

New  
Specification



*Rewarding Learning*

**ADVANCED SUBSIDIARY (AS)  
General Certificate of Education  
2026**

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## **Professional Business Services**

Assessment Unit AS 2

*assessing*

Human Resource Services

**[SPS21]**

**VALID FROM SEPTEMBER 2023 TO JUNE 2026**

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# **MARK SCHEME**

## General Marking Instructions

### **Introduction**

The main purpose of the mark scheme is to ensure that examinations are marked accurately, consistently and fairly. The mark scheme provides examiners with an indication of the nature and range of candidates' responses likely to be worthy of credit. It also sets out the criteria which they should apply in allocating marks to candidates' responses.

### **Assessment objectives**

Below are the assessment objectives for **GCE Professional Business Services**.

Candidates should be able to:

- AO1** Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terms, concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their client businesses.
- AO2** Apply knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their client businesses.
- AO3** Investigate, analyse and evaluate concepts, theories, methods and models as used by professional business services firms and their client businesses.

### **Quality of candidates' responses**

In marking the examination papers, examiners should be looking for a quality of response reflecting the level of maturity which may reasonably be expected of a 17- or 18-year-old which is the age at which the majority of candidates sit their GCE examinations.

### **Flexibility in marking**

Mark schemes are not intended to be totally prescriptive. No mark scheme can cover all the responses which candidates may produce. In the event of unanticipated answers, examiners are expected to use their professional judgement to assess the validity of answers. If an answer is particularly problematic, then examiners should seek the guidance of the Supervising Examiner.

### **Positive marking**

Examiners are encouraged to be positive in their marking, giving appropriate credit for what candidates know, understand and can do rather than penalising candidates for errors or omissions. Examiners should make use of the whole of the available mark range for any particular question and be prepared to award full marks for a response which is as good as might reasonably be expected of a 17- or 18-year-old GCE candidate.

### **Awarding zero marks**

Marks should only be awarded for valid responses and no marks should be awarded for an answer which is completely incorrect or inappropriate.

### **Marking calculations**

In marking answers involving calculations, examiners should apply the 'own figure rule' so that candidates are not penalised more than once for a computational error. To avoid a candidate being penalised, marks can be awarded where correct conclusions or inferences are made from their incorrect calculations.

### **Types of mark schemes**

Mark schemes for tasks or questions which require candidates to respond in extended written form are marked on the basis of levels of response which take account of the quality of written communication. Other questions which require only short answers are marked on a point for point basis with marks awarded for each valid piece of information provided.

### **Levels of response**

In deciding which level of response to award, examiners should look for the 'best fit' bearing in mind that weakness in one area may be compensated for by strength in another. In deciding which mark within a particular level to award to any response, examiners are expected to use their professional judgement.

The following guidance is provided to assist examiners.

- **Threshold performance:** Response which just merits inclusion in the level and should be awarded a mark at or near the bottom of the range.
- **Intermediate performance:** Response which clearly merits inclusion in the level and should be awarded a mark at or near the middle of the range.
- **High performance:** Response which fully satisfies the level description and should be awarded a mark at or near the top of the range.

### **Quality of written communication**

Quality of written communication is taken into account in assessing candidates' responses to all tasks and questions that require them to respond in extended written form. These tasks and questions are marked on the basis of levels of response. The description for each level of response includes reference to the quality of written communication.

For conciseness, quality of written communication is distinguished within either three or four levels of response.

Where there are three levels of response, quality of written communication is distinguished as follows:

Level 1: Quality of written communication is basic.

Level 2: Quality of written communication is good.

Level 3: Quality of written communication is excellent.

In interpreting these level descriptions, examiners should refer to the more detailed guidance provided below:

**Level 1 (Basic):** The candidate makes only a limited selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. The organisation of material may lack clarity and coherence. There is little use of specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar may be such that intended meaning is not clear.

**Level 2 (Good):** The candidate makes a reasonable selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with some clarity and coherence. There is some use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are sufficiently competent to make meaning clear.

**Level 3 (Excellent):** The candidate successfully selects and uses the most appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with a high degree of clarity and coherence. There is widespread and accurate use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a sufficiently high standard to make meaning clear.

Where there are four levels of response, quality of written communication is distinguished as follows:

Level 1: Quality of written communication is basic.

Level 2: Quality of written communication is satisfactory.

Level 3: Quality of written communication is good.

Level 4: Quality of written communication is excellent.

In interpreting these level descriptions, examiners should refer to the more detailed guidance provided below.

**Level 1 (Basic):** The candidate makes only a basic selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. The organisation of material may lack clarity and coherence. There is little use of specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar may be such that intended meaning is not clear.

**Level 2 (Satisfactory):** The candidate makes a satisfactory selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with some degree of clarity and coherence. There is some use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a satisfactory standard to make meaning evident.

**Level 3 (Good):** The candidate makes a good selection and use of an appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with good clarity and coherence. There is good use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of a good standard to make meaning clear.

**Level 4 (Excellent):** The candidate successfully selects and used the most appropriate form and style of writing. Relevant material is organised with a high degree of clarity and coherence. There is widespread and accurate use of appropriate specialist vocabulary. Presentation, spelling, punctuation and grammar are of the highest standard to make meaning absolutely clear.

<b>Report (AO1)</b>	<b>Level 1 ([1]–[2]) Basic</b> The candidate’s report is basic, lacks a clear structure and not all sections are completed. The report addresses few of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. References and a bibliography are included but are unclear.
	<b>Level 2 ([3]–[4]) Good</b> The candidate’s report is good, follows a clear structure and adheres to the format required. All sections are completed. The report addresses some of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. References and a bibliography are included.
	<b>Level 3 ([5]–[6]) Excellent</b> The candidate’s report is excellent, well-structured and adheres to the format required. All sections are completed. The report is logical and addresses the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. References are clear and a bibliography is included.

AVAILABLE MARKS

<b>1. Executive Summary (AO1, AO2)</b>	<b>Level 1 ([1]–[4]) Basic</b> There is a broad overview of the main issues and findings of the report, but this lacks clarity. The candidate demonstrates limited or no understanding of the issues in relation to Carters Ltd. The quality of written communication is basic.
	<b>Level 2 ([5]–[8]) Good</b> There is an overview of the main issues and findings of the report. The candidate demonstrates a good understanding of the issues in relation to Carters Ltd. The quality of written communication is good.
	<b>Level 3 ([9]–[12]) Excellent</b> There is a logical overview of the main issues and findings of the report. The candidate demonstrates a clear understanding of the issues in relation to Carters Ltd. The quality of written communication is excellent.

<b>2.</b> <b>Introduction</b> <b>(AO1, AO2,</b> <b>AO3)</b>	<b>Level 1 ([1]–[6]) Basic</b> The candidate demonstrates little or no understanding of the issues in relation to Carters Ltd. The candidate simply states an aim for the report, and uses limited information from the Client Brief to set the context for the report. There is limited consideration of the information provided. Use of relevant business terminology and concepts is limited. The quality of written communication is basic.
	<b>Level 2 ([7]–[12]) Good</b> The candidate demonstrates a good understanding of the issues in relation to Carters Ltd. The candidate states a clear aim for the report, and uses some relevant information from the Client Brief to provide a clear introduction to the business and context for the report. There is good consideration of the information provided with some relevant response. Use of relevant business terminology and concepts is good. The quality of written communication is good.
	<b>Level 3 ([13]–[16]) Excellent</b> The candidate demonstrates an excellent understanding of the issues in relation to Carters Ltd. The candidate states a very clear aim for the report, and uses relevant information from the Client Brief to provide a succinct introduction to the business and the context for the report. The information provided has been carefully considered with excellent responses. Use of relevant business terminology and concepts is excellent. The quality of written communication is excellent.

AVAILABLE MARKS

<b>3. Research Methods (AO1, AO2, AO3)</b>	<b>Level 1 ([1]–[4]) Basic</b> The candidate’s research objectives are basic or not stated. A limited range of research methods are selected to collect evidence. There is no attempt to justify the methods used. Copies of any primary research tool(s) used are included in the Appendices. The quality of written communication is basic.
	<b>Level 2 ([5]–[8]) Good</b> The candidate states clear research objectives and selects an appropriate range of research methods to collect the evidence required. There is an attempt to justify the methods used. The candidate discusses how the validity and reliability of the results can be assured. Copies of any primary research tool(s) used are included in the Appendices. The quality of written communication is good.
	<b>Level 3 ([9]–[12]) Excellent</b> The candidate states very clear research objectives and selects an appropriate range of research methods to collect the evidence required. The methods used are justified. The candidate discusses how the validity and reliability of the results can be assured, including any tests used to improve primary research tools. Copies of any primary research tool(s) used are included in the Appendices. The quality of written communication is excellent.

AVAILABLE MARKS

**4.  
Analysis and  
Discussion of  
Findings  
(AO1, AO2, AO3)**

**Areas for analysis and discussion may include:**

Structure

- Organisation structure, reporting lines, responsibility and accountability
- Problems with the structure of Carters Ltd
- Implications of the organisational structure for Carters Ltd

Conflict

- Conflict within senior management
- Colin's autocratic management style
- Lack of consultation with staff

Culture

- Ways to analyse the culture within a business, e.g. using the Schein Culture Model
- Company values not being applied.

Recruitment

- Recruitment and selection processes used by Carters Ltd
- Abandoning links with further education colleges results in a loss to training and learning and development expertise that is conversant with compliance requirements. The college also loses access to teaching resources that the FE Colleges can provide, for example, kitchen facilities and cooking ingredients.
- Human Resources staff not consulted about recruitment and selection as this has been deferred to the operations team. This reduces Carters' use of HR expertise (under-utilisation), may demotivate HR staff, and may lead to recruitment issues.
- Inappropriate use of job descriptions and person specifications by recruitment agencies is resulting in the wrong staff being employed.

Learning and development

- Learning and development processes employed in Carters Ltd
- Importance of learning and development in Carters Ltd
- Ways to evaluate the effectiveness of learning and development, e.g. using the Kirkpatrick Model
- Human resource documentation: learning and development records
- Strengths and weaknesses of learning and development approaches in Carters Ltd

Motivation

- Importance of motivation among staff and head office staff
- Theories of motivation and methods that relate to employee motivation within Carters Ltd
- Problems associated with absenteeism, labour turnover and grievances
- Impact of staff turnover

Employee well-being

- Importance of employee well-being in Carters Ltd
- Factors which can affect employee well-being
- Problems associated with poor employee well-being
- Factors contributing to stress among staff
- Methods to support employee well-being

**AVAILABLE  
MARKS**



	<p><b>Level 1 ([1]–[8]) Basic</b>  The candidate presents basic research findings. The discussion and analysis of findings is limited with minimal or no reference to relevant theory. There is a limited attempt to consider some of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. Use of relevant business terminology, theory and concepts is limited. The quality of written communication is basic.</p>
	<p><b>Level 2 ([9]–[16]) Satisfactory</b>  The candidate clearly presents research findings using suitable formats. The discussion and analysis of findings is satisfactory and is supported by some relevant theory. Most of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief are addressed. Use of relevant business terminology, theory and concepts is satisfactory. The quality of written communication is satisfactory.</p>
	<p><b>Level 3 ([17]–[24]) Good</b>  The candidate clearly presents research findings using a variety of formats demonstrating a sound understanding of suitable ways to present data. The discussion and analysis of findings is good and is supported by relevant theory. All issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief are addressed, and there is also some awareness of the wider context for Carters Ltd. Use of relevant business terminology, theory and concepts is good. The quality of written communication is good.</p>
	<p><b>Level 4 ([25]–[30]) Excellent</b>  The candidate clearly presents a comprehensive set of research findings using a variety of formats demonstrating an excellent understanding of the most suitable ways to present different types of data. The discussion and analysis of findings is excellent and is supported by relevant theory. Any limitations of the research methods used are evaluated and discussed. All issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief are thoroughly addressed, and there is also a clear awareness of the wider context for Carters Ltd. Use of relevant business terminology, theory and concepts is excellent. The quality of written communication is excellent.</p>

AVAILABLE MARKS

<p><b>5. Conclusion and Recommendations (AO2 and AO3)</b></p>	<p><b>Recommendations may include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changes to the organisation structure, reporting lines, responsibility and accountability within Carters Ltd</li> <li>• Action plan to address conflict among the senior management team</li> <li>• Review staff workloads to ensure that equitable workloads are operated within the organisation</li> <li>• Take steps to achieve a shared culture within Carters Ltd, for example introduce an induction programme that refers to the organisation's culture</li> <li>• Introduce recruitment processes to recruit 'the right person for the right job'</li> <li>• Introduce a human resource plan to manage the employee issues</li> <li>• Review current training methods and the content of training, perhaps based on the outcomes of the Kirkpatrick Model to address problems staff are experiencing in Carters Ltd.</li> <li>• Provide training (on-line/on-site and off-site/coaching/mentoring) that develops employees in relation to their current job</li> <li>• Introduce a more employee friendly training programme</li> <li>• Introduce employee well-being initiatives such as flexible working hours, work redesign and health promotion</li> <li>• Introduce policy and procedures to address absenteeism</li> <li>• Introduce reward and remuneration incentives and promotion routes that may reduce labour turnover</li> <li>• Undertake a review of the issues leading to grievances</li> <li>• Introduce regular meetings within and between supermarkets/outlets</li> </ul>	<p><b>AVAILABLE MARKS</b></p>
	<p><b>Level 1 ([1]–[6]) Basic</b>  The candidate gives basic conclusions and recommendations to address a limited number of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. Recommendations are not supported by research evidence or relevant theory. The recommendations demonstrate a limited understanding of relevant theory, models and concepts. The quality of written communication is basic.</p>	
	<p><b>Level 2 ([7]–[12]) Satisfactory</b>  The candidate gives reasonable conclusions and recommendations to address some of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. All recommendations are supported by research evidence and relevant theory. The recommendations demonstrate a satisfactory understanding of relevant theory, models and concepts. The quality of written communication is satisfactory.</p>	
	<p><b>Level 3 ([13]–[18]) Good</b>  The candidate gives clear conclusions and recommendations to address all of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. All recommendations are justified and supported by research evidence and relevant theory. The recommendations demonstrate a good understanding of relevant theory, models and concepts. The quality of written communication is good.</p>	

	<p><b>Level 4 ([19]–[24]) Excellent</b>  The candidate gives comprehensive conclusions and recommendations to address all of the issues and concerns raised in the Client Brief. All recommendations are justified and fully supported by research evidence and relevant theory. The candidate identifies wider issues and risks that might prevent successful implementation of the recommendations by Carters Ltd. The recommendations demonstrate an excellent understanding of relevant theory, models and concepts. The quality of written communication is excellent.</p>
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<b>AVAILABLE MARKS</b>
<b>100</b>

**Total**