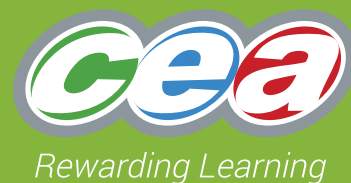


GCE



CCEA GCE Specification in
**Professional
Business Services**

For first teaching from September 2023
For first award of AS level in Summer 2024
For first award of A level in Summer 2025
Subject Code: 3210



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Subject Code	3210
QAN AS Level	610/2048/5
QAN A Level	610/2049/7

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This specification is available online at www.ccea.org.uk

1 Introduction

This specification sets out the content and assessment details for our Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced GCE courses in Professional Business Services. First teaching is from September 2023.

Students can take:

- the AS course as a final qualification; or
- the AS units plus the A2 units for a full GCE A level qualification.

We assess the AS units at a standard appropriate for students who have completed the first part of the full course. A2 units have an element of synoptic assessment (to assess students' understanding of the subject as a whole), as well as more emphasis on assessment objectives that reflect higher order thinking skills.

The full Advanced GCE award is based on students' marks from the AS (40 percent) and the A2 (60 percent). The guided learning hours for this specification, as for all GCEs, are:

- 180 hours for the Advanced Subsidiary level award; and
- 360 hours for the Advanced level award.

We will make the first AS awards for the specification in 2024 and the first A level awards in 2025. The specification builds on the broad objectives of the Northern Ireland Curriculum.

If there are any major changes to this specification, we will notify centres in writing. The online version of the specification will always be the most up to date; to view and download this please go to www.ccea.org.uk

1.1 Aims

This specification aims to encourage students to:

- develop their interest in and enthusiasm for professional business services, including developing an interest in further study and careers in the subject;
- develop and draw together different areas of knowledge, skills and understanding of different aspects of the subject;
- develop competence and confidence in a number of skills, including independent learning, creative thinking, practical, mathematical and problem solving;
- carry out practical tasks and present their findings in different formats;
- appreciate the needs of business professionals operating in the marketplace of Northern Ireland and beyond; and
- progress to relevant higher education programmes.

1.2 Key features

The following are important features of this specification.

- It includes six assessment units. Four are externally assessed and two are internally assessed and externally moderated by CCEA.
- The topics in each unit are organised in a logical sequence, building on previous knowledge and understanding as appropriate.
- Key practical tasks and the skills required are clearly identified.
- Assessment at A2 includes more question types, more demanding evaluative tasks, extended writing, and synoptic assessment that encourages students to develop their understanding of the subject as a whole.
- A range of support is available, including specimen assessment materials, exemplar planning frameworks and teacher guidance.

1.3 Prior attainment

Students do not need to have reached a particular level of attainment before beginning to study this specification. However, the AS specification builds on some of the knowledge, understanding and skills developed in GCSE Business Studies and other similar courses at the same level. Knowledge, understanding and skills developed in GCSE Mathematics are also relevant. The A2 section of this GCE builds on the knowledge, understanding and skills developed at AS level.

1.4 Classification codes and subject combinations

Every specification has a national classification code that indicates its subject area. The classification code for this qualification is 3210.

Please note that if a student takes two qualifications with the same classification code, universities and colleges that they apply to may take the view that they have achieved only one of the two GCEs. The same may occur with any two GCE qualifications that have a significant overlap in content, even if the classification codes are different. Because of this, students who have any doubts about their subject combinations should check with the universities and colleges that they would like to attend before beginning their studies.

2 Specification at a Glance

The table below summarises the structure of the AS and A level courses:

Content	Assessment	Weightings
Unit AS 1: Introduction to Professional Business Services	External written examination 1 hour 30 mins (80 marks)	30% of AS 12% of A level
Unit AS 2: Human Resource Services	Internal assessment Portfolio based on a pre-release case study (100 marks)	40% of AS 16% of A level
Unit AS 3: Financial Decision Making	External written examination 1 hour 30 mins (80 marks)	30% of AS 12% of A level
Unit A2 1: Technology in Business	External written examination 2 hours (90 marks)	18% of A level
Unit A2 2: Leadership and Management	External written examination 2 hours (90 marks)	18% of A level
Unit A2 3: Project Management Skills and Processes	Internal assessment Portfolio of evidence for a project management task (120 marks)	24% of A level

3 Subject Content

We have divided this course into six units: three units at AS level and three units at A2. This section sets out the content and learning outcomes for each unit.

This specification introduces students to a wide selection of topics relevant to prospective professional business service providers operating in Northern Ireland, the UK and beyond. The course is an industry-endorsed specification, appropriate for school leavers considering entry into bespoke business training programmes or apprenticeships as well as those seeking progression to relevant higher and further education programmes.

3.1 Unit AS 1: Introduction to Professional Business Services

This unit introduces students to the environment that professional business services firms operate in. It establishes the nature of the service they provide for clients. Students also investigate the consultancy process professional business services firms use. They explore the range of techniques they adopt to inform and formulate the advice they provide to their clients. They also explore the broader context of the professional services market to enhance their understanding.

Assessment for this unit is a 1 hour 30 minute written examination. It is worth 12 percent of the A level qualification.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>The business environment</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the client’s business environment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – types of production: primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary; and – sectors of the economy: private, public and voluntary; • identify and discuss the objectives of organisations in the private, public and voluntary sectors; and • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following types of business ownership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sole trader; – partnerships; – private limited companies; and – public limited companies;

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>The business environment (cont.)</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the main features of the types of business ownership, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – ownership; – source of finance; – degree of control; – liability status (limited or unlimited); and – distribution or use of profits; • identify key stakeholders and explain their interest in a business, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – owner or shareholder; – employees; – managers; – customers; – suppliers; – lenders; – government; – local communities; and – competitors; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of conflicting objectives between stakeholders; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a business’s resources (factors of production), including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – land; – labour; – capital; and – enterprise; and
<p>The professional business services sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the nature of the professional business services sector and the range of consultancy services professional business services firms provide, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – human resources; – financial; – business technology; – leadership and management; and – project management.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>The professional business services sector (cont.)</p> <p>The consultancy process</p> <p>Understanding the client's market</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the differences between tangible and intangible goods and services; • identify professional business services firms that operate locally, nationally and globally and consider why a business might use the consultancy services they provide; • define the term consultancy process; • apply and analyse the five phases of the consultancy process that professional business services firms use with their clients: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – entry; – diagnosis; – action planning; – implementation; and – termination; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of market size, market share and market growth; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following reasons for market research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – descriptive; – explanatory; – predictive; and – exploratory; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of primary research methods to collect information about a client's market, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – questionnaires; – interviews; – focus groups; – consumer panels; and – surveys (postal, face-to-face, telephone and online);

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Understanding the client's market (cont.)</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of secondary research methods to collect information about a client's market, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – existing market research reports; – published accounts and business reports; – government and agency publications; and – online information; • evaluate the use of primary and secondary research methods in a given business scenario; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sampling methods used in market research, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – random; – quota; and – stratified; • evaluate these sampling methods in a given business scenario; and • evaluate information collected using market research to inform decision making by a business. • analyse the following ways in which a market might be segmented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – age; – gender; – socioeconomic class; – lifestyle; – geographical region; and • analyse the benefits and drawbacks of segmenting a market.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Techniques for business planning</p> <p>Risk management</p> <p>Government regulation</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding and apply a range of techniques for strategic planning and decision making, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cost–benefit analysis; – strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats (SWOT) analysis; – political, economic, social, technological, environmental, legal (PESTEL) analysis; – Ansoff matrix; and – Boston matrix; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the need to assess and manage risk for a client; • apply and analyse the elements of a risk assessment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – identification and description; – estimation using an appropriate risk assessment matrix, including quantitative and qualitative scoring; and – evaluation; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the purpose of business regulation; and • evaluate the benefits to a client’s business of a code of conduct versus external regulation.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Recruitment processes (cont.)</p> <p>Learning and development</p> <p>Employee well-being</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key terms of a contract of employment; and • analyse how effective recruitment and selection can help an organisation's performance; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the importance of effective learning and development for a business; • analyse learning and development methods, including induction training, on-the-job training, off-the-job training and continuing professional development; • evaluate the possible outcomes of learning and development for employees in client businesses; • define the term employee well-being; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of why employers should value the concept of employee well-being in their organisations; • explore methods used to support employee well-being, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – flexible working hours; – workplace counselling; – resilience training; – stress management training; and – workplace wellness programmes; and • explain the causes of low levels of workplace well-being, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – role overload; – shift work; – work relationships; – limited career development; and – redundancies.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Managing conflict (cont.)</p> <p>Research processes</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse the different approaches a professional business services firm may advise a client to take to improve employer–employee relations, for example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – improved communication; – employee representative groups; – employee representatives on the board of directors; and – employee survey; • explain the aims and objectives of a specific piece of research; • carry out a literature search using secondary sources to inform primary research; • select, use and justify primary research methods, including questionnaire and interview, to collect data; • design a suitable research tool to collect data and meet objectives, using a questionnaire and interview schedule; • apply the concepts of reliability and validity; • understand the importance of confidentiality and consent in primary research; • use appropriate sampling techniques to select participants for primary research, including random, stratified and quota; • collect data; • present data using a variety of suitable formats; • analyse research findings and draw conclusions on the objectives; and • evaluate the research methods used.

Content	Learning Outcomes
Report writing	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the issues associated with the pre-release case study; • plan and evaluate a variety of research methods appropriate to a given context, including questionnaires and interviews; • analyse and critically evaluate information, including their own research evidence; and • present, analyse and evaluate research findings in a report format.

Report Format

Students must structure their reports to include the following:

Heading	Description	Word Count guidelines
Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Structured as required Completed with appropriate recommendation, including appendices, references and bibliography 	
Executive summary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Summarising the whole report logically and concisely 	
Introduction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providing a clear aim and relevant background information about the client organisation and context for the report 	400
Research methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Describing the research objectives Describing and justifying the research methods used (primary and secondary as appropriate) Primary research includes questionnaires and/or interviews relevant to the context and issues raised in the case study 	400
Analysis and discussion of findings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a variety of formats to present research findings Analysing and discussing the findings, drawing together primary and secondary evidence as appropriate Evaluating research methods used including a clear discussion and analysis of findings, supported by relevant knowledge, theory and concepts 	2000
Conclusion and recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reviewing the original research objectives and drawing key findings together Making recommendations for improvement supported by research evidence and relevant theory 	1200
Bibliography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acknowledging and itemising references in the report using the Harvard referencing system 	No limit
Appendices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Including any evidence of primary research tools used, for example interview schedules, questionnaires and/or letters written or received 	No limit

Quality of written communication is assessed in this report.

Students should write their reports:

- in the third person and passive voice;
- in 12 point font on single-sided A4 paper; and
- using 1.5 line spacing.

The reports should have numbered pages and be secured in a flat A4 folder.

As a guide, the report should be 3500 to 4000 words, excluding the executive summary, appendices and referencing of secondary sources.

3.3 Unit AS 3: Financial Decision Making

This unit focuses on the services provided by professional business services firms to support financial decision making within a client business. Students explore the sources of finance available to a business and key areas of good financial management, including budgeting and cash flow. Students also analyse and interpret final accounts using ratio analysis and use investment appraisal methods to consider how professional business services firms can advise clients on financial decision making.

The examination paper provides equations for all ratios.

This unit is assessed by a 1 hour 30 minute written examination. It is worth 12 percent of the A level qualification.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Introduction to financial decision making</p> <p>Finance management</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the importance of effective financial decision making for business operations; • identify, analyse and evaluate the sources of finance available to a business, including the advantages and disadvantages of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – internal financial sources, including retained profits, capital and disposal of assets; and – external financial sources, including loan capital, overdraft, share issue, leasing, hire purchase, and trade credit; and • evaluate the appropriate source of finance for a given purpose, considering: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cost; – time; – flexibility of the finance; – status and size of the business; and – financial situation.

Content	Learning Outcomes
Financial statements	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • analyse and interpret the following elements of the financial statements of a sole trader: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – income statement, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> sales revenue; cost of sales/goods sold; gross profit; expenses; and net profit; and – statement of financial position, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> non-current assets; current assets; equity; non-current liabilities; and current liabilities; <p><i>(Students do not need to construct a set of financial statements.)</i></p>
Ratio analysis for decision making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • explain the following key performance indicators (KPIs) used by a business to measure financial performance: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – profitability or performance; – liquidity; – gearing; – financial efficiency; and – shareholder earning; • calculate, analyse and interpret ratios to determine: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – profitability or performance, including gross and net profit margin, and return on capital employed (ROCE); – liquidity, including current ratio; – gearing; – financial efficiency, including trade payables and trade receivables; and – shareholder earnings, including earnings per share and return on equity; • Use the outcomes of ratio analysis to assess the financial performance of a business and make recommendations for improvement;

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Ratio analysis for decision making (cont.)</p> <p>Investment appraisal</p> <p>Financial decision making process</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the benefits and limitations of ratio analysis for financial decision making; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following methods of investment appraisal for financial decision making: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – payback; and – net present value (NPV); • conduct an investment appraisal in a given business context; • analyse the outcomes of an investment appraisal and make recommendations; • evaluate the methods of investment appraisal a professional business services firm can use with a client when advising on financial decision making; and • analyse how a business uses financial data for making decisions on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – investing; – expanding; – diversifying; and – increasing employee numbers.

3.4 Unit A2 1: Technology in Business

In this unit, students focus on the technology services that professional business services firms provide to support business operations in a client business. Students explore the range of technology and Information Technology (IT) systems available for communications, managing people, financial management and business operations. They also examine the issues professional business services firms must consider when advising a client on business technology, including security, data storage, and social, moral and ethical issues.

This unit is assessed by a 2 hour written examination. It is worth 18 percent of the A Level qualification.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Role of technology in business</p> <p>IT systems in a business</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how businesses use technology in the following areas: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – communications; – managing people; – business operations; and – financial management; • describe, analyse and evaluate different IT systems used by professional business services firms and their client businesses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – management information systems (MIS); – performance management systems (PMS); – customer relationship management systems (CRM); – transaction processing systems (TPS); and – inventory management systems (IMS);
<p>Technology for communications</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following technology available to support communications in a business: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – email; – instant messaging; – telephone and smartphone; – voicemail; – document sharing; – text; – websites; – web conferencing; – conference calls (voice, video and web); and – social media;

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Technology for communications (cont.)</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate this technology in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professional business services firms’ client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security.
<p>Technology for managing people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how technology is used to support performance management • evaluate this technology in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professional business services firms’ client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security;
<p>Technology for business operations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the range of technology available to support the following business operations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – marketing or customer relationship management (CRM); – transaction processing systems (TPS); and – inventory management systems (IMS); • evaluate this technology in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professional business services firms’ client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Technology for financial management</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the technology available to support financial decision making, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – spreadsheets; and – databases; • evaluate this technology in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professional business services firms’ client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Security issues</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the principles of keeping data safe, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – confidentiality; – integrity; and – availability; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the types of threats associated with cyber security, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – data theft; – phishing; – malware; and – zero day attacks; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following cyber security technology: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – secure socket layer (SSL); – hypertext transfer protocol secure (https); – two factor authentication (2FA); • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how cyber security technology can make the following systems more secure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – email; – cloud computing; and – transaction processing systems; • evaluate cyber security technology, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – secure socket layer (SSL); – hypertext transfer protocol secure (https); and – two factor authentication (2FA); • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of relevant legislation on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – data protection; – copyright; – health and safety; – computer misuse; and – communications.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Disaster Recovery Plan</p> <p>Technology and data</p> <p>Social, moral and ethical issues</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following aspects of a disaster recovery plan: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – files backed up; – timescale for backup; – location of backup; – storage method; and – key personnel and roles identified; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of common backup and recovery strategies; and • analyse the main features of a disaster recovery plan; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the use of big data in a business; • evaluate the use of data analytics to support and influence decision making, for example key performance indicators (KPIs); • evaluate a range of data storage systems in terms of capacity, cost and speed of access and retrieval including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – on-premises such as hard drives and external drives; – data centres; and – cloud storage; • evaluate the social, moral and ethical issues for a business using technology, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – automated decision making; – online censorship; – monitoring personal behaviour; – capturing, storing and analysing personal information; – the digital divide; and – acceptable use.

3.5 Unit A2 2: Leadership and Management

In this unit, students examine the key concepts of leadership and management and a range of leadership styles and theories. They investigate how professional business services firms can advise client businesses to meet some of the challenges of management, including performance management, managing teams and managing change.

This unit is assessed by a 2 hour written examination. It is worth 18 percent of the A Level qualification.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Leadership and management</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the similarities and differences between leadership and management; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of Goleman’s concept of Emotional Intelligence. • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fayol’s Five Functions of Management; and – Mintzberg’s Ten Managerial Roles; • analyse Fayol’s Five Functions of Management and Mintzberg’s Ten Managerial Roles; • demonstrate knowledge, understanding and application of Tannenbaum-Schmidt’s Continuum of Leadership; • evaluate the following leadership styles; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – autocratic; – democratic; and – laissez-faire; • demonstrate knowledge, understanding and application of the following theories of leadership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – transformational; and – transactional; • evaluate the following two models: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blake Mouton Managerial Grid; – Adairs Action Centered Leadership Model;

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Leadership and management (cont.)</p> <p>Performance management</p> <p>Managing teams</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the usefulness of the following two models for professional business services firms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Blake Mouton Managerial Grid; and – Adair's Action Centered Leadership Model; <p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the purpose of performance review as a part of performance management; • explain the role of the manager in the performance review process; • analyse the importance of the following in the performance review process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – performance standards; – effective feedback; and – setting objectives; • evaluate performance review for an employee and an employer, for example recognition, promotion and identifying learning and development needs; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the benefits and drawbacks of team working; • use the Tuckman Team Development model to examine the stages of team development that professional business services firms use with client businesses; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the different roles in a team according to the Belbin nine team roles model; • analyse how a professional business services firm might use the Belbin nine team roles model in a client organisation; • evaluate the Belbin nine team roles model for developing effective teams; and

Content	Learning Outcomes
Managing change	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge, understanding and application (drawing from real life business situations and contexts) of the reasons for change in the business environment including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – organic growth; – mergers and takeovers; – economic recession; – technological change; – new owners or leaders; – customer tastes; and – poor performance; • analyse reasons for resistance to change, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – fear; – insufficient information; – uncertainty; and – peer pressure; • analyse the following models used to manage change effectively: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Kurt Lewin’s unfreeze–change–refreeze model; and – Kotter’s 8-step process for leading change; and – Galbraith’s star model; • evaluate the benefits and challenges of managing change effectively for a business in a given context: <p>Benefits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reduced absenteeism. – reduced labour turnover. – improved communication. – increased productivity. – increased employee engagement and motivation. – reduced conflict. <p>Challenges</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – increased financial costs. – timely management of change measures/models implemented. – increased resistance to change. – differing personal beliefs and attitudes. – impact of the external environment. – increased employee dissatisfaction. – planned change may not succeed

3.6 Unit A2 3: Project Management Skills and Processes

In this unit, students explore the stages and processes involved in successful project management. They examine the components of project management methodology and apply this methodology to a specific project. To enhance teaching and learning in this unit, teachers should give students opportunities to engage with business organisations that use project management methodology.

Students produce a portfolio of evidence for a project. The project should be a one-off activity or event to deliver specific objectives. It should have a defined start and end.

The evidence required in the portfolio focuses on the methodology used when initiating, planning, executing and closing a project. Although centres should give students the opportunity to execute a 'live' project, students may provide evidence to meet the assessment criteria without executing the project. Students will not be disadvantaged if execution of a 'live' project is not possible in their particular setting.

Students take on the role of the project manager and provide individual evidence to meet the assessment criteria.

This is an internally assessed unit. Centres assess this unit and we moderate it. It is worth 24 percent of the A level qualification.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Introduction to project management</p> <p>Project documentation</p> <p>Feasibility of the project</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding of the nature of a project and why a business needs project management; • demonstrate understanding of the following project roles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – project manager; – project management team; – team manager; – project users; – project suppliers; and – project board; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the key components of the following project management stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – initiation; – planning; – execution; and – closure and evaluation; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the purpose and content of the following project management documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – business case; – project brief; – project initiation document (PID); – project progress report; – project closure report; and – plans and registers, including project plans, risk register, issues register and lessons learned register; • identify client needs and objectives; • carry out research relevant to the project, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – primary research; – secondary research; – market analysis using the PESTEL framework or SWOT analysis as appropriate depending on the nature of the project; • analyse research findings to verify the need for the project.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Feasibility of the project (cont.)</p> <p>Initiation</p> <p>Planning</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • develop a business case, including project justification, timescales, risks and costs versus benefits of each option; and • develop a project brief for a given or chosen project, including project overview, scope and objectives; • explain the importance of the initiation stage in project management; • explain the importance of the PID in the initiation stage; and • identify and explain the tolerances allowed within a project, for example time, costs, quality and risk; • explain the importance of the planning stage in project management; • develop a plan for a given or chosen project including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – project definition; – scope; – objectives; – deliverables; – resources (staff, equipment and materials); – activities; – timescales and milestones; – team structures; – roles and responsibilities; – quality plan (quality targets and methods of quality control); – financial plan (estimated expenditure); – risk plan (risks, actions to minimise risks, and roles and responsibilities for managing risk); and – stage review to assess if the project should proceed to the execution stage; and • use a project planning tool, such as a Gantt chart, to plan project tasks.

4 Scheme of Assessment

4.1 Assessment opportunities

Each unit is available for assessment in summer each year. It is possible to resit individual AS and A2 assessment units once and count the better result for each unit towards an AS or A level qualification. Candidates' results for individual assessment units can count towards a qualification until we withdraw the specification.

4.2 Assessment objectives

There are three assessment objectives for this specification. Candidates must:

- demonstrate knowledge and understanding of terms, concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their client businesses (AO1);
- apply knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their client businesses (AO2); and
- investigate, analyse and evaluate concepts, theories, methods and models as used by professional business services firms and their client businesses (AO3).

4.3 Assessment objective weightings

The table below sets out the assessment objective weightings for each assessment unit and the overall A level qualification:

Percentage Assessment Objective Weightings					
	AO1	AO2	AO3	AS	A level
AS 1	4	4	4	12	12
AS 2	4	6	6	16	16
AS 3	4	4	4	12	12
A2 1	4	7	7		18
A2 2	4	7	7		18
A2 3	4	11	9		24
Total	24	39	37	40	100

4.4 Quality of written communication

In AS and A level Professional Business Services, candidates must demonstrate their quality of written communication. They need to:

- ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear;
- select and use a form and style of writing that suit their purpose and complex subject matter; and
- organise information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary where appropriate.

Quality of written communication is assessed in responses to questions and tasks that require extended writing.

4.5 Synoptic assessment at A2

The A2 assessment units include elements of synoptic assessment, which encourages candidates to develop their understanding of the subject as a whole. In our GCE Professional Business Services, synoptic assessment allows candidates to demonstrate essential knowledge, understanding and skills so that they can:

- draw together the knowledge, understanding and skills learned in different parts of the A level course;
- gain a holistic understanding of professional business services;
- develop the ability to deal with factors affecting professional business services in different contexts and manage a project in response to a client problem;
- bring together and make connections between the areas of knowledge learned throughout the course;
- communicate with reasoned arguments supported by evidence; and
- use appropriate language and terminology in context.

4.6 Higher order thinking skills

The A2 assessment units provide opportunities to demonstrate higher order thinking skills by incorporating:

- a wider range of question types to address different skills, for example case studies and open-ended questions;
- extended writing where appropriate;
- questions constructed with a deliberate incline of difficulty and decrease in structuring; and
- synoptic assessment.

4.7 Reporting and grading

We report the results of individual assessment units on a uniform mark scale that reflects the assessment weighting of each unit.

We award AS qualifications on a five grade scale from A to E, with A being the highest. We award A level qualifications on a six grade scale from A* to E, with A* being the highest. To determine candidates' grades, we add the uniform marks obtained in individual assessment units.

To be awarded an A*, candidates need to achieve a grade A on their full A level qualification and at least 90 percent of the maximum uniform marks available for the A2 units. If candidates fail to attain a grade E, we report their results as unclassified (U).

The grades we award match the grade descriptions in Section 5 of this specification.

5 Grade Descriptions

Grade descriptions are provided to give a general indication of the standards of achievement likely to have been shown by candidates awarded particular grades. The descriptions must be interpreted in relation to the content in the specification; they are not designed to define that content. The grade awarded depends in practice upon the extent to which the candidate has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of candidates' performance in the assessment may be balanced by better performances in others.

The requirement for all AS and A level specifications to assess candidates' quality of written communication will be met through all four assessment objectives.

AS Grade Descriptions

Grade	Description
<p>AS</p> <p>Grade A</p>	<p>For AO1, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate in depth knowledge and understanding of terms, concepts, theories, methods and models relevant to professional business services firms, their client businesses and the scenarios presented in the specification content. <p>For AO2, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use appropriate subject-specific terms, concepts, theories, methods and models confidently and accurately; • demonstrate a high level of competency in applying relevant knowledge and understanding to various professional business services contexts; and • demonstrate a high level of competence in an appropriate range of skills. <p>For AO3, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the ability to analyse and investigate concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their clients by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – building logical and well developed arguments; and – using numerical and non-numerical techniques appropriately and accurately; and • demonstrate the ability to evaluate by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – presenting logical arguments; – making reasoned judgements; and – making valid conclusions and recommendations.

Grade	Description
<p>AS</p> <p>Grade E</p>	<p>For AO1, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate basic knowledge of terms, concepts, theories, methods and models contained in the AS units, with few significant omissions; and • demonstrate some understanding of terminology, concepts, theories, methods and models. <p>For AO2, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the ability to apply a basic level of relevant knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories, methods and models to various professional business services contexts. <p>For AO3, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • offer limited analysis and investigation of concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their clients by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – building simple arguments; and – using numerical and non-numerical techniques; and • demonstrate the ability to evaluate at a simple level by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – offering judgements; and – stating limited conclusions and recommendations.

A2 Grade Descriptions

Grade	Description
<p>A2</p> <p>Grade A</p>	<p>For AO1, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate in depth knowledge and understanding of terms, concepts, theories, methods and models relevant to professional business services firms, their client businesses and the scenarios presented in the specification content; and • demonstrate clear understanding of the links between business concepts and links between different elements of the subject content. <p>For AO2, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • use appropriate subject-specific terms, concepts, theories, methods and models confidently and accurately; • demonstrate a high level of competency in applying relevant knowledge and understanding to various professional business services contexts; and • demonstrate a high level of competence in an appropriate range of skills. <p>For AO3, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the ability to analyse and investigate concepts, theories, methods and models used by professional business services firms and their clients by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – building logical and well developed arguments; and – using numerical and non-numerical techniques appropriately and accurately; and • demonstrate the ability to evaluate by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – presenting logical arguments; – making reasoned judgements; and • making valid conclusions and recommendations.

Grade	Description
<p>A2</p> <p>Grade E</p>	<p>For AO1, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate some knowledge of some terms, concepts, theories, methods and models contained in this specification; • demonstrate basic understanding of terminology, concepts, theories, methods and models; and • demonstrate some understanding of the links between business concepts and links between different elements of the subject content. <p>For AO2, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the ability to apply a basic level of knowledge and understanding of concepts, theories, complex methods and models to various professional business services contexts. <p>For AO3, candidates characteristically:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate the ability to competently investigate and analyse concepts, theories, complex methods and models used by professional business services firms and their clients by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – building logical arguments; and – using numerical and non-numerical techniques appropriately and accurately; and • demonstrate some evaluative skills by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – presenting basic arguments; – making judgements; and – making conclusions and recommendations.

6 Guidance on External Assessment

There are four external assessment units in this specification, two at AS level and two at A2:

- Unit AS 1: Introduction to Professional Business Services;
- Unit AS 3: Financial Decision Making;
- Unit A2 1: Technology in Business; and
- Unit A2 2: Leadership and Management.

The external assessment focuses on candidates' knowledge, understanding and analysis of the content of each unit.

6.1 Unit AS 1: Introduction to Professional Business Services

This unit is assessed through a one hour 30 minute external written examination. The examination includes both extended writing and short response questions and is worth 80 marks.

6.2 Unit AS 3: Financial Decision Making

Assessment for this unit is a one hour 30 minute external written examination. The examination includes both extended writing and short response questions and is worth 80 marks.

6.3 Unit A2 1: Technology in Business

This unit is assessed through a two hour external written examination. The examination includes both extended writing and short response questions and is worth 90 marks.

6.4 Unit A2 2: Leadership and Management

This unit is assessed through a two hour external written examination. The examination includes both extended writing and short response questions and is worth 90 marks.

7 Guidance on Internal Assessment

There are two internal assessment units in this specification, one at AS level and one at A2:

- Unit AS 2: Human Resource Services; and
- Unit A2 3: Project Management Skills and Processes.

The internal assessment focuses on candidates' ability to apply their knowledge and skills in relation to a work context.

7.1 Skills assessed by internal assessment

Teachers must assess the following skills through internal assessment:

- working independently to select and interpret appropriate information;
- applying knowledge, understanding and skills to a range of contexts;
- researching, using primary and secondary sources, and analysing and presenting findings from the research undertaken;
- analysing, evaluating and drawing conclusions and making reasoned arguments; and
- writing succinctly, clearly and coherently using specialist terms with appropriate referencing.

There may also be external assessment of elements of all these skills.

7.2 Task setting

We set the tasks for Unit AS 2 and Unit A2 3. We provide centres with details of the internal assessment tasks and guidance on how to complete and submit them. Teachers must ensure that the completed tasks conform to the unit requirements.

For Unit AS 2, we will issue a new case study and task in September 2023 for first submission in Summer 2024. From then on, we will issue a new case study and task every three years i.e., we will issue a new case study and task for Unit AS2 in September 2026 for submission in Summer 2027. Centres must ensure that the task they complete is appropriate to the year they intend to submit for moderation.

Unit A2 3 has a set task that remains the same each year. Teachers must refer to the specimen assessment materials for guidance on tasks and marking criteria.

7.3 Task taking

Internal assessment is likely to involve both work in the classroom and independent study. It is essential to manage the assessment conditions in a way that ensures the assessment remains reliable and fair. Please note the requirements below.

Area	Assessment Conditions
Supervision	Teachers should supervise candidates' work to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • monitor their progress; • prevent plagiarism and check that the work that candidates submit is their own; • comply with health and safety requirements; • provide advice and guidance if there are any problems; and • ensure that the work aligns with the specification requirements and can be marked using the criteria set out for each unit.
Authenticity	Teachers must be aware of any third party copyright or intellectual property issues in candidates' work. They must sign a declaration to certify that, to the best of their knowledge, all the work that candidates have submitted for assessment is their own.
Time Limit/ Word Limit	There is a guideline word limit for AS Unit 2, see page 18.
Collaboration	The work of individual candidates may be informed by working with others, but each candidate must provide an individual response.
Resources	Candidates must appropriately reference all the materials they use in their work, including any online resources.

7.4 Task marking

Teachers should use their professional judgement to apply the criteria in the mark bands appropriately and fairly to candidates' work. They should take a 'best fit' approach to award the appropriate mark within a range, balancing strengths and weaknesses in each response.

For up-to-date advice on plagiarism, or any kind of candidate malpractice, see *Suspected Malpractice in Examinations and Assessments: Policies and Procedures* on the Joint Council for Qualifications website at www.jcq.org.uk

7.5 Internal standardisation

Centres with more than one teaching group must carry out internal standardisation of their internal assessment tasks before submitting their marks to us. This is to ensure, as far as possible, that each teacher has applied the assessment criteria consistently. It may be necessary to adjust an individual teacher's marking:

- to bring it into line with that of other teachers in the centre; and
- to match the standards established at the agreement trial.

If marks do change, centres must amend the total/final marks on their Candidate Record Sheets.

7.6 Moderation

Centres must submit their marks and samples to us by May in any year. We may adjust centres' marking to bring the assessment of candidates' work into line with our agreed standards.

We issue full instructions each year on:

- our moderation procedures;
- which samples we require; and
- the deadlines for submitting marks and samples to us.

Teachers and centre staff may contact us at any stage for advice or support relating to internal assessment.

7.7 Internal assessment review

We will review our internal assessment arrangements every two years to ensure that they continue to set an appropriate challenge and remain valid, reliable and stimulating.

8 Links and Support

8.1 Support

The following resources are available to support this specification:

- our Professional Business Services microsite at www.ccea.org.uk
- specimen assessment materials; and
- guidance notes for teachers.

We also intend to provide:

- planning frameworks;
- centre support visits;
- support days for teachers;
- portfolio clinics;
- agreement trials;
- a resource list; and
- exemplification of standards.

8.2 Curriculum objectives

This specification supports centres to build on the broader Northern Ireland Curriculum objectives to develop the young person:

- as an individual;
- as a contributor to society; and
- as a contributor to the economy and environment.

It can contribute to meeting the requirements of the Northern Ireland Entitlement Framework at post-16 and the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

Curriculum Progression from Key Stage 4

This specification builds on learning from Key Stage 4 and gives students opportunities to develop their subject knowledge and understanding further.

Students will also have opportunities to continue to develop the **Cross-Curricular Skills** and the **Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities** shown below. The extent of this development depends on the teaching and learning methodology the teacher uses.

Cross-Curricular Skills

- Communication:
 - Talking and Listening
 - Reading
 - Writing
- Using Mathematics
- Using ICT

Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities

- Problem Solving
- Working with Others
- Self-Management

For further guidance on the skills and capabilities in this subject, please refer to the supporting planning frameworks.

8.3 Examination entries

Entry codes for this subject and details on how to make entries are available on our Qualifications Administration Handbook microsite, which you can access at www.ccea.org.uk

Alternatively, you can telephone our Examination Entries, Results and Certification team using the contact details provided.

8.4 Equality and inclusion

We have considered the requirements of equality legislation in developing this specification and designed it to be as free as possible from ethnic, gender, religious, political and other forms of bias.

GCE qualifications often require the assessment of a broad range of competences. This is because they are general qualifications that prepare students for a wide range of occupations and higher level courses.

During the development process, an external equality panel reviewed the specification to identify any potential barriers to equality and inclusion. Where appropriate, we have considered measures to support access and mitigate barriers.

We can make reasonable adjustments for students with disabilities to reduce barriers to accessing assessments. For this reason, very few students will have a complete barrier to any part of the assessment.

It is important to note that where access arrangements are permitted, they must not be used in any way that undermines the integrity of the assessment. You can find information on reasonable adjustments in the Joint Council for Qualifications document *Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments* available at www.jcq.org.uk

8.5 Contact details

If you have any queries about this specification, please contact the relevant CCEA staff member or department:

- Specification Support Officer: Arlene Ashfield
(telephone: (028) 9026 1200, extension 2291, email: aashfield@ccea.org.uk)
- Subject Officer: Peter Davidson
(telephone: (028) 9026 1200, extension 2993, email: pdavidson@ccea.org.uk)
- Examination Entries, Results and Certification
(telephone: (028) 9026 1262, email: entriesandresults@ccea.org.uk)
- Examiner Recruitment
(telephone: (028) 9026 1243, email: appointments@ccea.org.uk)
- Distribution
(telephone: (028) 9026 1242, email: cceadistribution@ccea.org.uk)
- Support Events Administration
(telephone: (028) 9026 1401, email: events@ccea.org.uk)
- Moderation
(telephone: (028) 9026 1200, extension 2236, email: moderationteam@ccea.org.uk)
- Business Assurance (Complaints and Appeals)
(telephone: (028) 9026 1244, email: complaints@ccea.org.uk)