

GCSE 2003

June Series



Report on the Examination

Business and Communication Systems

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- 3126/1F – Foundation Tier – Theory
 - 3126/1H – Higher Tier – Theory
 - 3126/2F– Foundation Tier – Practical
 - 3126/2H– Higher Tier – Practical

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Business and Communication Systems

General

The first examination for this new specification proved accessible to students and the majority of candidates appeared to have been well prepared for the examination.

GCSE Business and Communication Systems has replaced GCSE Office Applications and, as in previous years, a number of candidates appear to have been entered for the wrong tier. Making the correct choice was obviously difficult in this first year of the new specification, particularly for new centres. Some candidates who were entered for the foundation tier scored very highly and could possibly have achieved B or even A grades on the higher tier. Conversely, some candidates who sat the higher tier papers struggled and would have been more assured of a grade if they had taken the foundation tier. Although the higher tier covers grades A* to D, those candidates not confident of achieving a C grade would be better entered for the foundation tier, as they may be put off by some of the more demanding questions on the higher tier papers, particularly in the practical paper.

Centres will be able to use the standard set by this year's grade boundaries to assist them in making the choice of tier for next year's candidates.

All four papers were set in the context of a recruitment agency, 'The People Bank'. Those candidates who scored most highly related their answers to the context. Others did not read the scenario properly, or did not understand it, and related their answers to a financial institution. The use of the same scenario for both the theory and practical papers is designed to give candidates the opportunity to become familiar with it and candidates should be encouraged to read the scenario through thoroughly before they start to answer the questions.

Foundation Tier – Theory Paper (3126/1F)

General

In order to gain maximum benefit and a clearer understanding of all the comments made, the following should be read in conjunction with the Question Paper and Mark Scheme.

This being the first examination of the new specification for Business and Communication Systems, it was pleasing to note that the spelling, punctuation and grammar were of a reasonable standard for Foundation Level and most candidates were awarded either 2 or 3 marks out of the 5 available for the Quality of Written Communication – QoWC. Few candidates were awarded 4 marks and the vast majority received at least one mark. However, unacceptable words were used eg ‘wanna’, ‘gonna’, ‘ain’t’ and ‘mightnt’. This is to be discouraged, together with mobile phone text message language, although there was little evidence of this, which was pleasing.

A small number of candidates, once again, had written in pencil or in coloured pen, other than black or blue as stipulated in the instructions on the front cover of the examination paper. Some scripts were very difficult to read, as the writing was poor or faint. This could possibly disadvantage the candidates.

Key words are most important – ‘state’, ‘name’ and ‘list’ – merely ask for a brief statement or single word answers relevant to the question asked. However, ‘state and explain’ requires the statement made to be qualified, therefore, a much more detailed answer is sought. ‘Explain and give reasons’ requires a fuller answer with an expansion of the explanation.

There were 8 questions on the paper. Several candidates appeared to take great care when answering the first 5 questions, which collectively carried only 39 marks out of the possible 95. Consequently, time ran out and they had to rush to answer the remaining 3 questions or failed to complete the paper. Examination technique is important and it would have been good practice if the candidates had read quickly or at least looked over the paper before beginning to write. This would have given them an indication of what was required of them and how to use the time available to their best advantage.

The scenario was very accessible and prominent, but many candidates failed to read it correctly or possibly did not read it at all as The People Bank was too often mistaken for a financial institution. The first sentence indicated that it was a recruitment agency and phrases such as ‘job vacancies’, ‘selection process’ and ‘job advertisements’ were used within the text. Candidates should be encouraged to read the scenario before and during writing their responses to the questions. However, there were some very good answers where candidates made good use of the scenario and these scripts showed careful preparation by centres. This was most encouraging.

Question 1

The rubric clearly stated ‘**circling the correct answer**’. Candidates are to be discouraged from circling more than one response per multiple choice questions and also from drawing a line under their choice of answer or writing the answer after the colon at the end of the question.

Very few candidates scored the full 8 marks and there was a variation in the ones candidates got wrong. A fair number of candidates scored between 5 and 7 marks, which was commendable.

Parts (c) and (g) caused the most problems with candidates choosing Curriculum Vitae in (c) instead of Person Specification as being ‘Information on the qualifications, experience and characteristics **required** for a job vacancy’. In (g) the lack of knowledge was apparent as few candidates recognised ‘Results of votes taken’ as the only choice that would **not** appear on an agenda.

Question 2

Some candidates did not actually circle an answer for part (a) thus losing 2 marks. However, they were not penalised for part (b) as well because if they gave appropriate explanations on the usefulness to Gerard **whilst travelling the country** of 2 items included in part (a) they were awarded up to 4 marks.

The majority of candidates correctly chose ‘Mobile telephone’ and ‘Laptop computer’ in (a) as being most useful to Gerard and gave an explanation why in (b). Mobile telephone was justified because of its use for contacting various people and laptop computer for e-mail but very few candidates linked their importance to Gerard whilst he was travelling away from the office, or pointed out that perhaps there would be a problem with their usage because of lack of signal or the lack of facilities needed to use the items. The better candidates scored 6 marks for a full answer but the average mark for the task was 4.

Question 3

Part (a) asked candidates to ‘state and explain’ **one** advantage **to Gerard** of working from home. A number of candidates gave more than one advantage, wasting valuable time, and failed to explain the advantages, therefore, scored only one mark. The most common advantages mentioned were ‘more relaxed at home’, ‘could work when wanted’, ‘saving time travelling to work each day’.

The better candidates gave an explanation of the advantage chosen and scored the full 2 marks. They then went on to answer part (b) correctly by giving an advantage and a disadvantage **to The People Bank** of Gerard working from home and again scored full marks.

However, the weaker candidates misread the rubric and considered Gerard and not The People Bank and gave an advantage and disadvantage to Gerard of working from home and consequently scored no marks at all for this part of the question. It was here also, that several candidates confused the office with a Bank and mentioned people wanting to talk to Gerard about their overdrafts or withdrawals or accounts. This showed that some candidates had not read the Scenario or had failed to understand it.

Question 4

A fair number of candidates showed good understanding of The Data Protection Act in part (a) and gave two things that The People Bank **must do** because of this Act. These candidates were awarded 2 marks eg ‘keep the data accurate and up-to-date’ and ‘keep the data secure’.

The weaker candidates mentioned ‘passwords had to be put on computers’ and gave no explanation why – this is not something that must be done because of The Data Protection Act. This question was misunderstood by many candidates who were awarded no marks.

Part (b) was attempted by most candidates but very few candidates scored highly. There were 9 marks allocated to this part of the question and even fairly good answers, showing an understanding of passwords and screen savers, did not score the maximum of 3 marks per section. Candidates failed to realise that in order to score 3 marks, any statement made, which would be awarded one mark, needed sufficient development to be awarded the other 2 marks.

A number of candidates repeated the rubric or repeated their answer to the effectiveness of the usage of passwords and screen savers. Staff training in the importance of confidentiality was confused with general training and again the rubric was repeated. Most candidates managed 3 marks out of the 9 available for this part by making a simple statement without any explanation or further development.

Question 5

Almost all candidates managed to score one mark for part (a) by giving an example of information included in a CV, the favourite one being qualifications. Very few candidates managed 2 marks by saying that a CV was ‘a summary of the applicant’s life’ or ‘someone’s life history’.

Part (b) was well done and most candidates scored the full 2 marks by giving 2 pieces of information other than name and address, which would be on a CV. Again the favourite was qualifications, followed closely by references, experience and date of birth.

Only the more able achieved any marks in part (c). These candidates were able to give a basic advantage and disadvantage to an IT company of using The People Bank to recruit employees – an advantage being that The People Bank ‘would get suitable applicants’ and the disadvantage that ‘it would cost money’ to The People Bank but rarely an answer was given that scored the full 4 marks.

The weaker candidates either completely misunderstood the question in part (c) or confused The People Bank and the IT Company as to who was doing the work. Here again reference was made to a bank and answers included ‘they would have worked in a bank before’, ‘would know how to deal with withdrawals’ and many other references to financial work.

Question 6

A very disappointing response was made to part (a). Many candidates made no attempt at all. The candidates who responded either misread the rubric and considered the Candidate Database instead of the Vacancies Database or merely listed 3 incorrect pieces of information without any expansion or mention of possible results. Very few answers were in the context of The People Bank.

There were 9 marks for part (b) – 3 marks per method of advertising – and good number of candidates scored between 5 and 8 marks with the better candidates achieving full marks. Most candidates referred to the effectiveness of the 3 methods of advertising and some candidates gave a justification and also a development eg ‘a National newspaper would be a very effective way to advertise jobs because it is bought by a lot of people all over the country and many of those people would be looking for IT jobs or just looking at the paper and come across the advertisement by chance’.

A few candidates compared ‘National Newspapers’ and ‘The People Bank Website’, which was good but a number of candidates did not know what a ‘Specialist IT Journal’ was and referred to ‘a journal’ as a person or did not understand that it was a publication specialising in IT.

Generally, part (c) was answered correctly although very few candidates scored more than 3 marks – usually one mark for giving a basic reason why each piece of information they had listed in (c) would be important in a job advertisement but failing to give a development. The standard reason for including the salary offered in the advertisement was ‘that the applicant would like to know how much they would be paid’ with no mention of why they would wish to know that or if it would be more or less than their current salary.

Few candidates scored full marks for part (e), with a significant number of candidates scoring zero. The weaker candidates attempted to give a description of a law instead of its name – ‘the act that gives men and women the same rights’. This gained no marks.

The better candidates were able to give 2 and sometimes 3 laws that prevent discrimination in the workplace – the favourites being ‘Sex Discrimination Act’ and ‘Equal Pay Act’. The ‘Race Relations Act’ was often given as ‘Racial Discrimination Act’ which was incorrect. ‘Equal Opportunities’ was not accepted.

Question 7

This question contained a fair amount of reading and required the candidates to select the relevant information from page 7 in the examination paper to explain how suitable each of the applicants might be for the vacancy. The vacancy was for an Office Assistant – very few candidates mentioned this in their answers. A large number of candidates did not understand how to tackle this question and very few managed to score full marks, although all the information was available for them to do so.

Most candidates were able to work out the ages of the applicants, although quite a few calculated them incorrectly. Statements such as ‘she is 22’ or ‘he is only 18’ were made without any reason given as to why her/his age was suitable or unsuitable for the job. Many candidates simply listed information from the database without recognising why they were important eg ‘he can do Presentation Software’ or ‘Neera has knowledge of databases’ when there was no mention of database in the Job Description.

Candidates made reference to the **applicants’ salary** and **qualifications** only when the **minimum salary required by them** and their **skills**, were included in the database. Assumptions were made that because Neera was the oldest that she had more experience and, therefore, would be the most suitable candidate for the job.

A disappointing response by many candidates to this question which carried 12 marks. The better candidates thought about each applicant individually and selected relevant information and used it well in their answers. Quite a few scored marks of between 8 and 11 but rarely were 12 marks awarded. The majority of marks were between 2 and 7 with the occasional one and sometimes a zero.

Question 8

Many candidates gave the correct answer of £22,320 and were awarded the full 8 marks, which was very pleasing. Some candidates managed to get Karin’s annual salary plus commission to £22,220, leaving out the second £100 for Grade 1 and they scored 7 marks. Other candidates calculated the commission correctly but failed to add Karin’s annual basic salary – they were awarded 6 marks.

However, many candidates did not attempt this question at all or wasted valuable time by calculating the salary plus commission of all three consultants, therefore, not being able to complete the remaining parts of this question. Other candidates selected incorrectly from the grid and used figures from all three consultants from different grades – time was wasted again.

A large number of candidates either ran out of time, as previously mentioned, or did not have the knowledge to complete the remainder of Question 8.

The candidates who completed parts (b) and (c) very rarely scored more than 2 marks for each response made.

The candidates who made an attempt generally gave one or two advantages to The People Bank of paying commission to its consultants – ‘it will motivate the workers’ or ‘they will work harder in order to receive commission’. However, they did not always develop the points made. Some candidates gave advantages to the consultants and not to The People Bank as required.

As for part (b), candidates gave one disadvantage to The People Bank of paying commission but made little or no attempt to expand on any statement made. A number of candidates referred to ‘losing money’ as a disadvantage. Again candidates referred to disadvantages to the consultants and not to The People Bank.

The better candidates included answers such as – ‘arguments might occur because some consultants were earning more money and the atmosphere would be bad’ or ‘consultants would be demotivated if they did not earn commission and then not try to work hard’. Some candidates even referred to The People Bank not knowing what their salary bill would be, which showed a good knowledge of the topic.

Higher Tier – Theory Paper (3126/1H)

Question 1

Part (a) required candidates to perform a straightforward calculation. The majority of candidates gained full marks for this question. Those who did not were able to gain some marks by showing their working out. The most common mistake was to read from the wrong row of the table of consultants' appointments instead of choosing the figures for Karin.

In part (b), most candidates were fully aware of the motivational aspects of paying commission. Very few were able to explain a further advantage and repeated or further developed the same advantage, so earning a maximum of 3 marks for their answer. A very few candidates correctly explained that the use of commission is good for the cash flow of the business as it means that the firm's outgoings are highest when their income from customers is highest. A minority of candidates gave the advantages to the consultants rather than the business, gaining no marks.

In part (c), the most commonly identified disadvantage of commission was the potential for causing conflict amongst the workforce, although this was seldom fully explained in terms of its effects on the business. Many candidates incorrectly stated that the commission would reduce The People Bank's profits, apparently failing to recognise that if consultants were arranging more successful appointments, income would be increased.

Acceptable answers for part (d) included bonus schemes, overtime and hourly rates. The most common incorrect answers were fringe benefits (not a payment method), time rates and piece rates.

Question 2

Part (a) was well answered by many candidates. The most successful answers were those which related the details in the job description and specification to those in the database. These answers correctly pointed out that Sam did not meet the required age range and that Neera probably would not want the job as it offered below her minimum salary. It was pleasing to see that many candidates gave quite a sophisticated comparison of the candidates, preferring Chun, as he possessed not only computing skills but also some customer service experience. Some candidates simply listed items from the database and failed to relate these to the job requirements, gaining no marks. Others misunderstood elements of the job description. A common mistake was to infer from 'various locations in cities around the UK' that the successful applicant would have to travel. Some missed the significance of the term 'computer aptitude' and ruled Sam Bhudia out because of his lack of skills in the packages listed. Many candidates did not understand the term 'Presentation software' and some talked of qualifications, which were not mentioned in the database. A common misunderstanding was to equate 'Minimum salary' with the candidates' current salary, or to assume that this is the salary that would be paid, therefore the candidate with the lowest minimum salary would be the cheapest to employ.

Few candidates gained full marks for part (b). Candidates lost marks by not limiting their answer to a discussion of the physical characteristics and qualifications, gaining no marks by relating their answer to the experience and personality characteristics listed. In order to gain 4 marks, candidates were required to assess the importance of each of smart appearance, age range and GCSEs. Marks were awarded for answers which stated that these were not important, as long as these were justified. For example it was heartening to find, among the many ageist answers, those which stated that age was not as important as having the correct skills for the job.

The majority of candidates gained full marks for part (c). Occasionally a mark was lost by incorrectly giving ‘letter’ as a means of sending a CV. The most commonly chosen methods were post, e-mail and fax.

This question was marked using a levels markscheme, with the top marks available for answers which were set in the context of The People Bank. Many candidates were able to give very detailed comparisons of the two methods they had chosen, but very few gained full marks for this question because they did not relate their answer to the context. Some did not read the question carefully and talked about Jamel as a candidate, rather than a consultant, and some incorrectly said that in order to e-mail the CVs they would first have to be entered into the computer.

Part (e) was well answered, with candidates showing a good understanding of the consequences of incorrect selection. The most common answers were the need to expend time and money repeating the recruitment and selection process, and the consequences of an incompetent employee for the business and other employees. Some candidates related their answer to The People Bank, stating that they would lose their reputation and therefore lose customers, and although this was not required, marks were awarded.

Question 3

Part (a) on the requirements of the Data Protection Act was well answered by the majority of candidates. However, some candidates lost marks by stating things which The People Bank *could* do (eg staff training, password protection), rather than things they *must* do (eg keep the data secure, keep it accurate and up to date).

Very few candidates gained high marks on part (b) because they tended to repeat points from their answers about passwords in their evaluation of the password protected screensaver. Few candidates gained more than 1 out of the 3 marks available for the evaluation of staff training, with some candidates gaining no marks by limiting their answer to a restatement of the stem: ie that it would make employees aware of the importance of confidentiality.

Question 4

Part (a) was generally well answered, with many candidates gaining full marks by recognising that since consultants need to interview candidates, a cellular office layout is needed. Candidates who specified an open plan office were able to gain a mark if they managed to justify their answer: 2 marks on the rare occasion where this was done in context.

Part (b) was very well answered by a large number of candidates who have a clear understanding of the differences between application forms and CVs. However a significant minority of candidates gave very confused answers. The best answers pointed out that in an application form the candidate is required to answer questions posed by the firm, and that in a CV the applicant may supply unwanted information or omit information which is required. Disappointingly, some answers did not relate the differences to the selection process as requested in the question.

Part (c) required candidates to put their knowledge about CVs and application forms into the context of The People Bank, and this was surprisingly not well done by many candidates who simply repeated parts of their answers to part (b). Two marks could be gained by explaining how The People Bank need CVs to keep on file to allow candidates to apply for a range of different jobs and companies.

Many candidates were able to list 4 different items included on a CV. Marks were not awarded for more than one item from each of the headings: Personal details, Qualifications, Experience, Interests and Personal qualities. A candidate who wrote address and date of birth would gain only one mark.

Answers to part (e) rarely gained full marks. This was quite a straightforward question, and candidates would have been advised to choose their answers to part (d) in order to maximise their marks in part (e). For example, those who chose ‘name’ as one of the items found it very difficult to give sufficient justification for 2 marks. The best answers were in the context of The People Bank: ie they took into account the fact that the consultants were selecting on behalf of a third party and would therefore need to match candidates with a job specification.

Question 5

While a large number of candidates were able to specify the hardware required to use the Internet, very few could specify the software without using brand names, which did not earn a mark. A small number of candidates lost marks by writing the correct hardware and software against the wrong headings.

Many candidates lost marks on part (b) by failing to answer in enough detail: for example, they correctly said the Internet could be used to communicate, but did not specify how or with whom. Those who said the Internet could be used to set up a website did not gain a mark, because the Scenario states that The People Bank already have one. However a mark could be gained for updating the website or creating a web page. While ‘research’ was considered too vague for a mark, ‘research into companies or competitors’ was valid.

Part (c) was marked using a levels markscheme. To gain top marks the answers had to be related to The People Bank. Few candidates gave answers which would not apply to any company, and a minority related their answer to a High Street bank. By setting their answer in context, candidates gained a minimum of 4 out of the 6 marks available for this question.

Quality of Written Communication

This was generally good, with the majority of candidates gaining 4 or 5 marks. Candidates should be discouraged from using bullet points unless they are short of time, as this restricts the marks they can gain for the quality of written communication.

Foundation Tier – Practical Paper (3126/2F)

General

Candidates in centres where thorough preparation took place received high marks and many could have achieved more than a C grade if they had been entered for the higher level. A number of candidates did not complete the five tasks, usually attempting them in order and therefore omitting the last task. If they had attempted them in order of highest to lowest marks they would have probably gained more marks. The standard of spelling, punctuation and grammar has slightly improved but was variable with the weaker candidates being unable to construct sentences properly, however, most used paragraphs. It was pleasing to see fewer instances of text message language this year.

The hard copies of tutors' input were often not included with the scripts and this delayed the marking whilst they were sought. Tutors should proof read the material to be used by candidates as there are still errors occurring and it is time consuming for examiners to take account of these on every script. It could also disadvantage candidates. For instance, a record missing from the database may be the vital one for the answer to be given correctly. A candidate would not be penalised for a tutor's error but may well be confused and worried during the examination that they were not coming up with the expected result.

Centres need to make sure that name, centre number and candidate number are keyed in on every printout submitted and that the printouts are placed in task order in the Stationery Folder. Only the tasks to be marked should be included – everything else removed. The folders are sent to centres well in advance of the examination and tutors are advised to acquire them in good time. The information filled in on the front cover should be in black or blue ink and fully completed.

Task One

This was generally very well done with many candidates gaining full marks. The heading was usually correct and emphasised but occasionally 'The Peoples Bank' or 'The People's Bank' was used.

The paragraphs were moved correctly in most instances but sometimes only the headings were reversed or the line spacing was inconsistent. The search and replace facility was not used by some candidates as one instance of the word 'applicants' was still present.

Merging the file 'Contact' at the end of the piece was usually done accurately by the more able candidates but occasionally with inconsistent line spacing. The border was generally suitable and around the whole text but occasionally the heading would be outside the border or the border itself would be inappropriate.

Task Two

Very few candidates gained full marks for the first section of this task and some did not attempt it at all. Those who searched to find the permanent jobs usually did well but some did not sort into date order and others printed the ID or Contract field as well as Surname, Forename and Date of Birth fields, or printed all fields. Those who did the second search often searched for the South East correctly but failed to input the correct command for less than £22,000, or printed more than the three fields required. Candidates who attempted the coding of the Region and Contract fields usually did well but sometimes did not ensure that the codes were unique.

The memo headings were usually well done, with those candidates who had read the scenario and used the Manager's name (Gerard Summers) gaining an extra mark for the correct selection of information.

The explanations for the advantages and disadvantages of coding the fields were often weak. The idea that the codes were passwords in order to access the data was common, but most often the idea of saving time or space was present but not qualified as to how, where or why and therefore could not be awarded marks.

Candidates rarely gave ways that a database could be useful and reasons why it would help a business were few. Most often they would say that it is good to have a database and it is easier and quicker but did not qualify how or why and therefore gained no marks.

Many candidates did not read the next question properly and gave the reasons for having a backup copy of the database but did not suggest a storage device on which it could be kept.

Task Three

This was generally well done and often full marks could be awarded. The sorting of the table into date order was disregarded in marking because it was not explicitly stated in the specification.

There were six easy marks to be gained for those who could read the table correctly. Most frequent errors were not formatting the sums of money to two decimal places or formatting the mileage column to two decimal places as well. Occasionally the totals of the columns were omitted.

The formula to calculate the amount claimed was sometimes ‘*50’ or ‘*5’ instead of ‘*0.5’ and occasionally a calculator was used here instead of a formula. Some candidates demonstrated that they could use AutoSum for the totals of the columns but did not know how to put in a cell reference in the Amount Claimed column. The formulae printout was sometimes missing but credit was given for correct totals.

Task Four

There were some really excellent letters scoring more than 20 marks and printed over 2 pages with full marks for the layout, but many candidates lost all 6 marks for this even though a perfectly laid out letter was printed as part of the question. The date was often incorrectly placed, the addressee was regularly missing, the salutation ‘Dear Ms J Peterson’ was often used and also without a line space afterwards, the complementary close was frequently incorrectly capitalised as ‘Yours Sincerely’ and the designation ‘Manager’ was often missing.

Three suitable jobs were usually chosen but the summary of the information was very seldom accurate. The reasons for choosing these jobs were rarely given. Candidates who reproduced the appropriate parts of the table or who listed all the points in a sentence were not awarded marks as they did not relate them to Janet’s letter and her requirements. The reasons for recommending one job rather than the other two were also insufficient as a comparison should have been made but they were usually just repeated points for choosing the job in the first place. Nearly all candidates mentioned that Janet’s CV would be placed on the database and that she should make contact if she were interested in a job. It appeared that some candidates did not read Janet’s letter or failed to understand it.

Standards of composition were variable with incorrect punctuation being the main fault, but paragraphs were usually used and on the whole spelling was good.

Task Five

Very few candidates achieved Level 3 on the use of computer facilities to emphasise the key points for a job advertisement, as they had not worked out that these were the job title, the location and the salary. Frequently the employer’s name was the only thing to be enhanced but time was wasted on elaborate and unnecessary boxes or copious amounts of WordArt and clipart.

Most candidates included all the information required but the contact details for The People Bank ie address, e-mail address or telephone number, to be found in other parts of the paper, were usually missing.

Some candidates included all the jobs from the table so could not be awarded marks for the accurate selection of the correct job. When they did select the correct job the spelling and inconsistent initial capitals of words lost them accuracy marks.

Some candidates demonstrated poor examination technique and possibly spent too long on this task, as there were only 16 marks whereas the database and letter attracted 33 and 25 marks respectively.

Higher Tier – Practical Paper (3126/2H)

General

The majority of candidates attempted all four tasks, showing an ability to manipulate all the packages successfully. It was encouraging to see candidates maximising their marks by printing evidence of what they had been able to accomplish even when they had not been completely successful.

The remarks on administration for the foundation paper also apply to this paper.

Task One

This was a relatively straightforward task but very few candidates gained full marks. Those who chose an obvious heading and emphasised it correctly gained 3 marks; those who tried to be more sophisticated often failed, choosing an inaccurate or inappropriate title, which did not reflect the purpose or content of the piece. The mark for emphasising a title can be gained by capitalising, emboldening or underlining: WordArt is frequently used but is unnecessary.

Changing the shoulder headings to side headings posed a problem for some candidates. In order to gain full marks, the headings and paragraphs had to be correctly aligned. Some candidates had obviously attempted to do this using spacing or tabs instead of using the indent facility of their word processing package.

Most candidates correctly used search and replace and correctly merged the final paragraph, but some changed the formatting of the final paragraph or lost a mark by using inconsistent linespacing.

The majority were able to fully justify the document.

It was disappointing to note how frequently candidates failed to detect the two unmarked errors in such a short piece of text.

Task Two

This task was common to both the foundation and higher tiers, and was generally well answered by the majority of the higher tier candidates.

It was disappointing, however, how few candidates correctly showed all the parts of a letter in the correct positions, despite having the example in the paper to follow. There were 7 easy marks to be gained for this. The most common errors were the incorrect positioning of the date, the omission of the addressee, the misspelling of the addressee's name (Paterson for Peterson was a common error) and the incorrect spelling or capitalisation of Yours sincerely. Few candidates correctly showed the designation 'Manager' below the manager's name.

Most candidates succeeded in selecting three suitable jobs although few accurately summarised them. Those who realised that the employers' names, salaries and skills required were important sometimes lost marks by incorrect spellings or capitalisation. Most candidates were able to give correct reasons for selecting the three jobs, but when it came to recommending the most suitable job out of the three, a minority suggested the correct job of Programmer, failing to take into account the requirement of the candidate to develop her programming skills. There appears to be a misunderstanding of the terms 'essential' and 'desirable' skills, with many candidates considering a lack of the desirable skills as a reason to rule out a suitable vacancy. The reasons given for recommending the chosen job were weak in general and no marks were given for reasons which could equally apply to the other two, such as the location and age range.

Nearly all candidates correctly included the reference to the database and the request to contact if interested. Quality of written communication was generally good and many letters extended to two pages.

Task Three

Few candidates managed both searches completely successfully, although it was pleasing to see those candidates who could not carry out the search, printing out the correct fields in the right order, and so earning marks. Very few candidates followed the instruction to add a suitable title to the first search. Many were caught out by the requirement to sort the records from the second search in descending age order, instead sorting in descending order of date of birth. Most candidates were able to print out the correct fields.

The memo headings were usually completed correctly, with four marks available for those who correctly included the manager’s name, Gerard Summers. The understanding of mailmerge was variable, with many candidates incorrectly recommending telephone number as a necessary field. Steps in carrying out a mailmerge were often limited to the specific instructions for the particular package the candidates were using, rather than a general description of the steps involved. Candidates who did this rarely mentioned all the steps, such as creating a standard letter or inserting the fieldnames from the database.

The benefits of mailmerge were not well explained. The question required the candidates to compare mailmerge with two alternatives. Most of the answers did not specify which alternative was being compared, so marks were lost. For example, it is true to state that a mail-merged letter would be quicker to complete than individual word-processed letters, but it would be considerably slower than sending a standard letter to all candidates. Good answers fully explained the benefits of a mail-merged letter over both alternatives.

Task Four

Candidates devised a range of suitable solutions for this task, often gaining high marks. Most correctly selected all the relevant information from the question paper, although a number lost marks by misreading the salary as £20000. Candidates who used numbers instead of cell references in formulae lost marks, as they had not followed the instructions correctly. Many candidates used the Sum function unnecessarily. This was not penalised as long as the formulae used calculated the correct answers. Those who did not include a formula printout were unable to gain 8 of the marks because it was not possible to determine whether they had used cell references in their formulae.

Most candidates were able to produce a chart and import it into a word processed document. Those who chose to use a pie chart struggled to justify their choice of chart. Three marks were gained by those candidates who correctly explained that a bar chart allowed an easy comparison of the totals and gave a clear graphical view of who had earned the most, while a pie chart did not. Adding a correct title and labels to the charts caused problems for some candidates, with inaccurate titles frequently used, such as “Total Salary” or “Total Commission” rather than “Total Earnings” being the most common errors. It was pleasing to see so many candidates gaining close to full marks on this task, demonstrating that skills with spreadsheets have been well taught.

Mark Ranges and Award of Grades

Foundation tier

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
Paper 1 3126/1F	100	100	42.2	13.0
Paper 2 3126/2F	98	200	93.4	34.4
Foundation tier overall 3126	--	300	135.6	43.6

3126/F		Max. mark	C	D	E	F	G
3126/1F boundary mark	raw	100	50	40	31	22	13
	scaled	100	50	40	31	22	13
3126/2F boundary mark	raw	98	53	43	34	25	16
	scaled	200	108	88	69	51	33
Foundation tier scaled boundary mark		300	156	128	100	73	46

Higher tier

Component	Maximum Mark (Raw)	Maximum Mark (Scaled)	Mean Mark (Scaled)	Standard Deviation (Scaled)
3126/1H	100	100	55.3	11.6
3126/2H	100	200	122.0	29.5
Higher tier overall 3126	--	300	177.3	36.3

		Max. mark	A*	A	B	C	D
3126/1H boundary mark	raw	100	72	64	56	49	39
	scaled	100	72	64	56	49	39
3126/2H boundary mark	raw	100	78	68	58	48	37
	scaled	200	156	136	116	96	74
Higher tier scaled boundary mark		300	223	197	171	145	113

Provisional statistics for the award

Foundation tier (12232 candidates)

	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	34.7	58.6	77.4	89.0	95.6

Higher tier (8196 candidates)

	A*	A	B	C	D
Cumulative %	10.0	32.6	59.8	81.1	94.1

Overall (20428 candidates)

	A*	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
Cumulative %	4.0	13.1	24.0	53.3	72.8	85.1	92.1	96.0

Definitions

Boundary Mark: the minimum (scaled) mark required by a candidate to qualify for a given grade. Although component grade boundaries are provided, these are advisory. Candidates' final grades depend only on their total marks for the subject.

Mean Mark: is the sum of all candidates' marks divided by the number of candidates. In order to compare mean marks for different components, the mean mark (scaled) should be expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark (scaled).

Standard Deviation: a measure of the spread of candidates' marks. In most components, approximately two-thirds of all candidates lie in a range of plus or minus one standard deviation from the mean, and approximately 95% of all candidates lie in a range of plus or minus two standard deviations from the mean. In order to compare the standard deviations for different components, the standard deviation (scaled) should be expressed as a percentage of the maximum mark (scaled).