

Introduction

The GCSE in Applied **Business** (Double Award) is a vocational GCSE that is equivalent, upon completion, to two GCSE's.

It has been designed to provide a broad educational basis for further training, for further education or for moving into employment within the business sector.

The course itself consists of three compulsory units that are equally weighted. Two units are assessed 'internally' by the student producing assignments to cover investigation and analysis of businesses to a given brief, while the third unit on Business Finance is assessed externally through a written test.

All three units require knowledge and analysis of business organisations. However, the two internally assessed units require in depth access by both students and teachers.

Unit 1

INVESTIGATING BUSINESS requires an investigation of two contrasting businesses,

while,

Unit 2

PEOPLE AND BUSINESS, requires an investigation of one medium to large sized organisation (businesses with over 50 employees).

For this reason the two units that have been broken down to explore the issues the students need to learn about, are the internally assessed ones. This new GCSE started in September 2002 and teachers are under great pressure to arrange visits and speakers to allow their students access to the information they require. Simulated exercises have a limited role in this qualification, the aim is to immerse the student and teachers in the actual working environment they are studying.

This GCSE 'map' should provide EBPs and employers with an understanding of the issues and level of depth that needs to be covered in business to enable students to specifically meet the requirements of their coursework.

Unit 1

Investigating Business

The Applied Business unit introduces the student to six main themes:

- AIMS, OBJECTIVES AND OWNERSHIP
- BUSINESS LOCATION AND ACTIVITY
- FUNCTIONAL AREAS WITHIN THE BUSINESS – HUMAN RESOURCES, FINANCE, ADMINISTRATION AND IT SUPPORT, OPERATIONS, MARKETING AND SALES, CUSTOMER SERVICE, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.
- THE USE OF IT
- BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS
- EXTERNAL INFLUENCES, BUSINESS COMPETITORS, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES AND OWNERSHIP

Explanation of Term

All businesses have aims to help them plan and set targets for what they want to achieve.

A business may aim to:

- Make a profit
- Provide goods and services to the local or wider community
- Survive as a business or expand
- Maximise sales or improve the quality of a product
- Provide a highly competitive service
- Provide charitable or voluntary services
- Be environmentally friendly

Objectives may be:

- Providing more services than in the previous year
- Producing new goods or providing a new service
- Improving a product

Ownership can include sole trader, partnership, company, co-operative, franchise, public sector.

Unit 1

Factor /Evidence

Mission statement, Annual report/Balance sheet, company leaflets, marketing materials, environmental policies, and interviews with marketing/sales. These should all give indications of the companies aims/objectives and type of ownership. Other useful evidence:-

Map of the area where the company is situated.

Job specifications and job descriptions.

Training plans and progression routes.

Business accounts, records.

Customer feedback forms.

Marketing materials such as leaflets, posters, credit leaflets.

E-mails with or without attachments.

Data accessed by various departments.

Internet marketing.

Minutes of meetings.

Telephone conferencing.

Video conferencing.

Confirmation of booking/sales.

Discussion on competitors.

Environmental issues.

Examples of the company's product range – through brochures, photos etc.

Types of Companies

All.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- Are you a public, private or voluntary organisation?
- Are you currently recruiting new members of staff? If so at what level?
- Are staff being retrained?
- How much promotional work is being carried out?
- Are they developing new products?
- What determines their pricing policy?
- Has the company got expansion plans over the next year?
- Does the company have any ethical or environmental objectives?

Unit 1

BUSINESS LOCATION AND ACTIVITY

Explanation of Term

Businesses may need to be close to customers, to competitors or to be near suppliers and skilled employees.

The following may influence the location of business:

- The number of people with appropriate skills available to work in a particular area
- The cost of labour
- Local government charges.
- Financial help (e.g. local, national or European funding).
- Transport links for supplies and distribution.
- The need to be where customers are.
- History and tradition.
- Sales techniques (telephone, internet and mail order).

Businesses carry out one or more activities. This refers to their main activities, which could fall under the following categories:

- Sale of goods.
- Manufacture of goods.
- Producing raw materials
e.g. agriculture, fishing, forestry and mining.
- Client services.
- Other services (e.g. transport and communications)

Factors/Evidence

A map of the area where the company is situated and the type of work force likely to be found there. Location can be affected by the sales techniques used – if the company sells via the phone, internet or mail order rather than the high street. The products sold by the company will determine their activities. Any future plans regarding relocation of all or part of the company or changing due to technological developments.

Types of Companies

All.

Unit 1

Generic examples of questions for companies

- The wages paid to employees – are they high for the area or industry?
- Are the premises used expensive?
- Does the company enjoy any concessions with local taxes or anything else?
- What road, rail, sea or air routes are nearby that the company uses?
- Is the company sited near large conurbations with large numbers of customers?
- Does the company choose high street locations?
- Does the company expect their sales techniques or location to change in the next few years?
- Are the employees involved in actually making goods or providing a service?
- How are things likely to change over the next couple of years given the economic situation and the effects of technological developments?

FUNCTIONAL AREAS WITHIN THE BUSINESS

Explanation of Term

A business can be divided into various departments or functions including:

- Human resources – covered in next unit.
- Finance – accounts, paying wages and salaries and obtaining capital and resources.
- Administration and IT support – clerical work, cleaning and maintenance, health and safety, security and support for software applications, electronic communications and electronic transactions.
- Operations – the organisation and use of buildings and land, equipment, people and materials.
- Marketing and sales – market research, promotion, sales and how these meet the businesses' aims and objectives.
- Customer service – providing information, giving advice, providing credit facilities, delivering goods, providing an after-sales service.
- Research and development – how research can aid development and allow businesses to remain competitive by developing new goods and services and updating existing ones.

Unit I

Factors/Evidence

Job specifications and job descriptions. The conditions staff work under, the training plans the company has in place and the type of progression routes open for individuals. Business accounts, the post room, reception and keeping records, insurance, security grills, door locks, ID, passwords, customer feedback forms, marketing materials such as leaflets, posters, credit leaflets.

Types of Companies

Most middle sized or large companies.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- Do the staff work regular hours, have shift work and/or flexitime?
- How much holiday leave are staff entitled to?
- Do the staff wear uniform or is there a dress code?
- Is the working environment noisy?
- What regulations do you have to follow with regards to health and safety?
- How do you keep your data protected?
- Regarding the layout of your building, are associated departments together?
- Is your technological equipment well used?
- Are your staff multi-skilled?
- Do you use customer feedback forms and what do you use them for?
- What sort of credit facilities do you offer to customers?
- How do the goods/services you sell reach the customer?
- Do you have a customer complaint department?

Unit 1

THE USE OF IT

Explanation of Term

As the students look at each functional area they need to understand how IT might be best used to cut costs and to improve goods/services.

Examples might include:

- How different departments either within the same building or in separate ones, communicate with one another
- How company data can be accessed by various departments
- How the security procedures in place ensure data held on an electronic system is safe and that the system itself is protected from viruses
- How the company communicates with people external to the organisation
- How a company communicates with its customers electronically after a sale has been completed
- How sales can be completed electronically.

Factors/Evidence

Emails with or without attachments between departments, data accessed by various departments for different reasons e.g. reception to check a booking and accounts to charge the customer. The virus protection system the company uses, the password structure in place to enable people to access certain areas. Internet marketing by the company and website information. Emails to confirm bookings made by customers via the internet. Website or emails providing info on new products or on how a customer order is progressing. Information when a sale occurs and something about the transaction takes place electronically.

Types of Companies

All. Particularly those with various sites or who sell across the internet.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- Does the company use email communication often? Does it have any rules on its use?
- Does the company have any data, which needs to be accessed by more than one department? How does it protect this data from abuse or loss?
- What virus protection does the company have?
- Do you have a website and on-line support for customers?
- When a sale occurs and something about the transaction takes place electronically does this update your stock request or lead to fund transfers, generate an invoice?

Unit 1

BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Explanation of Term

This covers all the ways the business communicates with other people:

- Within their functional area
- Outside their functional area
- Outside of the business as a whole
- Via oral communication
- Video communication
- Written communication
- Graphical communication

Factors/Evidence

Telephone conversations, emails, meetings, informal conversations, telephone conferencing, video conferencing, internet video links, memos, letters, financial documents, advertisements, e-mail attachments/documents, complaints, confirmations of bookings/sales, orders, job descriptions, production drawings, on screen graphics, graphics via the internet.

Students need to find out about the wide variety of different methods of communication used by businesses and which method might be most appropriate for different business needs.

Types of Companies

All but especially large companies with perhaps split site locations, a head office or regional offices in a different country and a large number of suppliers and/or different types of customers e.g. wholesale and the general public. Examples could include an airline, a large marketing/advertising company, and a large retailer.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- What different types of departments, people and organisations do they communicate with as part of their job?
- What types of people do they communicate most with?
- What are the most common methods of communication they use during their job?
- Do they vary the method of communication depending on the audience? Can they give examples?

Unit 1

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES, BUSINESS COMPETITORS, ECONOMIC CONDITIONS AND ENVIRONMENTAL CONSTRAINTS

Explanation of Term

All the external influences that can impact on a businesses performance. This can include the other organisations the company is in competition with. How economic factors such as the cost of debt, high customer unemployment and the threat of war may impact and in addition how environmental constraints such as noise or waste disposal can impact on the company.

Factors/Evidence

Discussion on who the company regards as their main competitors – this could be with sales/marketing, finance, human resources and so on. Any noise light or waste restrictions the company is under. The strategies the company undertakes to ensure it remains competitive, examples of the companies product range and the marketing materials used to promote these. Look especially at the language and format used to see if they match the target markets the products are being aimed at.

Types of Companies

All.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- Who are your main competitors?
- Do you regard your competitors as local, national or international?
- What effect do high or low interest rates have on your business?
- What effects do events such as wars, terror attacks, and plane crashes and so on have on your business?
- Can fluctuations in the exchange rate of the pound against other currencies impact on your business?
- Do you have one product aimed at a particular market segment or a variety of products aimed at different sectors of the market?
- How do you decide on your price for different products?
- Do you aim to be competitive on price, quality or availability? If all three which is the more important?
- What damaging effects can the production and distribution of your product/service have on the environment?

Unit 2

People and Business

This unit introduces the student to five main themes:

- STAKEHOLDERS
- INVESTIGATING JOB ROLES
- WORKING ARRANGEMENTS, RIGHTS OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES AND RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS
- RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING
- CUSTOMER SERVICE

STAKEHOLDERS

Explanation of Term

All the people who could have a say in how the business operates.

These include:

- Customers
- Employees
- Owners and shareholders
- The local community
- The government
- Pressure groups
- Suppliers
- Financiers

Factor/Evidence

Mission statement, the annual report explaining the type of organisation we are dealing with, an interview with appropriate members of staff and finance department. PR department for any local community initiatives.

Other evidence might include:-

Job descriptions, job specifications, adverts for vacancies, evidence of recent changes in technology or the use of it, health and safety notices, training schedules, induction training and appraisal forms, figures on the numbers of repeat visitors, figures on increasing sales and/or market share, pay and benefits, after-sales customer care policy, customer care that the staff provide, cleanliness of premises, range of payment methods.

Unit 2

Types of Companies

All.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- What sort of company are you – public, private or voluntary?
- Are you answerable to shareholders?
- Do you do any work with the local community?
- Are there any pressure groups concerned about your type of industry?
- Do you receive any local or central government money to help you deliver part of your service?
- Have you received any funding from venture capitalists or the bank to which you are accountable?
- Do you feel conflict if you are answerable to both shareholders and customers?
- Is the company dependent on suppliers getting their goods to them on time?
- What sort of role if any, do the various stakeholders play in the company and how important are they?

INVESTIGATING JOB ROLES

Explanation of Term

This covers organisation charts so that the student can get a feel for the size and type of organisation – whether it has a flat structure or is hierarchical in nature. It also provides an indicator of where the job fits in. Who reports to the job holder and in turn, whom that person reports to. In addition the student will need access to job descriptions and job roles as they need to report on these for their assignment. If they are working to the AQA exam board specs they will need access to three job roles within the same department. Ideally these job roles should span across managers, supervisors and operatives or support staff so that the clear differences can be seen.

Factor/Evidence

Organisation charts, job descriptions, job specifications. Job descriptions or information require access to the following information – the key responsibilities, tasks or activities, decision making and problem solving capabilities, the skills, qualifications and personal qualities required and the related pay and benefits. In addition it would be helpful to know the level of job security the posts enjoy.

Unit 2

Types of Companies

Medium to large sized companies.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- How would you describe the structure of the company – hierarchical or relatively flat?
- How many different departments do you have within the company?
- Do you have lots of retail branches or satellite centres where the organisation chart is relatively similar?
- What are the main skills you need your employees to demonstrate?
- How much devolvement of responsibility is there within the company?
- Are you competitive in terms of the level of pay and benefits you provide?
- Have you had any redundancies lately?
- Do you anticipate expansion in the workforce?
- How many operatives or support staff are there per supervisor or manager?

WORKING ARRANGEMENTS, RIGHTS OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES AND RESOLVING DISAGREEMENTS

Explanation of Term

Whether staff are in permanent or temporary employment and whether they work full or part time. Hours of work could cover shift work, flexitime, overtime and breaks from work for maternity, sabbaticals and so on. Working arrangements can also cover places of work such as offices, retail outlets, tele-working, mobile and home based working. They can also cover annual salary, pension and other benefits and paid holiday entitlement and reasons for changes in working practices such as to introduce new technology and/or to introduce team-working and multi-skill practices.

Rights of employers and employees covers areas such as health and safety, meeting the terms of contracts, co-operating in meeting the objectives of the business, adequate training, trade union membership and the law including equal pay, discrimination, tribunals and arbitration services.

Factor/Evidence

Interviews with human resources and/or different types of employees, job descriptions and adverts for various vacancies, recent changes in technology or the use of it and if staff are being redeployed or retrained, blank performance assessment forms, health and safety notices and requirements, any trade union information.

Unit 2

Types of Companies

Middle sized or large companies.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- How many of your staff work in head office and how many work elsewhere?
- How many staff are in permanent employment as opposed to temporary contracts?
- Do your staff work set hours or do they work a roster system, shift system, flexitime and so on?
- How much overtime is done?
- Do any of your staff work from home?
- Do you have any hot desks?
- How do you decide what level of salary to pay your staff?
- What sort of benefits do you provide?
- Do you have any recent job advertisements?
- Have you had any changes in working practices recently? If so why?
- What are the main things you expect from your employees?
- Are there any trade unions that are recognised by the company?

Unit 2

RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

Explanation of Term

For recruitment this includes everything from identifying the vacancy, drawing up a job description, drawing up a person specification, advertising the vacancy, shortlisting applicants, interviewing applicants and selecting and appointing the most appropriate candidate.

For training this includes the use of all ongoing training from induction onwards for all staff. It includes the use of appraisal or performance reviews, retraining to use new technology or new working practices, and the use of national awards such as liP and National Training Awards.

Factor /Evidence

Interview with Human Resources, job descriptions and job specifications, training schedules, induction training, appraisal forms.

Types of Companies

All.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- What is the procedure when a new post is identified?
- Who draws up the job description?
- Are all vacancies advertised internally/externally?
- How do you enforce equal opportunity regulations?
- Who is responsible for shortlisting applicants?
- What do you look for from a CV?
- Can we have copies of some of your job descriptions and specifications?

Unit 2

CUSTOMER SERVICE

Explanation of Term

This section covers why customers are important, internal and external customers, customer expectations, customer satisfaction and the investigation of customer service. For their assignment students need to look at the customer service within an organisation and consumer protection practices in operation.

Factor /Evidence

Figures on the number of repeat visitors, figures on increasing sales and/or market share. How the company treats its own employees – pay and benefits, relationships between departments, the amount of training provided. Investigating customer care for external customers covers things like the products/services – quality, reliability, availability, safety, packaging, and clarity of information. The after-sales care should be clear and constant. Staff issues include their helpfulness, dress, accuracy of information, communication skills such as telephone manner and managing a telephone conversation. The premises should be clean, well signposted, and accessible for the disabled and offer a range of facilities. Other issues to consider include the range of payment methods, customer care telephone lines and staff training.

Types of Companies

All.

Generic examples of questions for companies

- Are your sales figures going up year on year?
- Is the company gaining market share?
- How do you ensure that employees feel good about the company?
- What activities does the company offer to build up relationships within and between departments?
- How much customer care training is given? Need concrete examples.
- Is there a customer care manual that staff can refer to?
- What feedback do you get from customers about your products/service?
- How do you use this feedback data to change policy?
- Do your staff that deal directly with customers wear a uniform?
- Is there a particular way staff are taught to answer the telephone?
- How many different payment methods are there for your products?
- Do you have a customer complaint department?
- What safety or consumer protection laws does your company have to meet?

Notes

