. Some scripts did not do this to develop detail, which was particularly noticeable on question 6b. In general, AO4 appeared to have improved on previous years, with it becoming more common to see judgements within the main body and not just the conclusion. The strongest scripts demonstrated context-based judgement by bringing in application to the evaluation.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.1 (a) This question asked candidates to define a franchise. This had a high attempt rate of 99.7% and an average mark of 1.1 out of 2. Most candidates were able to reference the selling of the legal right to use a business brand name, and then the stronger candidates usually identified this was in return for a fee of royalties and an upfront purchase cost. Lots of responses gave examples, most commonly McDonalds, although this was not credited in this response as it did not show understanding of the term.

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(b) This question required one advantage and one disadvantage of growing via franchising and as it was point marked not band marked, there were three marks available for each point. With an attempt rate of 99.7% again, this was a well approached question with a mean mark of 3.8. The best way to approach this was to give a key point and then using the normal rules of analysis, explain the point and the impact it has. Most responses discussed the risk to the brand name and that it is low risk as the franchisee makes most of the investment. A small portion of responses looked at the answer from the point of view of the franchisee which meant they were unable to access the marks.

Q.2 (a) This was another definition question, this time on rationalisation. Despite a lower attempt rate than Q.1(a) (97.9%), the mean mark was higher (1.4), suggesting a high number of candidates had learnt the accurate definition. As in previous series, it was a requirement that for full marks, there must be some reference to efficiency. Lots of incorrect responses were discussing being rational when approaching decisions.

(b) This question required candidates to consider some data presented in a bar chart. As in previous years, the requirement in a data analysis question for the AO2 marks is to describe what the data is showing to show correct interpretation. Strong scripts were able to do this well, by comparing closures vs opening stores. Weaker responses simply commented on the number of stores that were closing. The AO3 marks in this question were for explaining the effect on two stakeholders. Most responses focussed on customers and employees. Some statements made were too brief to be awarded band 2 for AO3, but a high proportion of responses were able to make chained arguments. This question was the most approachable on the whole paper, with the highest attempt rate of 99.8% and a facilitating factor of 73.6% (the mean mark expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark.)

Q.3 (a) With an attempt rate of 99.4% and a facilitating factor of 77.7%, this question was approached well, with lots of candidates able to achieve all 5 marks. There were a small number of scripts who forgot the £ sign on the final answer, which meant one mark was deducted, and some scripts who calculated the new net profit of £292 000 but did not then calculate the variance from the original net profit. It appeared that the part that caused the candidates most difficulty was calculating the percentage changes on the revenue and expenses figures, which is a reminder of why basic quantitative skills are important to embed. There were lots of stages to this calculation and the presentation of some scripts made the workings difficult to follow, especially when trying to apply the OFR. Logical presentation and underlining/circling of the final answer often helped this.

(b) Within this question there were two parts, with their own command words. Firstly, candidates were asked to explain likely reasons for the variances identified, and then secondly recommend ways to respond. Most responses approached both sections of the question, but some did not include the responses, and so marks were limited for these candidates. The most common error made here was candidates assuming cost of raw materials classed as an expense and making this the argument they used, when that would impact cost of sales. The AO2 marks were accessed well with lots of candidates using the quantitative and qualitative information provided.

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Most responses were able to give a cause for two of the variances and provide some development, although in parts this was brief so limited the AO3 marks. AO4 was awarded for the candidates' suggestions of how the variances could be improved. Higher level AO4 marks were given to the responses that critiqued and evaluated their suggestions, and band 3 AO4 required these suggestions to be given/evaluated in context. The question had a good attempt rate of 98%, but the facilitating factor was 57.9%, mainly driven by candidates failing to recognise both command words.

(c) This question required candidates to calculate the total contribution of the special order, and was answered very well overall, shown by an attempt rate of 99.5% and a high facilitating factor of 78%. There was also a mark lost for incorrect presentation here too which suggests that an even higher proportion of candidates were able to correctly calculate it. It was pleasing to see candidates write out the formula first, especially if the response did not correctly complete the calculation as it allowed 1 mark to be gained even if the correct data was not chosen.

(d) This question was also well approached by candidates, with an attempt rate of 99% and a mean mark of 3.1 out of 4. Most candidates began the response by discussing the answer to the calculation and that because it was positive that it was a good idea to accept the special order. Whilst this wasn't essential, it is good practice to use the calculation in a sub part of the question. Other strong responses then discussed lots of other points from the case study such as access to a new international market. It was pleasing to see some candidates link to the adverse sales variance from the previous question and how the special order will help this, which often led to good AO4 as it allowed context-based judgement. Other ways to access the AO4 marks involved critiquing the suggestion to accept by looking at counter arguments.

Q.4 (a) This question required candidates to calculate the income elasticity of demand, and with an attempt rate of 99.3% was accessed by most candidates and done well with the second highest facilitating factor of 80.4%. It was pleasing to see candidates display their workings logically, especially if the own figure rule was applied, and good practice to start with the formula. There were marks available here for presentation, and a small number of candidates lost a mark for either rounding incorrectly or expressing the final answer as a percentage. Another common error made was to input the two changes into the formula upside down. This was often avoided if the candidate began by writing out the formula.

(b) This question required the candidates to refer to the calculation made in Q.4(a) and comment on what it means for the businesses in the market. Most responses successfully identified that the calculation answer meant it was a luxury good and was income elastic, which earnt an AO2 mark. Own figure rule applied here and if the calculation had been completed wrong (most commonly upside down which gave an answer of 0.56), then candidates were required to call this inelastic for the AO2 mark to correctly interpret their incorrect figure. For band 2 application, candidates needed to consider other aspects of the context, most commonly this was accessed by discussing substitutes in the market such as a supermarket shop. For AO3 marks, lots of the responses were deemed as limited as they simply discussed whether sales would increase or decrease or not based on changes in income. Stronger responses explained this further, such as discussing impact on stock levels/production or the need for widening the product portfolio.

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The facilitating factor for this question was the lowest on the paper at 54.8%, mainly driven by very brief explanations.

Q.5 (a) This question asked candidates to calculate the annual depreciation, and was the best answered question on the paper, with a facilitating factor of 83.3%. Common errors were that some candidates used the life of the business of 10 years, instead of the life of the asset of 5 years, and marks were also deducted if the answer did not have a £ sign, or was expressed as a minus, but this was uncommon, and presentation was generally good.

(b) Candidates were required to classify which strategy one of the options would be according to the Ansoff matrix. 98.1% of candidates attempted this with a facilitating factor of 64.1%. Most of the incorrect answers that were given were not Ansoff strategies suggesting lack of knowledge as the issue rather than being unable to apply to the situation.

(c) 99.3% of candidates attempted this question, which required candidates to draw a decision tree displaying the three options to calculate the net return. It was pleasing to see that most attempts resembled the structure of a decision tree diagram more than in previous series for similar questions. The facilitating factor was 67% so generally answered quite well. There were a small number of responses that were not presented well, and this made the workings quite difficult to follow. A common error that was made was to subtract the multiplied probabilities instead of adding them up, but good workings would still allow one mark for correctly deducting the original cost at the end. £ signs were not required for presentation marks in this question.

(d) In previous series, it has been a common question following a decision tree asking which is the best option for the business to choose, but this question asked about the usefulness of decision trees themselves. Some candidates addressed the question incorrectly by focussing too much on the positives and negatives of each option, not on the decision tree itself, which limited the marks. 98.8% of candidates attempted this question, and it had a facilitating factor of 57.8%. Successful responses looked at an advantage and a disadvantage of using decision trees then made an overall conclusion. Lots of AO2 was used from the given context, but often the chains of analysis were brief, which limited the AO3 marks. Strong responses evaluated each paragraph given, and band 3 for AO4 was given if a judgement was made in context to Ruth.

Q.6 (a) This question required candidates to calculate three different ratios for one year. This had the lowest attempt rate of all the questions (96.5%) suggesting a small percentage of candidates did not know any of the required formulae. The facilitating factor of 67.2% shows that the candidates that did attempt the question were able to calculate some of the formulae. The acid test ratio was the best attempted of the three and most candidates were able to calculate this correctly. The majority were calculated as 0.81:1, with an extremely small minority using the alternative stock figure to get 1.56:1, which was also awarded as correct. A higher number of responses were unable to calculate ROCE and/or gearing. Most of these incorrect responses appeared to be because candidates were unable to correctly calculate capital employed. Presentation was important in this question, with some candidates either rounding incorrectly, or forgetting to put the correct units of measurement on the final answer.

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(b) This question required candidates to make a judgement of the performance of the business using both quantitative and qualitative data. A small number of responses began by defining the terms quantitative and qualitative data – this is not required here and would only be needed if the question was specifically about these terms. Whilst the question did not directly ask candidates to discuss the ratio answers, as with Q.3(d) when a sub part follows a calculation question, it is good practice for the response to include discussion of the previous calculations, and this was required to access the top bands for AO3 and AO4. There were a number of very strong responses that interpreted the ratio calculations very well and were able to make some strong judgements on these. However, analysis was often missed, and some responses focussed heavily on judging the figures in relation to the benchmarks but failed to include the impact of the changing figures on the business. Qualitative information was analysed well, with most candidates choosing to focus on the labour turnover of the business. This question had a 97.3% attempt rate and an average score of 5.3 out of 9.

Q.7 This question asked candidates to evaluate backwards vertical integration for Volkswagen and with an attempt rate of 98.4% and a facilitating factor of 65.4%, was the highest scoring of the longer response questions. It was good practice for responses to start with a definition to pick up AO1 marks, but this was also awarded for inferred knowledge throughout the answer. There were lots of clues given in the stem, and most responses were able to get limited application by lifting these from the case study. For stronger AO2 there needed to be reference to either VW as a car company and where they sit in the market, or the nature of the car market itself. This was seen less frequently. AO3 was accessed well, with most responses considering and advantage and a disadvantage of the strategy. It was pleasing to see AO4 being added in throughout the whole response, not just in the conclusion and this allowed higher AO4 marks to be accessed. Again, accessing top band AO4 was not possible without context-based judgement.

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BUSINESS

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COMPONENT 3: BUSINESS IN A CHANGING WORLD

Overview of the Component

This paper was received well by candidates with a high percentage completing all questions in Section A. Many candidates were able to demonstrate impressive technical skills in accessing the AOs for each question. However, it is noticeable that whilst question 11 to 14 were attempted at 95% and over, question 15 only had an 89% attempt rate. This indicates that some candidates may have spent too much time on the earlier questions. Time management is a crucial skill in this exam and candidates should plan their timings.

- As in previous years, a higher proportion of typed scripts were submitted this year. Some responses showed very poor handwriting. Centres are advised to review the legibility of candidates handwriting. If it is deemed to be poor, then the potential to type responses should be explored.
- Knowledge of the specification content was at a good level in the majority of cases. Knowledge of market orientation (Q11) and intellectual property (Q12) showed the weakest responses from unprepared candidates with mean scores of 5 and 5.1 respectively. The low attempt rate of question 15 may also indicate a lack of knowledge on the part of some candidates.
- Section A contained an extended case study of the LEGO company. Most candidates made excellent use of the case study and built on the material provided to develop AO3 and AO4 skills. However, some candidates simply retold the story by writing out what had happened in the case study rather than developing the implications and creating judgements. Section B was varied with Q21 being a particular issue for those attempting it, with a mean score of 3.3/10.
- As this paper required long written responses some candidates were able to perform very well with the focus on building lines of argument and creating judgement. It was also clear that some candidates were less skilled in the integration of AOs to build high scoring responses. It is crucial that centres focus on the AOs and how to score well throughout the paper. Section B part 1 questions again saw candidates making little reference to the situation in the question and therefore sometimes failed to achieve any AO2 marks.
- AO4 was good with the majority candidates offering judgements within each paragraph. Some candidates also created judgements as a final paragraph to weigh up the evidence and directly answer the question. Whilst this is good practice, some candidates simply reiterated previous statements in a summary rather than a final judgement.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Q.11 This question on market orientated strategy achieved a mean of 5/8. Most candidates were able to pick out some of the case study material which showed market research had been carried out and was then acted upon. However, it was also clear that some candidates did not know the content area and focused on anything that would increase sales. The facility factor was 62, the highest of all the questions in Section A.

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Q.12 Intellectual property covers several areas including copyright, patents and trademarks. Whilst most candidates continued to use the case study as a reference point, some missed the opportunity to bring in their own examples from other businesses. However, it was pleasing to see candidates considering issues such as the affordability of patents for small businesses. With a facility factor of 50.7 this question was the least well answered in Section A with many candidates only raising one valid point.

Q.13 Market segmentation was familiar ground for most candidates. With excellent use of the case study, candidates were able to focus on types of segmentation and demonstrate the implications of various techniques. Better counter arguments were created by the fact that the 'build what you want' buckets of bricks remained a best seller for LEGO despite no obvious segmentation.

This was the most popular question on the paper with an attempt rate of 99.1%. Candidates also handled the question with the most skill achieving a mean score of 7/10 and the highest facility factor on the paper at 70.4.

Q.14 This question encouraged candidates to consider the impact of technology upon LEGO and its customers. Responses contained a wide range of ideas both in terms of product and market development. Although candidates often covered both customers and the business in their responses these were often intertwined rather than having distinct technologies that would benefit one or the other. To some extent this limited the development of AO3. However, with a facility factor of 60.8 candidates still performed well on this question.

Q.15 This question had the lowers attempt rate in Section A, 6% lower than any other question. It may be that some candidates mistimed their paper and didn't have time to complete this question. However, as Porter's 5 Forces framework would be difficult to attempt without knowledge, it is likely that some candidates were simply unfamiliar with the topic and so did not attempt the question. For those attempting the question the facility factor was moderate at 54.4.

Responses were varied in their quality. It is good practice for candidates to name all forces before tackling some in more depth. Some candidates had clearly revised this topic and were very competent in their response with clear reference to case study issued which were then built upon to establish the strategic position of LEGO. The most common area of misunderstanding was in distinguishing between competitive rivalry and substitutes with many candidates misdescribing these forces. This lack of accuracy held back those with a lesser understanding of the framework.

Q.21 This was the second most popular of the option question in Section B. Workforce performance has a clear place in the specification focusing on productivity, absenteeism and labour turnover. Many candidates picked other areas which could not be directly linked to a worker's individual performance leading to the lowest facility factor on the paper of 32.8.

Secondly, very few candidates placed their response within the context of a small-scale manufacturing business leading to a lack of AO2 marks being awarded. However, those few using the context were able to perform very well leading to the widest standard deviation of all the Section B part 1 questions.

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Q22 Most candidates selecting this option were able to provide a suitable response to this question with the majority of scripts showing knowledge of both financial and non-financial methods of motivation. It was pleasing to see a range of motivational techniques were used in the answering of this question.

Candidates often selected employees as the stakeholder group but there seemed to be less direct reference to the implications for the business. These tended to be passing references which were often the byproduct of a stakeholder discussion. Candidates would do well to consider the implications to the business in a different paragraph to allow a full argument to form. Candidates should consider the impact of motivational techniques on the business strategy to aid their discussion.

Q.31 With a response rate of 23.1% this was the least popular option. However, those selecting this question had a much better facility factor than candidates choosing question 21. Answers often showed a very well contextualised understanding of small independent restaurants and the challenges they faced in competing with large chains. There were many instances where candidates related to a local independent restaurant with which they were familiar therefore application was often good and sometimes excellent.

Overall, this question was approached well with better candidates digging into the specification issues around small business survival to support their AO3. Weaker candidates simply told the story of their favourite local fast-food provider.

Q.32 The EU question was answered in a pre-prepared format by most candidates. Those choosing this option primarily focused on the trade arrangement involved in being a member of a single market. Better candidates also covered free movement of labour and access to new resources which gave breath to the answer enabling them to move up the mark bands.

When discussing viewpoints, it is useful for candidates to discuss some technical detail such as the avoidance of internal tariffs and quotas whilst. Better candidates focused on restrictions of being in the EU such as the inability to set up trade deals with other trade areas and having to work with a common external tariff. Responses seemed mixed between those who truly understood some of the economic and social impacts of the EU and those who had some understanding of trade arrangements.

Q.41 Question 4 was the most popular of the options with over 45% of candidates selecting this area. Question 41 was the most successful of the Section B part 1 questions with a mean score of 6/10. Candidates were well versed in the concepts of price and income elasticity of demand and mechanisms were often well explained. Some candidates ignored the context which hampered their ability to score AO2 marks. Better candidates used the ideas own label and branded goods to explain how demand for superior, normal and inferior goods might change in relation to income.

Discounts on necessities such as milk and bread were discussed in a strategic sense by some candidates as a way of drawing in customers who may then purchase other more profitable products. Generally, the question was well handled but the focus on the context again became a weak point for some candidates in picking up AO2 marks.

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Q.42 This question allowed candidates to demonstrate their understanding of economic concepts. Most candidates completed covered all 3 concepts although, seemingly down to timing issues, a few only completed one or two of the areas. For candidates to show a complete understanding they must tackle the question in full.

It was pleasing to see candidates were able to make clear links between economic indicators and business strategy. Many were able to include examples of business and how strategies had been adjusted to deal with varying economic circumstances. Although there are no AO2 points available in this question framing responses to show the level of impact of interest rates on those selling big ticket items such as cars as opposed to a sweet shop allowed degrees of judgement be created. In doing so, higher level AO4 could be created. With a mean of 11.5 this was the best answered of the Section B part 2 questions.

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