

CAMBRIDGE TECHNICALS LEVEL 3 (2016)

Examiners' report

BUSINESS

05834–05837, 05878

Unit 1 January 2024 series

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Introduction

Our examiners' reports are produced to offer constructive feedback on candidates' performance in the examinations. They provide useful guidance for future candidates.

The reports will include a general commentary on candidates' performance, identify technical aspects examined in the questions and highlight good performance and where performance could be improved. The reports will also explain aspects which caused difficulty and why the difficulties arose, whether through a lack of knowledge, poor examination technique, or any other identifiable and explainable reason.

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.

A full copy of the question paper and the mark scheme can be downloaded from [Teach Cambridge](#).

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Unit 1 series overview

Those candidates who showed a sound understanding across the breadth of the Specification, coupled with an ability to analyse and evaluate, did well on this paper. This series has seen some good answers relating to responses to reduced disposable income (as illustrated by responses to Question 25) and business ownership (as illustrated by responses to Question 29). Examiners have seen some improvement in candidates' interpretation of financial data (as illustrated by responses to Question 2 (a) and (b)). Examiners have also seen a marked increase in the proportion of candidates who attempted to make an overall judgement in response to the 12 mark questions on the paper (in particular Question 27 where no explicit direction was given).

However, yet again, LO7 appears to be an area of the Specification for which candidates are not fully prepared. In particular LO7.2 (sources of finance) as highlighted by responses to Question 31. In addition, LO3 relating to organisational structure (as highlighted by responses to Question 23) appears difficult for candidates to assimilate and is worthy of extra attention.

Candidates who did well on this paper generally:	Candidates who did less well on this paper generally:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> demonstrated numerical skill including the ability to calculate (in Question 7) and the ability to interpret a cash flow forecast and income statements data (in Questions 14, 28 (b) (i) and (ii) respectively) researched a wide variety of businesses, targeted to the pre-issued research brief (for Section B) answered questions contextually (in Sections B and C) made judgements supported by justified reasoning (Section C extended response questions). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> left multiple choice questions entirely blank (Section A) showed little evidence of studying the topics indicated in the pre-release research brief (particularly evident was a lack of knowledge of the actions of pressure groups (Question 22)) confused ethical behaviour with meeting legal requirements (Question 30) demonstrated little, or no, knowledge of short-term external sources of finance suitable for a sole trader (Question 31).

Section A gives time for candidates to settle into the exam. This section of the paper was generally well answered by most candidates. Once again, a minority of candidates lost marks because they ticked two responses, say A and C. Such hedging cannot be credited. Candidates should be instructed not to take this approach. Where a candidate indicates an answer and subsequently changes their mind, they should clearly cross out their original tick. In addition, some candidates lost marks by leaving an MCQ entirely blank. This is poor examination technique. Candidates should be encouraged to indicate a response to all 20 multiple-choice questions.

Section B was still not as well answered as might be expected, given the clear guidance on areas to focus on in the pre-issued research brief for this examination. Some weaker scripts showed no evidence at all of research for Section B, the one area of the paper where candidates can prepare in advance. Centres are advised to devote adequate time to the preparation of candidates for Section B of this paper. The research brief for each series is specific to that series and is issued well in advance of the examination.

How the research brief linked to the questions in Section B

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • employee protection in the workplace • how a tall organisational structure affects business performance • pressure groups in action • how businesses respond to changes in disposable income • factors that have contributed to the success of a business. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Question 24 describe two ways a business you have researched complies with the Health and Safety at work Act • Question 23 analyse one advantage and one disadvantage for a business you have researched of having a tall organisational structure • Question 22 explain how a pressure group has attempted to alter the behaviour of a business you have researched • Question 25 describe how a business you have researched has responded to falling levels of disposable income in the UK • Question 21 identify two financial factors and two non-financial factors that have contributed to the success of a business you have researched.
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The wording of Questions 21, 22 and 23 linked extremely closely with the wording of the pre-issued research brief, however some candidates still demonstrated very limited knowledge or understanding. Centres are advised to emphasise to candidates the importance of focussing their research and revision on the topics indicated in the corresponding series' research brief.

Evidence suggests that those candidates who chose to answer all five questions in Section B on the same business did less well than those who selected a business according to the question. Candidates should be encouraged to select the business they use depending on the question i.e. to choose a specific business for which their understanding is suitable for answering the question. This was especially important for Question 22 where the business needed to have experienced the activities of a pressure group and for Question 23 where the business needed to have a tall organisational structure.

As always, Section C contained three high tariff, extended response questions. These questions were level of response marked. Candidates needed to demonstrate the skills of analysis (Level 3) and evaluation (Level 4) to gain the highest marks.

Analytical skill (Level 3)

Analysis requires candidates to develop their answers to include impacts on the business (or in this case, because the business is unincorporated, the business owner).

It should be noted that phrases such as 'this will change customer satisfaction levels' (Question 27), 'this will affect customer service (Question 30) or 'this will impact on cash flow' (Question 31), cannot be credited because the direction of the impact is unclear. Candidates need to make explicit the direction of the impact i.e. 'greater customer satisfaction levels', 'better customer service' and 'improved cash flow'.

Evaluative skill (Level 4)

Evaluation requires a reasoned decision that answers the question. i.e. a decision weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of trying to meet the ever-increasing needs of customers (Question 27), a justification of which ethical action Jack should prioritise (Question 30) and a recommendation as to which short-term external source of finance Jack should use (Question 31).

Candidates should be encouraged to reach decisions and give detailed justification to support their argument using contextual information. Whilst an accurate justification that applies to most businesses would achieve a Level 4 mark, an answer which argues using the particular circumstances of the business scenario, in this case a window cleaning business, was more highly rewarded.

Areas which caused most problems on this paper were business functions (Questions 2 and 10), pressure groups (Question 22), organisational structure (Question 23) and source of finance (Question 31). On the other hand, Question 25 on responding to falling levels of disposable income, Question 26 on the aim of survival, Question 28 requiring the interpretation of income statement data and Question 29 on the advantages and disadvantages of being a sole trader, were well answered.

Section A overview

The vast majority of multiple-choice questions were well answered. Those that were more problematic are discussed below.

Question 2

2 Which functional area would be responsible for managing employee redundancies?

A Business support services

B Finance

C Operations management

D Personnel

[1]

This question was testing knowledge and understanding of the functional areas in a business. Candidate answers were fairly evenly split. This appears to indicate that candidates are unclear as to typical job roles in the various functional areas.

Question 10

10 Which of these tasks would be done by a research and development assistant who works for a bicycle manufacturer?

A Checking the quality of the bicycles that come off the production line

B Designing a new range of bicycles for pre-school children

C Launching a marketing campaign for a new range of e-bikes

D Searching for the cheapest supplier of bicycle tyres

[1]

As with Question 2 this question was testing knowledge and understanding of the functional areas of business, this time the R&D function. The correct answer (B) was given by only half of candidates, with incorrect answers being fairly evenly split across the other three options. This, again, appears to suggest candidate confusion between the typical tasks undertaken in each functional area.

Assessment for learning



Centres are advised to give candidates plenty of practice allocating tasks/roles to functional areas at frequent intervals throughout the programme of study. Possibly as a starter to a lesson, whilst waiting for all students to arrive. A card sorting exercise (on paper or electronic) could be used to allocate tasks to functional areas. Alternatively 'give me 5' could be used to ask learners to suggest five tasks which would be undertaken in a particular function.

Question 12

12 The Companies Act governs:

A private limited companies only

B private limited companies and public limited companies only

C private limited companies, public limited companies and community interest companies

D public limited companies only

[1]

This question was testing knowledge and understanding of the Companies Act. Approximately half of candidates gave the correct answer (C). Of those that did not, invariably the answer given was B. All incorporated businesses i.e. companies have a separate legal identity. Therefore, all types of company are governed by the Companies Act.

Question 13

13 An electrician has been hired to install an electric fire for a customer.

Which of the following is **not** a requirement of the Consumer Rights Act?

- A The electrician must install the fire in a reasonable period of time
- B The electrician must install the fire using reasonable skill
- C The electrician must install the fire with reasonable care
- D The electrician must install the fire with reasonable courtesy

[1]

This question was testing knowledge and understanding of consumer protection legislation and, in particular, the Consumer Rights Act. For the provision of services the Act requires that the work is carried out with reasonable skill, reasonable care and within a reasonable time frame. The law makes no provision for courtesy. Again, only half of candidates selected the correct answer (D), with the incorrect answers being fairly evenly split across the remaining options.

Section B overview

The questions in Section B should be answered with direct reference to candidates' personal research, as directed by the pre-released research brief available in advance of the examination. How each question in this section links to the research brief is tabulated in the Series Review section at the beginning of this report.

For each question in this section, candidates are advised to select the most appropriate business from the ones that they have researched, rather than answer all questions about the same business. Evidence suggests that choosing a specific business on which to answer each question leads to better focused answers and higher marks.

Question 21

21 Identify **two** financial factors and **two** non-financial factors that have contributed to the success of a business you have researched.

Name of business

Activity of business

Financial factor 1

.....

Financial factor 2

.....

Non-financial factor 1

.....

Non-financial factor 2

.....

[4]

Most candidates achieved at least 2 of the 4 marks. The factors could be internal or external, so long as they contributed to the likely success of a business. Surprisingly, examiners saw more robust answers for the non-financial factors than the financial factors.

By far the most common answers for financial factors were profits, high revenue and low prices. The most common non-financial factors were good reputation, customer service and quality products.

Question 22

22 Explain how a pressure group has attempted to alter the behaviour of a business you have researched.

Name of business

Activity of business

.....
.....
.....
.....

[2]

Despite the action of pressure groups being clearly listed as an area for study on the pre-release research brief, far too many candidates showed no understanding at all about pressure groups. Instead they commonly referred to employees striking or customers boycotting.

Of those candidates who appeared to have a clear grasp of what a pressure group is, some still did not gain marks because they discussed 'why' a pressure group might attempt to alter behaviour rather than 'how', as required by the question. Examiners were looking for an action or activity, for example 'protest', 'campaign' or 'create a petition'. Those who suggested such an action, and answered in context, gained full marks.

Question 23

23 Analyse **one** advantage and **one** disadvantage for a business you have researched of having a tall organisational structure.

Name of business

Activity of business

Advantage

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

Disadvantage

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

[6]

Questions on organisation structure have historically been poorly answered. The responses examiners received to this question show some improvement in this area, however more work is still needed in this topic area.

Many candidates were able to identify an advantage and disadvantage of a tall structure. Far fewer were able to take this advantage/disadvantage and suggest the analytical impact on the organisation of this (please see the mark scheme for exemplars). 2 marks were also given for answering with context.

Question 24

24 Describe **two** ways a business you have researched complies with the Health and Safety at Work Act.

Name of business

Activity of business

1

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.....

.....

2

.....

.....

.....

[4]

Examiners were looking for practical 'hows'. As such two very similar answers could both be credited with marks. For example 'the business provides fire extinguishers' and 'the business provides first aid kits' could both be credited. To gain full marks the answer needed to be contextual.

Where candidates scored zero this was invariably because they gave responses about what employees do or do not do, rather than what the business does. Responses such as 'employees must not operate machinery without training' or 'employees must wear hair nets' do not answer the question. However, 'the restaurant gives safety training on how to use the oven' or 'the restaurant issues hair nets to kitchen staff' would gain full marks.

Question 25

25 Describe how a business you have researched has responded to falling levels of disposable income in the UK.

Name of business

Activity of business

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

[4]

This question was well answered with most candidates being able to suggest at least one way that the business had responded to falling levels of disposable income.

By far the most common answers were about giving discounts, lowering prices and using special promotions, however cost cutting measures were also credited.

Most candidates answered contextually answer and gained high marks on this question. Of the few that did not, the most common mistake was to give answers that would have been appropriate for an increase in levels of disposable income rather than a decrease, as required by the question.

Section C overview

All of the questions in this section link to the business scenario which should be read carefully before answering any of the questions in this Section of the exam paper.


Question 26

26 State what the business aim of 'survival' means.

.....
..... [1]

This question dichotomised candidates. Many were clear that the aim of survival referred to being able to continue to trade, to stay open or to avoid closure thus gaining the mark. Almost an equal number incorrectly suggested survival was a synonym for breaking even or even avoiding a loss, and thus did not gain the mark. The specification splits business aims into five categories. 'Survival' is one of these categories, financial aims is another.

Misconception

 There appears to be a common misconception amongst candidates that the aim of survival is the same as aiming to break even. It is not. Survival refers to staying in business or keeping the business going. When necessary, a business may be able to sustain operating at a loss for several years. Many social media sites and technology companies are examples of this. Candidates should not confuse financial aim with the aim of survival.

Question 27

27 Evaluate likely advantages and disadvantages for Jack of trying to meet the ever-increasing needs of his customers.

[12]

As with all 12 mark questions on this paper, the question is level of response marked. The type of answer examiners were looking for is shown in the exemplar response in the published mark scheme. This question centres around the advantages and disadvantages to a sole trader of trying to meet the ever-increasing needs of customers. There were plenty of advantages and disadvantages to choose from.

Candidates did well on this question, with almost all candidates being able to accurately identify and articulate at least one advantage and one disadvantage to Jack of trying to meet the ever-increasing needs of his customers.

By far the most common advantage was 'greater brand awareness (Level 1), attracting more customers (Level 2) leading to more revenue (Level 3). Such a chain of argument scored 7 of the available 12 marks solely for discussion of this one impact.

Other commonly cited advantages (i.e. Level 1's) were 'more repeat custom' and 'greater job satisfaction for Jack'. Many candidates were able to develop their answers through a chain of argument to the impact on the business, gaining additional Level 3 marks.

By far the most common disadvantage was 'increased tiredness (Level 1), due to higher workload (Level 2) leading to Jack being able to spend less quality time with his family (Level 3). With other commonly cited disadvantages being 'additional cost' and 'negative impacts on mental health'.

Once Level 3 had been achieved, an overall decision weighing up the advantages/disadvantages supported by valid reasoning was given Level 4. Those candidates who gave a contextual justification achieved a minimum of 11 marks.

Almost all candidates attempted to make a decision. However some candidates literally just said 'the advantages outweigh the disadvantages' (or vice versa) or 'Jack should/should not try to meet the ever increasing needs'. These are insufficient to be given as Level 4, a valid reason for whatever decision the candidate makes needs to be given.

Misconception



Some candidates appear to think that a general sentence such as 'the disadvantages outweigh the advantages' is sufficient to gain Level 4 marks, it is not. The candidate must also give at least one valid reason to support their decision to be credited with a Level 4 mark.

Question 28 (a)

28


(a) Identify each of the following items as either a fixed cost, a variable cost or a non-current asset for a window cleaning business.

Item:	Fixed cost, variable cost or non-current asset?
Cleaning fluid	
Ladders	
Public liability insurance	

[3]

Many candidates were able to identify that cleaning fluid was a variable cost and that the insurance was a fixed cost. Where candidates did less well was in identifying that the ladders are a non-current (fixed) asset i.e. something owned by the business which is kept in the business to help it function.

Assessment for learning



Centres are advised to give candidates plenty of practice categorising financial items at frequent intervals once the financial aspects of the course have been delivered. Categories could include fixed/variable costs, revenues, profit, current/non-current assets, liabilities, etc. A card sorting exercise (on paper or electronic) could be used to categorise the items. Alternatively, a competitive element could be added by asking learners to create a similar style question to Q28a with what they deem difficult items to categorise. This can then be projected on the whiteboard, to challenge the class and see who can answer it correctly.

Question 28 (b) (i)

(b) Use the information shown in **Fig. 1**.

(i) Identify two aspects of the financial performance of Jack's window cleaning business that were **better** than Darcie's window cleaning business in 2023.

1

2

[2]

Most candidates were able to correctly identify two aspects of financial performance that were better for Jack than Darcie, thus gaining full marks.

Question 28 (b) (ii)

(ii) Identify two aspects of the financial performance of Jack's window cleaning business that were **worse** than Darcie's window cleaning business in 2023.

1

2

[2]

Most candidates were able to correctly identify two aspects of financial performance that were worse for Jack than Darcie, thus gaining full marks.

Question 28 (c)

(c) Explain why the 'cost of sales' figures for Jack's and Darcie's window cleaning businesses are low.

.....
.....
.....
..... [2]

This question was testing understanding of one of the components of an income statement i.e. cost of sales. To gain full marks the explanation provided needed to show an understanding of costs of sales (i.e. it is about variable cost (direct cost/costs of production)) and an aspect of the window cleaning businesses which makes the figure low. The most common correct answers to this question related to Jack and Darcie providing a service or not being manufacturers or sellers of goods. Many incorrect answers were suggested including them operating locally or being self-employed.

Question 29

29 Explain **two** advantages for Jack of operating his window cleaning business as a sole trader rather than as a partnership.

1

.....

.....

.....

2

.....

.....

.....

[4]

Most candidates were able to achieve at least 2 of the 4 marks available, with many achieving full marks. Where 2 marks rather than full marks were achieved the most common error was correctly identifying two advantages but no explaining them. Candidates need to take careful note of the command words in the question and the mark allocation shown on the question paper.

Some answers were too vague to credit e.g. 'Jack can keep all the money'. This answer is too vague because Jack cannot keep all of the cash inflows or all of the revenue, so 'money' is too vague a term. 'Profit' is what Jack can keep all of, so the answer needed to be specific.

Occasionally candidates scored zero on this question. When this occurred it appears that the candidate had misread the question and given disadvantages instead of advantages.

Question 30

30 Jack has decided to remain as a sole trader. He intends to expand his business by recruiting three employees.

Advise Jack on ways to treat his employees ethically.

Which one of these ways should Jack prioritise? Justify your view.

[12]

As with all 12 mark questions on this paper, this question was level of response marked. The type of answer examiners was looking for is shown in the exemplar response in the published mark scheme. This question centres around ways of treating employees ethically.

Some very good answers were seen to this question with suggestions such as 'pay more than the living wage', 'allow flexible working' and 'provide free refreshments'. All of these were appropriate and credited as Level 1.

To move through the levels of response candidates needed to explain their suggestion (Level 2) and analyse the impact on the sole trader of their suggestion (Level 3). One such common chain of argument was 'listen to employee concerns' (Level 1) 'because this will make employees feel cared for' (Level 2), 'increasing motivation (Level 3)'. Another common chain of argument was 'give employees bonuses' (Level 1) 'so that they can have a better standard of living (Level 2), 'however this will increase the business' cash outflows' (Level 3).

In an attempt to encourage all candidates to make a justified judgement for Level 4, the question demanded this explicitly. The majority of candidates, therefore, wrote a final paragraph which selected which suggestion Jack should prioritise. Those that had achieved Level 3 and suggested a valid reason for their selection gained a Level 4 mark. Those that did so with contextual argument gained a minimum of 11 marks. To achieve 12 marks candidates needed to not only to argue why a particular suggestion was selected for prioritisation but why another suggestion was of a lesser priority.

Some candidates performed less well than expected on this question. Such candidates often suggested ways that were legal rather than ethical and these suggestions could not be credited. Ethical on this specification is taken to mean doing above and beyond what the law requires. Therefore, suggesting legal duties such as 'paying the minimum wage', 'providing safety training', 'issuing PPE' or 'giving breaks' could not be credited. The examiner needed to see suggestions which are doing more than the bare minimum. Answers such as 'paying above the minimum wage' or 'giving generous breaks' were credited as ethical suggestions.

Misconception



Some candidates seem to link ethical behaviour with legal behaviour. On this specification ethical behaviour is taken to mean doing more than the law requires. Solely meeting legal obligations is the minimum behavioural requirement, rather than an example of behaving ethically. Ethical business behaviour is going above and beyond what the law requires.

Question 31

31 Analyse **three** short-term external sources of finance that Jack could use to fund the expansion of his business.

Which one of these three sources should Jack use? Justify your view.

[12]

As with all 12 mark questions on this paper, this question was level of response marked. The type of answer examiners was looking for is shown in the exemplar response in the published mark scheme. This question centres around short-term external sources of finance. Candidates needed to discuss three such sources that would be suitable for Jack.

By far the most common correct Level 1 answers were overdraft, crowd funding and trade credit. Other common answers were credit cards, grants and hire purchase. Owner's savings and retained profit could not be accepted as these are not external sources of finance. Likewise medium- and long-term sources of finance such as loans and venture capital could not be credited because the question explicitly asked for short-term sources.

To move through the levels of response candidates needed to explain an advantage or disadvantage of the suggested source of finance (Level 2) to arrive by a chain of argument on the impact on the sole trader (Level 3). One common example was 'crowd funding (Level 1) 'which can also act as a marketing tool' (Level 2) 'increasing sales' (Level 3). Another was 'overdraft' (Level 1) 'which charges interest' (Level 2) 'leading to higher business costs' (Level 3)'.

Once again, in an attempt to encourage all candidates to make a justified judgement for Level 4, the question demanded this explicitly. The majority of candidates, therefore, wrote a final paragraph which selected their chosen source of finance for Jack. Those that had already achieved Level 3 and made a valid selection supported by valid reasoning were given Level 4. Those candidates who gave a contextual justification achieved a minimum of 11 marks.

However, many candidates performed less well than expected on this question. Some candidates suggested answers that were not sources of finance at all and could not be given even at Level 1. Totally incorrect answers included 'raising prices', 'creating a web page', 'advertising on social media' or 'reducing employee wages'. Many more candidates gave vague answers such as 'use finance' or 'use credit'. Of those who gave specific sources of finance, far too many suggested internal sources or medium- or long-term sources. Commonly candidates suggested a mixture of short- and long-term sources. They were not penalised for this, however all too often they chose to recommend the long-term method rather than an appropriate short-term one.

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