

GCE



CCEA GCE Specification in
**Professional
Business Services**

For first teaching from September 2017
For first award of AS level in Summer 2018
For first award of A level in Summer 2019
Subject Code: 3210



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Subject Code	3210
QAN AS Level	603/1438/2
QAN A Level	603/1437/0

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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 2017.

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 2018 and the first A level awards in 2019. 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 0002.

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 public, private and voluntary sectors; and • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the following types of business ownership: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sole trader; – ordinary and limited partnerships; and – private and public limited companies.

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; • 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; • apply the five phases of the consultancy process to a given business scenario; • 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; • analyse the ways in which a market might be segmented: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – age; – gender; – socioeconomic class; – lifestyle; – geographical region; and – residential; and • analyse the benefits and drawbacks of segmenting a market.

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 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); • 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.

Content	Learning Outcomes
Techniques for business planning	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understand 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;
Risk management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate 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;
Government regulation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding of the purpose of business regulation; and • evaluate the benefits to a client’s business of a code of conduct versus external regulation.

3.2 Unit AS 2: Human Resource Services

In this unit, students focus on the services provided by professional business services firms to support human resources in a client business. Students explore the need for effective human resources management in a business. They also investigate how professional business services firms can advise clients on improvements to their human resources processes in:

- organisational structure and culture;
- recruitment;
- learning and development;
- employee well-being;
- employee motivation; and
- managing conflict.

Students also develop their research and report writing skills and then submit a report using a given format. The report is based on a pre-release case study.

Students carry out primary and/or secondary research related to the case study.

Teachers assess the reports and we moderate them. This unit is worth 16 percent of the A level qualification.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Human resource services</p> <p>Organisational structure and culture</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding of the term human resources; • demonstrate understanding of the importance of effective human resources management in a business; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of types of organisational structure, including centralised, decentralised, tall and flat structures; • demonstrate understanding of roles in an organisation, including director, manager, supervisor, team leader and employee; and • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of chain of command, span of control and layering.

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 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 	400
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 	1800
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 	1000
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 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 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 resources, including retained profits, capital and disposal of assets; and – external financial resources, including loan capital, overdraft, share issues, leasing, hire purchase, and trade payables and trade receivables; 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
<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; • make recommendations for improvements based on the outcomes of ratio analysis; • demonstrate 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; • evaluate the outcomes of an investment appraisal and make recommendations for investment decision making; • 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.

Content	Learning Outcomes
Technology for financial management (cont.)	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • describe and evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of these technologies in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security;
Technology for managing people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the technologies available to support businesses to manage people; • evaluate the suitability of these technologies in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professional business services firms' client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security;
Technology for business operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the range of technologies available to support the following business operations: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – marketing (CRM); – services (reservations systems); and – manufacturing (inventory management); • describe how technology supports business operations in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – marketing; – services industry; and – manufacturing; and • describe and evaluate the suitability and effectiveness of these technologies in terms of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – professional business services firms' client needs; – users; – time; – cost; and – security.

Content	Learning Outcomes
Security issues	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding of the principles of keeping data safe, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – confidentiality; – integrity; and – availability; • evaluate cyber security technologies, 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 the types of threats associated with cybersecurity, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – data theft; – phishing; – malware; and – zero day attacks; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of how cyber security technologies can make the following systems more secure: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – email; – cloud computing; and – transaction processing systems; • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a disaster recovery plan, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – files backed up; – timescale for back ups; – method and location of back up; – storage method; and – key personnel and roles identified; • analyse the main features of a disaster recovery plan; and • describe and justify common backup and recovery strategies.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Security issues (cont.)</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"> • understand relevant legislation on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – data protection; – copyright; – health and safety; – computer misuse; and – communications; • 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; • understand, analyse and evaluate a range of data storage systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – on-premises internal such as hard drives and external drives; – data centres; and – cloud storage, including hosted solutions; • compare and evaluate the storage capacity, cost and speed of access and retrieval of a range of storage systems; • analyse and 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 policy.

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>Leadership styles</p> <p>Theories of leadership</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding of the similarities and differences between leadership and management; • analyse the principles of management using Fayol's functions of management and Mintzberg's managerial roles; • use Tannenbaum–Schmidt's continuum of leadership to identify and explain the following leadership styles: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – autocratic; – democratic; and – laissez-faire; • evaluate the impact of leadership styles in a given context; • apply the theories of leadership, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – transformational; and – transactional; and • explore methods and tools that professional business services firms use to assess leadership styles, including the Blake and Mouton managerial grid and Adair's action centered leadership model.

Content	Learning Outcomes
<p>Managing change</p>	<p>Students should be able to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate understanding 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 the importance of leadership in managing change; • analyse reasons for resistance to change, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – fear; – insufficient information; – uncertainty; and – peer pressure; • demonstrate understanding of the use of change management models, including: <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; • apply change management models in a given context to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – reduce absenteeism; – reduce labour turnover; – improve communication; – increase productivity; – enhance morale; – increase employee engagement and motivation; and – reduce conflict.

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; • explain 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; – environmental scan using the PESTEL framework; and – SWOT analysis; and • 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; • 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; • 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 project planning tools, including Gantt charts and critical path analysis, 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
AS Grade A •	<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 service 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 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 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 service 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 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 <p>making valid conclusions and recommendations.</p>

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 issue a case study and task in September 2017 for first submission in Summer 2018. We issue a new case study and task every three years. For example we will issue a new case study and task for Unit AS2 in September 2020 for submission in Summer 2021. 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 and Assessment Team (telephone: Malcolm Corney (028) 9026 1211, email: mcorney@ccea.org.uk)
- Business Assurance (Complaints and Appeals)
(telephone: (028) 9026 1244, email: complaints@ccea.org.uk)