



Coimisiún na Scrúduithe Stáit
State Examinations Commission

LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION 2015

BUSINESS

CHIEF EXAMINER'S REPORT

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1. Introduction

1.1 The Syllabus

The current Leaving Certificate Business Syllabus was devised in 1997 and first examined in 1999. The syllabus may be downloaded at www.education.ie.

In modern society the business environment is not static but is ever changing. To regulate and guide ever-changing interactions, governments frequently implement and update legislation. The selected list of relevant legislation is included in the Appendix to the *Leaving Certificate Business, Guidelines for Teachers*, which may also be downloaded [at www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie). The Guidelines state that the delivery of the subject should where possible reflect the dynamic nature of business and to facilitate this it was agreed that the Appendix would be amended as legislation evolved. Schools are notified by Circular from the Department of Education and Skills of the updated legislation and the date from which it would be examinable, which is two years following the issue of the Circular. In the last number of years there has been on-going and substantial changes in consumer, employment and company legislation. These on-going changes have resulted in a time lag on issuing the Circulars.

The syllabus contains seven units. The learning outcomes are in general common to Ordinary and Higher levels with some designated Higher level only. At Ordinary level candidates are required to “*recall and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the syllabus content.*” In addition to these assessment objectives, the Higher level candidates are required to: “*demonstrate a greater depth of knowledge of the syllabus content; apply business terms, concepts and theories to address problems and issues; select, organise, interpret and use information supplied; evaluate evidence, make reasoned judgements and present conclusions accurately and appropriately.*” Differentiation between the levels is achieved in terms of depth of treatment of topics. The Higher level course incorporates all of the Ordinary level topics and some further material. There are no specific weightings given to the different assessment objectives in the syllabus.

This report should be read in conjunction with the examination papers and the marking schemes for 2015. These are available from the website of the State Examinations Commission at www.examinations.ie.

1.2 The Assessment Structure

The syllabus is assessed at Higher level by means of a three-hour terminal written examination and at Ordinary level by means of a two and a half hour terminal written examination. Both papers have a total allocation of 400 marks.

There are three compulsory sections at the **Higher level** as follows:

Section 1 (80 marks 20%) consists of 10 short response type questions which are drawn from across the syllabus. Candidates are required to answer any eight of the ten questions in this section in the spaces provided in the examination paper. Each question is allocated ten marks.

Section 2 (80 marks 20%) consists of a single compulsory question requiring candidates to apply knowledge and understanding to the specific context of an applied business question (ABQ). There are 7 units in the syllabus and each year three of these units form the basis of the ABQ. The three specified units of the syllabus are changed annually on an agreed rotational basis. In 2015, units 2, 3 and 4 were assessed.

Section 3 (240 marks 60%) consists of seven questions and candidates are required to answer four of these. There are two parts to Section 3 and candidates are required to answer one question from Part 1 (out of a possible three), two questions from Part 2 (out of a possible four) and one other question from either Part 1 or Part 2. All questions require extended responses and are allocated 60 marks each. Answers to Section 2 and Section 3 must be written in an answer book.

There are two compulsory sections at the **Ordinary level** as follows:

Section 1 (100 marks 25%) consists of 15 short response type questions which are drawn from across the syllabus. Candidates are required to answer any ten of the fifteen questions in this section in the spaces provided in the examination paper. Each question is allocated ten marks.

Section 2 (300 marks 75%) consists of eight questions and candidates are required to answer four of these. There are two parts to Section 2 and candidates are required to answer one question from Part 1 (out of a possible three), two questions from Part 2 (out of a possible five) and one other question from either Part 1 or Part 2. Each question is allocated 75 marks. Answers to Section 2 must be written in an answer book.

1.3 Participation Trends in Leaving Certificate Business

The subject Business has the highest uptake of the three Leaving Certificate Business related subjects: Business; Accounting and Economics. The overall participation rates of candidates in Leaving Certificate Business for the last five years are given in **Table 1**. Almost 17,000 candidates, representing just over 30% of the overall Leaving Certificate cohort sat the Leaving Certificate Business examination in 2015, down from in excess of 18,000 in 2010. In 2010, when the last Chief Examiner’s Report was published, 34% of the total Leaving Certificate cohort sat the Leaving Certificate Business examination.

Year	Business Candidature	Total Leaving Certificate Candidature	Business as % of Total
2011	18,083	54,344	33.3%
2012	17,249	52,592	32.8%
2013	16,932	52,767	32.1%
2014	16,516	54,025	30.6%
2015	16,876	55,044	30.7%

Table 1: Participation in Leaving Certificate Business, 2011 to 2015

Candidature at Higher and Ordinary Levels

The number and percentage of candidates taking business at Higher and Ordinary levels in the years 2011-2015 are given in **Table 2**. The drop of over 3% in the total cohort sitting the Leaving Certificate Business examination is reflected mainly in the falling numbers taking the subject at the Ordinary level where a steady decline in the number is observed in recent years. The breakdown between levels has changed in recent years with the percentage of the overall cohort taking the subject at the Higher level rising from 66.5% to 72% over that period. The percentage presenting at Ordinary level has fallen correspondingly.

Year	Total Business Candidature	Number at Higher Level	Number at Ordinary Level	% Higher	% Ordinary
2011	18,083	12,024	6,059	66.5%	33.5%
2012	17,249	11,839	5,410	68.6%	31.4%
2013	16,932	11,573	5,359	68.3%	31.7%
2014	16,516	11,674	4,842	70.7%	29.3%
2015	16,876	12,154	4,722	72.0%	28.0%

Table 2: Number and percentage of candidates at each level, 2011 to 2015

Participation by Gender

The gender breakdown of candidates taking Higher level and Ordinary level Leaving Certificate Business 2011-2015 is given in **Table 3** and **Table 4** respectively. As can be seen the gender breakdown has been relatively stable over the last 5 years. Females represent a marginally greater percentage of the total cohort at the Higher level while the situation is reversed at the Ordinary level.

Year	Total Higher level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Males as % of total
2011	12,024	6,344	5,680	52.8%	47.2%
2012	11,839	5,982	5,857	50.5%	49.5%
2013	11,573	5,961	5,612	51.5%	48.5%
2014	11,674	6,062	5,612	51.9%	48.1%
2015	12,154	6,353	5,801	52.3%	47.7%

Table 3: Gender composition of Higher level Business cohort, 2011 to 2015

Year	Total Ordinary level	Female Candidates	Male Candidates	Female as % of total	Males as % of total
2011	6,059	2,915	3,144	48.1%	51.9%
2012	5,410	2,571	2,839	47.5%	52.5%
2013	5,359	2,571	2,788	48.0%	52.0%
2014	4,842	2,302	2,540	47.5%	52.5%
2015	4,722	2,315	2,407	49.0%	51.0%

Table 4: Gender composition of Ordinary level Business cohort, 2011 to 2015

2. Performance of Candidates

2.1 Higher Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is presented in **Table 5** (lettered grades) and **Table 6** (sub-grades). As can be seen from **Table 5** there is a fairly consistent pattern of grade distribution across the five years, however, there is a slight downward movement on the ABC grades and there is a slight upward movement on the EFNG rate. This is likely to be related to the increased participation rates at Higher level with examiners reporting that many of the poorly performing candidates struggled with the demands of the questions at Higher level and/or did not attempt the required number of questions.

Year	A	B	C	ABC	D	E	F	NG	EFNG
2011	10.0	30.3	31.2	71.5	21.9	5.5	1.1	0.1	6.7
2012	11.4	29.1	30.8	71.3	21.8	5.4	1.3	0.1	6.8
2013	10.9	30.2	29.6	70.7	22.2	5.5	1.4	0.1	7.0
2014	10.7	30.4	28.5	69.6	22.8	6.0	1.6	0.1	7.7
2015	11.0	28.6	29.7	69.3	23.3	6.1	1.2	0.1	7.4

Table 5: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Higher level Business, 2011 to 2015

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2011	3.0	7.0	8.4	10.9	11.0	10.7	10.7	9.8	8.3	6.7	6.9	5.5	1.1	0.1
2012	3.8	7.6	7.2	10.4	11.5	9.8	10.3	10.7	7.7	6.4	7.7	5.4	1.3	0.1
2013	3.9	7.0	8.8	10.3	11.1	10.0	9.7	9.9	7.7	6.9	7.6	5.5	1.4	0.1
2014	3.3	7.4	7.8	10.2	12.4	9.3	9.4	9.8	7.2	7.3	8.3	6.0	1.6	0.1
2015	4.0	7.0	8.0	9.5	11.1	9.1	10.1	10.5	7.4	7.1	8.8	6.1	1.2	0.1

Table 6: Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Higher level Business, 2011 to 2015

Year		A	B	C	ABC	D	EFNG
2011	F	11.1	31.8	30.9	73.8	20.7	5.6
	M	8.9	28.5	31.6	69.0	23.1	7.9
2012	F	13.0	30.4	30.0	73.4	20.3	6.2
	M	9.7	28.0	31.7	69.4	23.3	7.4
2013	F	12.4	30.9	29.2	72.5	21.3	6.2
	M	9.3	29.5	29.9	68.7	23.4	7.9
2014	F	12.4	32.3	28.2	72.9	20.8	6.4
	M	9.0	28.2	28.7	65.9	25.0	9.1
2015	F	12.3	29.1	29.5	70.9	22.0	7.2
	M	9.6	28.0	30.0	67.6	24.8	7.5

Table 7: Comparison of achievement by lettered grade between female and male candidates in Higher level Business, 2011 to 2015 (% achieving each grade)

The distribution of lettered grades at Higher level between female (F) and male (M) candidates from 2011 to 2015 is given in **Table 7**. It is clear from the data that female candidates consistently achieved more ABC grades than male candidates in the years 2011 to 2015 at Higher level Business. In addition, the difference in A grade is quite significant at around 3% on average in favour of females, while the combined EFNG rate is consistently higher for males.

2.2 Ordinary Level Statistics

The distribution of grades awarded over the last five years is presented in **Table 8** (lettered grades) and **Table 9** (sub-grades).

Year	A	B	C	ABC	D	E	F	NG	EFNG
2011	10.9	33.9	31.1	75.9	18.7	3.5	1.5	0.4	5.4
2012	10.7	29.3	32.3	72.3	19.2	5.4	2.5	0.4	8.3
2013	10.8	31.3	32.6	74.7	18.6	4.4	1.9	0.3	6.6
2014	10.9	30.5	33.1	74.5	18.6	4.6	2.2	0.2	7.0
2015	10.5	30.9	32.6	74.0	19.3	4.6	1.8	0.3	6.7

Table 8: Percentage of candidates awarded each lettered grade in Ordinary level Business, 2011 to 2015

Year	A1	A2	B1	B2	B3	C1	C2	C3	D1	D2	D3	E	F	NG
2011	2.5	8.4	7.4	12.5	14.0	11.9	11.5	7.7	8.3	5.1	5.3	3.5	1.5	0.4
2012	3.4	7.3	6.5	9.4	13.4	9.9	11.0	11.4	5.2	6.8	7.2	5.4	2.5	0.4
2013	3.2	7.6	7.4	10.5	13.4	11.2	10.0	11.4	6.3	5.6	6.7	4.4	1.9	0.3
2014	3.4	7.5	5.6	11.2	13.7	9.9	11.6	11.6	5.9	5.7	7.0	4.6	2.2	0.2
2015	3.1	7.4	5.5	10.6	14.8	10.0	11.2	11.4	5.8	6.5	7.0	4.6	1.8	0.3

Table 9: Percentage of candidates awarded each sub-grade in Ordinary level Business, 2011 to 2015

As can be seen from **Table 8** the final results in 2015 accord closely with those of previous years. An analysis of the work of candidates who obtained an E grade or lower revealed that in some cases entire questions were omitted or extremely short responses were given.

The distribution of lettered grades at Ordinary level between female (F) and male (M) candidates from 2011 to 2015 are given in **Table 10**.

Year		A	B	C	ABC	D	EFNG
2011	F	12.5	33.9	29.8	76.2	18.4	5.3
	M	9.4	33.7	32.4	75.5	19.0	5.5
2012	F	11.5	29.5	32.0	73.0	20.0	7.0
	M	10.1	29.2	32.6	71.9	18.5	9.7
2013	F	12.4	32.8	31.5	76.7	17.3	5.9
	M	9.4	29.8	33.7	72.9	19.8	7.3
2014	F	11.4	30.3	33.2	74.9	18.6	6.5
	M	10.5	30.6	32.8	73.9	18.7	7.5
2015	F	11.5	32.3	31.3	75.1	18.4	6.4
	M	9.6	29.5	33.9	73.0	20.1	7.0

Table 10: Comparison of achievement by lettered grade between female and male candidates in Ordinary level Business 2011 to 2015 (% achieving each grade)

It is clear from the data that, similar to Higher level, female candidates consistently achieved more A grades than male candidates in the years 2011 to 2015 at Ordinary level. However, while the % achieving ABC grades is higher in the case of females in all cases, the difference between male and female is less than is the case at the Higher Level. In addition the EFNG grade is higher for males than females.

3. Analysis of Candidate Performance

3.1 Question Popularity and Scoring

Higher Level

A summary based on an analysis of a random sample of candidates' results for Higher level business 2015 is presented in **Table 11**.

Question	Topic	Response Rate (%)	Average Mark (%)	Rank Order In Popularity	Rank Order in Average Mark
Section 1	Short Response Questions (8): Compulsory	100%	74%		1
Section 2	Applied Business Question (ABQ) Harte Shoes Ltd. Units 2,3 and 4: Compulsory	100%	68%		2
Section 3					
Part 1					
Q1	Relationships in Business / Contract /Discrimination	75%	55%	2	6
Q2	Types of business organisation /Irish economy /Environmental responsibilities	48%	59%	5	3
Q3	International trading environment / EU / Global marketing	22%	58%	7	4
Part 2					
Q4	Visual communication / Organisational structures / Credit control	77%	57%	1	5
Q5	Product life cycle / Product development process / Setting up business	67%	63%	4	2
Q6	Insurance / Cash Flow / Performance Appraisal	68%	63%	3	1
Q7	Marketing Mix / Public Relations/Market Segmentation	47%	52%	6	7

Table 11: Question popularity of and average mark awarded, Higher level Business 2015

The table presents response rate, average mark awarded, as well as ranking the questions in terms of their popularity and average percentage of the available mark achieved. It should be noted that candidates are required to attempt all three sections of the examination paper. In Section 3 the majority of candidates answer one of the three questions in Part 1 and three of the four questions in Part 2. Units 6 and 7, which are assessed in Part 1, remain consistently the least popular questions, however, candidates who chose to attempt the questions based on these units (Question 2 and Question 3) generally performed reasonably well, with some very impressive performances observed. Just over one fifth of the cohort (22% of candidature) attempted Question 3 on the International Trading environment, while 48% attempted Question 2 on the Domestic Environment.

In the 2015 Higher level examination the average percentage mark achieved by candidates for the short response questions in **Section 1** was 74%, which is broadly in line with previous years. The average percentage mark achieved for the applied business question (ABQ) was 68%, representing a slight improvement on recent years. However, examiners continue to express some concern about candidates who do not appear to understand the requirements of this question, even though they are clearly stated on the marking scheme annually and in previous Chief Examiner's Reports. This lack of understanding impacts negatively on candidates' grades as the ABQ is worth 80 marks out of a total of 400 marks (20%) and is a compulsory question.

In Section 3, extended response answers are required. Question 1, which is based on Unit 1, is always the most frequently answered question in Part 1. Candidates are required to answer one of three available questions in Part 1 and, as stated previously, the questions on Domestic and International Environment tend not to be popular. Question 1 was the second most popular choice among candidates in 2015 (75%). Though popular, the question proved highly discriminating with a very wide range of marks awarded from excellent to quite poor. As a result of this wide variation, the average mark for Question 1, at 55%, was the second lowest awarded. A significant number of candidates omitted parts (C) (i) and (iii) where recall of specific information and evaluation of a syllabus topic were required. Question 4, which is based on enterprise/management, is generally the most popular question overall in Section 3. It was first in order of popularity (77%) in 2015 and had an average mark of 57%. While candidates generally perform well on marketing questions

based on Unit 5, Question 7 was the second least popular question (47%) in 2015 and it achieved the lowest average mark (52%).

Ordinary Level

An analysis of a random sample of candidates' results for Ordinary level business 2015 based on a random sample of scripts is presented in **Table 12**.

Question	Topic	Response Rate (%)	Average Mark (%)	Rank Order In Popularity	Rank Order in Average Mark
Section 1	Short Questions (10): Compulsory	100.0%	80.1%		
Section 2					
Part 1					
Q1	Consumer and employment legislation, Trade Union membership.	79.7%	60.7%	1	2
Q2	Categories of industry, factors of production, MNCs in Ireland, IDA services.	29.7%	55.6%	7	5
Q3	Government taxes and expenditure, effects of increase in employment on government budget and local community.	45.9%	65.5%	5	1
Part 2					
Q4	Role of entrepreneur, enterprise skills, leadership styles, agenda for meeting, benefits of teamwork.	69.7%	58.0%	2	3
Q5	Types of insurance, principles of insurance, role of assessor, recruitment methods, commission and benefit-in-kind.	33.8%	53.1%	6	7
Q6	Business expansion, bar chart, visual communication, sources of long term finance, stock control.	62.6%	53.6%	4	6
Q7	Target market, selling online, factors to consider before setting price of products, market research, channels of distribution.	68.5%	57.2%	3	4
Q8	Mass production, branding, product life cycle, Product development, factors to consider before choosing method of advertising.	27.6%	50.1%	8	8

Table 12: Question popularity of and average mark, Ordinary level Business 2015

The table presents response rate, average mark awarded, as well as ranking the questions in terms of their popularity and average percentage of the available mark achieved. Candidates are required to attempt both sections. In Section 2 the majority of candidates answer one question from Part 1, and three questions from Part 2, as is the case at the Higher level.

In **Section 1**, the short response type questions, the average mark awarded was 80.1%, which is consistent with recent years. This section tests competencies such as recall of business terminology/concepts, basic financial calculations and some interpretation of data. At both levels this basic business knowledge and understanding is fundamental to the success of candidates in the examination. The key question cues at both levels generally include: “*list*”/“*name*”, “*define*”, “*outline*”, “*explain*”, “*describe*”, and “*calculate*”, while “*compare*” and “*distinguish between*” could be included at the Higher level. The question cues signify that brief details are required.

In **Section 2**, Question 1, which is based on Unit 1, remains the most popular question, similar to the Higher level. In 2015, it was first in order of popularity overall (79.7%) and ranked 2nd in order of average mark awarded (60.7%). Question 2 and Question 3 on the Domestic and International Environment remain unpopular as is the case at Higher level. Question 4 on enterprise and management continues to be a very popular question at the Ordinary level and most candidates performed well in this question.

3.2 General commentary on engagement and performance

Candidates at both levels generally performed very well on questions in **Section 1**. The questions tend to test content knowledge. They provide opportunities for candidates to recall and demonstrate a knowledge and basic understanding of the syllabus and in addition at the Higher level to apply their knowledge of business concepts to particular situations. The questions are presented so as to elicit short, and sometimes, in the case of the Ordinary level, one-word responses. The applied business question (ABQ) in **Section 2** of the Higher level provides opportunities for candidates to apply business terms, concepts and theories studied in class to address issues in an unseen case, to evaluate the evidence and to arrive at well-reasoned judgements. The questions in **Section 2** at Ordinary level and **Section 3** at Higher level provide

opportunities for extended written responses, allowing candidates to demonstrate deeper understanding and higher order cognitive skills, particularly at Higher level.

Higher level

The majority of candidates were well prepared for this examination and demonstrated a good knowledge of basic business theory and its application.

In **Section 1**, candidates were required to answer eight questions out of ten. Many candidates attempted all ten. The questions requiring candidates to recall basic business terms/definitions, were generally well answered. Questions 2(a); 4, 5, and 8 did not present any problems in general. Question 6, which referred to the stages in team development, was poorly attempted. Some candidates confused “*storming*” with “*brainstorming*”. Inaccurate definitions and responses which suggested that candidates had not read questions carefully were identified as the most common factors contributing to the award of low marks.

The ability to perform financial calculations is one of the assessment objectives of the syllabus “*select, organise, interpret and use information supplied*”. In Question 3 (a) candidates were required to apply a formula (not provided) to the data supplied and calculate the Net Profit Percentage. The majority of candidates calculated the Net Profit Percentage accurately but they performed less well in part (b) where they were required to apply the information in business decision-making indicating that the required computational competency was not matched by the necessary understanding and application needed to use the result in a business context. Candidates also frequently omitted the units of measurement, e.g. %, €, which are necessary to give meaning to the answers. In Question 1 the explanation of the term “span of control” did not pose difficulties, however, identifying a situation where a “narrow span of control may be appropriate” posed difficulties for some. In Question 7 while the majority of candidates could explain the term “exchange rate” applying the concept to risks for a business proved challenging for many candidates.

Section 2 comprises the applied business question (ABQ) and is compulsory for all candidates. The ABQ in 2015 was based on Units 2, 3 and 4 of the syllabus. The average mark awarded was 68%, indicating reasonably good engagement with the syllabus objectives. There are generally three parts to the ABQ which tend to move from lower to higher order skills. The ABQ allows for

a progression in emphasis from the business text book knowledge to application of this knowledge to everyday life situations. While responses to this question have improved in recent years, with many exceptional responses, examiners continue to express concern about an apparent lack of understanding on the part of some candidates regarding the approach required in answering this question. Candidates are required to make use of business theory studied during the course, and apply this theory to the context of the case presented. They are required to find an appropriate link in the case to back up the points of business theory presented. These links must be a direct relevant quote/phrase/sentence from the ABQ, indicating that the candidate clearly understands the point(s) of theory presented. Some candidates score little or no marks as they write business theory without any reference to the ABQ. Other candidates appear to treat the ABQ as a comprehension piece and rewrite chunks of material from it, failing to score any marks as a result. The better quality attempts provided evidence of candidates having given careful attention to the wording of the questions and the mark allocation, and planned the use of their time in formulating their responses.

In part (A) candidates were required to answer a question as follows “*Do you think Martin Harte displayed enterprising skills/characteristics?*” A significant number of candidates did not answer the question posed, which was awarded two marks, and proceeded to outline a list of skills/characteristics. The specific enterprising skills/characteristics chosen had to have relevant links in the ABQ to be considered valid. For example if the candidate had chosen “*Innovation*” (i.e. coming up with new ideas and/or better ways of doing things) as an enterprising skill/characteristic, an appropriate link from the ABQ could be “*His solution was based on the ever increasing popularity of Irish Dance worldwide.*” Candidates need to be selective with the material, choosing a particular phrase or sentence as a relevant link. A significant number of links existed in the ABQ to indicate that Martin Harte had exceptional entrepreneurial skills/characteristics. A small number of candidates discussed the management activities of planning, organising and controlling and the management skills of leading, motivating and communicating. It was evident from some responses that candidates need to be encouraged to read questions carefully, highlighting the different parts of the question in order to ensure the question is properly addressed.

In part (B) (i), candidates were required to “*define the management activity of planning.*” In general candidates had no difficulty recalling the definition of planning, however, some candidates wrote extensive answers on the topic of planning, ignoring the question cue “*define*”. A minority of candidates did not refer to the setting of goals, which is a core aspect of the planning process. In part (B) (ii) candidates were required to “*explain the elements of a SWOT analysis and conduct a SWOT prepared by Christine Landers*”. The majority of candidates had no difficulty in locating the relevant links for each element of the SWOT analysis but had some difficulty in explaining the different elements. Part (B) proved to be the best answered part of the ABQ with many candidates being awarded the full allocation of marks.

One of the assessment aims of the Leaving Certificate Business course is to “*Evaluate evidence, make reasoned judgements and present conclusions accurately and appropriately.*” In part (C) the higher order skill of evaluation was required as follows “*Evaluate the effectiveness of the approach taken by Martin to help Harte Shoes Ltd adapt to change.*” The question required candidates to apply judgement based on prior business knowledge and evidence from the ABQ. Many candidates were able to make a judgement and justify their answer, based on their knowledge of change strategies and the evidence provided in the ABQ. However, some evaluations continue to be very superficial and some candidates do not evaluate at all. Evidence from responses suggests that candidates should be encouraged to pay attention to question cues used, as some question cues require more comprehensive responses.

In **Section 3** candidates were required to complete four extended response questions.

In Question 1(A) candidates were required to “*Describe one example of a co-operative relationship and one example of a source of conflict that could arise between (i) Investor and Entrepreneur and (ii) Supplier and Purchasing manager.*” The purpose of the question was to provide an opportunity for candidates to “*apply business terms, concepts and theories to address problems and issues*”. A number of candidates provided excellent definitions of the terms “*co-operative relationship*” and “*competitive relationship*” but did not answer the question set. Having provided definitions some candidates made a very limited attempt to answer the question set. The recall of definitions has merit in that it indicates knowledge and perhaps some

understanding of the business terms, however, the requirement to build on the definitions to answer the actual questions set at the Higher level was not always evident.

Candidates were required to provide examples of how both the investor/entrepreneur and the supplier/purchasing manager may co-operate and may experience conflict. In many cases only one side of the relationship was presented. In Question 1(B) candidates were asked to “*illustrate*” which required an example. While many candidates defined the legal term “specific performance” they omitted an example, thereby losing marks. A similar requirement existed in Question 3(B) and Question 7(C) (ii).

In Question 1(C) (ii) candidates were required to “*List three grounds, other than gender and disability, on which discrimination is outlawed under this Act.*” Some candidates wrote paragraphs to explain the protected grounds rather than just naming the grounds, as was required in the question.

In the discussion type questions, there was a clear qualitative difference between the responses of candidates who scored highly and those who did not. When required to discuss key points, for example in Question 2 (C) “*Discuss how a business could operate in an environmentally conscious way*”, it was important to identify distinct points, thereby avoiding overlap in the answers. While candidates, in general, provided a number of distinct points, a minority of candidates’ tended to repeat or give variations of one core point. For example, there was a disproportionate focus on “reduce, reuse, and recycle” in some answers, hence limiting the marks awarded.

Examiners commented that some of the responses to discussion type questions were poorly organised and in some cases long passages of irrelevant material were presented. The quality and development of the answer determines how marks will be awarded. It is good practice to structure responses and to support explanations with current examples or up-to-date statistics if available. However, some discussion type questions were exceptionally well answered by candidates, for example Question 3 (A) “*Discuss reasons why multinational companies (MNCs) may choose to locate in Ireland. Provide examples to support your answer*”. The knowledge of recent economic events demonstrated by candidates, and their ability to link that knowledge to the specific questions asked, was evident and is to be commended. Some candidates, however, omitted to provide

examples thereby losing marks. In Question 3(C), while candidates focused on the implementation of directives and regulations, the formulation of directives and regulations was omitted in some cases.

Some questions require candidates to present information in numerical and diagrammatic form. For example Question 4 (A) (i) required candidates to draw a bar chart or line graph from data provided. While the majority of candidates were able to construct a bar chart or line graph, marks were lost for failing to label the chart accurately, for incorrectly plotted points and for failing to title the chart, which is essential information on any chart. Candidates who used graph paper to present the information in general performed better. Question 5(A) (i) required candidates to draft and label a product life cycle. The quality of responses varied. Some candidates did not label the axis or title the chart and mixed up some of the stages. In 2015, candidates were given a partially completed Cash Flow Forecast and were required to calculate the missing figures. Candidates correctly identified the figures in most cases, indicating a good understanding of the construction of a Cash Flow Forecast. Some candidates had difficulty with the negative figure denoted by letter B. Overall, this was a very popular question (68%) and was awarded a very good average mark (63%).

To enable candidates to “*demonstrate a greater depth of knowledge of the syllabus content*”, which is one of the syllabus assessment aims, some questions provide stimulus material for example Question 4(A), Question 6(A)(ii) and Question 7(A). In some cases answers may be directly based on the material given and in other cases the material provides a context for answering the question. The aim is to test candidate’s ability to apply their knowledge of business concepts and theories. For example Question 4(A) (ii) required candidates to consider the principles of effective communication but in the context of Paul’s presentation to the board of directors (Paul is referred to in the stimulus material). The question provided a straightforward challenge and led to many excellent answers, however, a significant number of candidates evidently misread the question and outlined how Paul might communicate the data on the bar chart to the board of directors.

In Question 6(A) (ii) candidates were required to interpret the information provided in the stimulus material to answer the question asked. The majority of candidates correctly identified the principle of utmost good faith, however, weaker responses explained the principle of utmost good faith as “*telling the truth*” rather than “*disclosing all material facts*”. Precision of language is required when explaining various business concepts and principles.

Question 7 which is based on Unit 5 of the course was not well answered in general. In relation to Question 7 (A), examiners observed that, while there were many very good answers, a significant number of candidates provided little or no information on the three elements of the marketing mix: product; price and place. Answers such as “*product is what is sold*” and “*place is where it is sold*” were common in the weaker responses, while some candidates provided no business theory but rather rewrote the detail provided in the stimulus material. A significant number of candidates were awarded only nine marks out of a possible twenty-five marks for identifying the product Kurve Ltd had, its pricing strategy and its method of distribution. Meaningful engagement with the topics and appropriate development is required for marks to be awarded at the Higher level.

Ordinary Level

The generality of candidates were well prepared for this examination and demonstrated a good knowledge of basic business theory and its application. At Ordinary level candidates are required to “*recall and demonstrate a knowledge and understanding of the syllabus content.*”

In **Section 1** most of the short response questions requiring recall of previously learned facts were readily accessible to the majority of candidates. Candidates were presented with a variety of question types including identification of the various initialisms/acronyms, recall of terms and definitions, true/false questions, financial calculation, matching terms from a list and sentence completion. At Ordinary level, candidates tend to perform best in these types of questions. The average mark for Section 1 was 80%. While candidates are required to attempt ten questions out of fifteen, a significant number of candidates complete all fifteen. This can be interpreted as reflecting a good level of course coverage by the candidates.

The identification of the various initialisms/acronyms as follows: “ATM”; “PIN”; and “DIRT” did not present problems for the majority. However, some candidates had difficulty with the word “retention” in “DIRT”. Also definitions/explanations of business terms such as “limited liability” “innovative” “proposal form”, where candidates were required to write an extended response, were less well answered. Some responses were incomplete or inaccurate and marks were lost accordingly. The majority of candidates performed the financial calculation correctly and workings were well displayed. A minority of candidates didn’t have a calculator and had some difficulty working out the answer. Some common errors in **Section 1** included for example in Question 3 recording “free samples” as an example of advertising rather than “sales promotion” and in Question 12 recording “production” rather than “product” as an element of the marketing mix. In Question 15 applying knowledge of a functional organisation to a private limited company proved challenging for the generality of candidates.

In **Section 2** Question 1 and Question 4 continue to be the most popular questions, similar to the situation at the Higher level. Questions on Units 6 and Unit 7 (The Domestic and International Environment) remain unpopular, as is the case at the Higher Level. These questions are based on the current business environment and tend to be very topical questions.

A common problem at the Ordinary level is that only one valid point is often given when two or three points are required. In some cases the same point is repeated. While question cues such as “list”, “name” “state” do not present problems, question cues such as “outline”, “explain” are often not addressed adequately. Candidates could improve their overall performance if due cognisance is taken of question cue word(s) and consideration is given to the allocation of marks. Examiners reported that the brevity and lack of development of points of information presented a significant barrier to good performance by some candidates at the Ordinary level.

In some questions candidates were required to apply their business knowledge to particular situations, for example Question 1 (D) “*Outline two reasons why the advertisements below are unlawful under the Employment Equality Act 1998.*” The majority of candidates were able to apply their knowledge of the legislation to the advertisements presented. Marks for the application of knowledge are often some of the easiest to attain and candidates should aim to avail of such

opportunities to score marks.

In some instances candidates failed to answer the question posed. For example Question 7 (B) *“Explain two advantages to Amy of selling her products online.”* Many candidates concentrated their answers on the advantages of working from home rather than the advantages of online selling.

The graphical demands of some questions continue to pose challenges for some Ordinary level candidates. In Question 6(B) the Bar Chart was not drawn to the proper scale in many cases and the axes and title were omitted. Other questions where diagrams were required as part of the application of knowledge, such as the Notice and Agenda of the Ashfield Tidy Towns Committee meeting (Question 4(D)) and the channel of distribution used by *babypressie.ie* (Question 7(E)) proved challenging for some candidates.

The stimulus materials provided in some questions aims to create a context for the candidate in answering the questions. However, relevant business theory studied throughout the course is required to answer the question in most cases. There was some evidence of candidates transcribing the stimulus material as an answer to questions posed without demonstrating knowledge of relevant business theory. Candidates should check if the answer requires a specific reference to the text given in the stimulus material. For example, in Question 6 (E) the nature of the business (a car dealership) was relevant for the question asked on stock control. Some candidates did not relate their answer on stock control to the stock of new and used cars at Mason Motor Ltd.

4. Conclusions

- Participation rates in Leaving Certificate Business have fallen in the last five years from 33.3% to 30.7% of the overall Leaving Certificate cohort, with the biggest decrease being experienced at the Ordinary level. In 2007 the participation rate was 37%.
- The break-down of the cohort between the Higher and Ordinary level is 72 % at the Higher level and 28 % at the Ordinary level, showing an increase in the proportion of candidates presenting at Higher level compared to when the Chief Examiner's Report was last published in 2010. At that time 68% presented at Higher level and 32% at the Ordinary level.
- In general candidates at both levels engaged well with all aspects of the examination papers, which proved sufficiently challenging to provide the necessary level of discrimination.
- Most candidates continue to demonstrate high levels of achievement in relation to the assessment objectives.
- There has been a slight decrease in ABC grades and a slight increase in EFNG grades over the past five years at the Higher level, while the grades at the Ordinary Level accord closely with those of previous years.
- There was evidence of a high standard of answering in the case of the short response type questions in Section 1 at both levels. However, the extended response type questions, requiring higher order skills, lacked structure or appropriate development in some cases.
- Some candidates who presented at the Higher level did not show the level of preparedness to engage with the examination at this level and would have been more suited to the Ordinary level examination.
- Some candidates lack an understanding of the approach required in answering the applied business question (ABQ) and this is having a serious impact on the marks awarded for this section of the examination.
- Candidates who performed less well demonstrated limited understanding of or engagement with the cognitive demands of the questions. In some instances they did not complete the

required number of questions/parts of questions and in some cases appeared to misunderstand the questions posed.

- Marks continue to be lost when very brief or one-word answers are given in response to questions requiring developed points of information.
- Basic business definitions continue to prove difficult for some candidates.
- Questions on Units 6 and 7, based on the Domestic and International environment continue to be the least popular questions at both levels.
- Candidates often respond incorrectly to question cues, resulting in partial or incorrect responses to questions. This results in the loss of marks.

5. Recommendations to Teachers and students

Recommendations to Teachers

- In using illustrations and diagrams/graphs in class, emphasise the need to present information clearly (labelling of axes, scales, titles etc.).
- Emphasise the importance of learning basic business definitions and terminology and provide opportunities for students to develop basic skills as early as possible.
- Explain the meaning of question cues commonly used in business examination papers. These include 'list', 'outline', 'explain', 'distinguish', 'discuss', 'evaluate' etc. The amount of detail required in the answers will depend on the question cue used.
- Provide opportunities for students to practise the Applied Business Question (ABQ) and explain that, when they are answering these questions, they are required to use their knowledge and understanding of business theory in addition to identifying the relevant links provided in the ABQ.
- Provide opportunities for students to practise writing extended response examination style answers that are relevant, well-structured and sufficiently comprehensive in nature.
- Provide designated class time to allow candidates to engage in critical thinking so that they may be more willing and able to answer questions where evaluation/judgement is required in relation to current business issues.
- Remind students of the necessity of organising their time efficiently when sitting the examination so that they can complete the required number of questions.

Recommendations to students

- Develop a thorough knowledge of key business terminology.
- Understand the meaning of the question cues used in examination questions (e.g. list, outline, explain, distinguish, discuss, evaluate etc.).
- Practise writing answers to different levels of question, rather than just recall type questions e.g. discuss, evaluate etc.
- Practise extended response type questions.
- When answering an extended response question
 - Underline the key word(s)
 - Identify the main topic and discussion area
 - Choose a number of distinct points about what to write
 - Develop points of information fully and avoid one word or one sentence answers
 - Do a mini plan, organising the points before starting to write.
- When answering the applied business question (ABQ)
 - Decide on the appropriate business knowledge/theory
 - Choose a few relevant points
 - Address the particular question cue (e.g. outline, explain, discuss, evaluate)
 - Find and record an appropriate link in the ABQ, to explain the point(s) of theory presented
 - The link chosen must be a direct relevant quote/phrase/statement from the ABQ indicating that you clearly understand the point(s) of theory presented.
- Choose the level at which you will take the examination very carefully.
- Read questions carefully to avoid misinterpretation.
- Organise time efficiently when sitting the examination and answer the precise question asked.
- Complete the required number of questions and all sections within questions.

- Present work clearly and legibly.
- Use diagrams/graphs effectively
 - make sure they are accurate
 - label them fully; remember that if the axes are not labelled properly graphs make little sense; title the diagram
 - make them large enough to be legible.