

Young Enterprise Examination

Examiner's Report 2019

All examiners reported a continuing upward trend in the overall standard of exam papers this year.

The number of students sitting the exam fell slightly (670 this year to 722 last year), nonetheless the quality of insight, analysis and reflection has risen.

A good quality paper reflects that the candidate has had positive engagement in the programme and appreciates the value and benefits of the learning involved.

Markers identify if students demonstrate:

- Considered and honest reflection on their involvement and commitment
- How it was of benefit to them as individuals and as team players
- How they understood and performed their respective roles
- What they learnt about the principles and disciplines of business development and management

Many candidates state that the experience has influenced their future career choice or acts as a stimulus to further education.

“Doing Young Enterprise has been an amazing experience and one I will never forget. I Had always wanted to do it from S3. I knew Young Enterprise would be invaluable to my experience-based learning. The skills I have developed and the lessons I have learned will undoubtedly benefit me in the future and support the start of my career.”

The markers are mindful of the diversity in maturity, ability and fluency across schools and all papers are evaluated on their own merit.

The best papers do not necessarily come from members of the competition-winning teams. Students can still demonstrate the value of the experience without their company achieving business success. Also, not all YES programme participants take the exam.

Higher graded papers are often from schools where teachers and advisors provide adequate support and resources. If a large team has worked well together and all the members sit the exam, there tends to be a higher standard in those papers. We see large teams from some schools while from others as few as two, often only one, taking the exam. While these 'lone' candidates can, and often do, achieve a high grade there is a noticeable trend for better results from schools where there have been good levels of encouragement and support generally.

The Grade Levels 2019

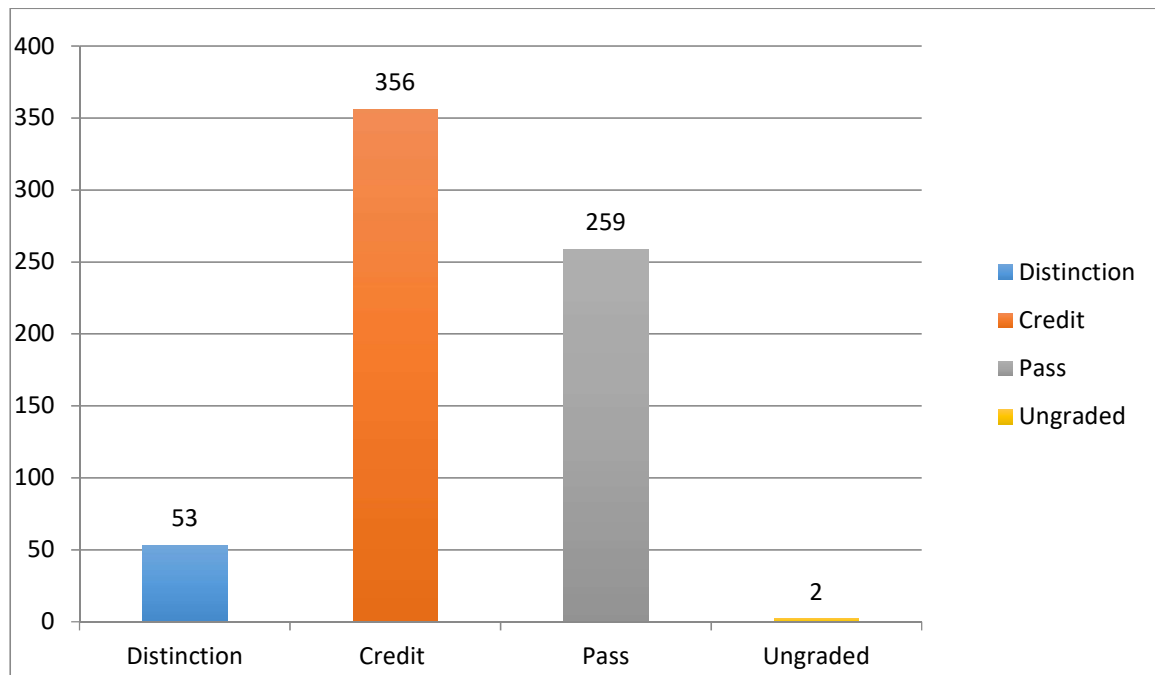
Table 1: Grade Breakdown by number and percentage

Distinction	53	7.9%
Credit	356	53.1%
Pass	259	38.7%
Ungraded	2	0.3%

For the second year running more credit grades were awarded than pass grades. The level of distinctions remains high and there is a very low number of ungraded papers.

A paper needs to be outstanding to gain a distinction. The number of distinctions has risen substantially over the last two years.

The Grade Levels 2019



The graph shows the significant rise in the quality of the exam papers over the years.

To achieve a credit, the paper must convey the reality of the experience and how the participant delivered a high level of commitment and contribution and evidence of learning outcomes.

Most students reflected on what they gained from the experience and what they learnt from close working with their fellow team members. There was good analysis on what they had done both the positive aspects and the areas that could have been better.

Table 2: grades awarded by year

Year	Distinction	Credit	Pass	Ungraded
2010	3%	29%	66%	2%
2011	6%	38%	53%	3%
2012	3%	36%	56%	5%
2013	4%	28%	64%	4%
2014	3%	33%	61%	3%
2015	4%	37%	57%	2%
2016	7%	35%	57%	1%
2017	7%	42%	51%	1%
2018	8%	54%	36%	<1%
2019	8%	53%	39%	<1%

Lower grades are as a result of short answers with insufficient information. Most ungraded papers are due to the candidate's failure to answer all four questions. In the pass markers have the occasional papers which reflected resentment and cynicism towards the programme from

candidates who may not have wanted to participate in the first place. The fall in the number of ungraded papers may be connected with the decrease in the number of students taking the exam.

Questions Answered

Table 3: Questions Answered

2019	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6
Number of Students	670	670	116	360	450	406
Percentage of Students	100%	100%	17%	54%	67%	61%

There is a total of six questions. Candidates must answer four.

Section One – Must answer both

- Q1. The role of the candidate
- Q2. Project planning/management and performance

Section Two – Any two

- Q3. Finance and company compliance
- Q4. Leadership, teamwork and networking
- Q5. Marketing and promotions
- Q6. Ideas generation and innovation

There are two sections to the examination paper. Section A contains two mandatory questions; Q1 is about individual's experience and contribution. Q2 asks about the business planning and management of the company.

Most exam markers report that less time and energy is devoted to Q1. The question gives candidates the opportunity to reflect on their own contribution. As in previous years, it can be disappointing to read a mediocre answer by a candidate who receives fulsome praise from their colleagues retreating from the chance to shine. Perhaps they feel self-conscious and uncomfortable talking about themselves. It would be helpful if teachers encouraged candidates to take a braver approach in Q1 and to 'blow their own trumpets'.

One candidate did this by writing honestly and clearly after the company's marketing initiative failed: *"I received very few replies from the organisations I contacted with details by email. This posed a challenge as I knew it was central to the success of our idea for external organisations to work with us. A telephone call was the answer. I had to put aside my nerves and test my communication skills to ensure I appeared friendly. Informed and passionate. I prepared a list of 'talking points' to ensure the call was carried out in a coherent way. This led to further follow up phone calls to identify the zone of possible agreement."*

The 'zone of possible agreement' is an intriguing notion in itself.

In section B, candidates are given the choice of answering two out of four questions. The questions in this section address key business areas and provides candidates scope to discuss their roles and areas of interest in more detail.

Q3 (Finance and company compliance) is by far the least popular question. Only 17% of students attempted it, even those who had been responsible for the accounting and compliance function did not attempt it. The reason for this has eluded markers for years – it was only answered by 10% in

2016. It may be that the subject is seen as 'dry' or less exciting than the other choices but it still and issue and may be worthy of further discussion. In total, 21% of candidates reaching distinction level answered Q3.

There were some good insights nonetheless:

"I created projections and sales goals for our company, constantly looking ahead to decide future sales targets and monthly budgets. I was in charge of selling the shares to realise start-up capital and raised share equity. I had to constantly update our accounts, track down receipts and chase people for money."

Q4 (Leadership, teamwork and networking) continues to be a popular choice. Many answers were impressive, providing mature insights on company culture and the importance of engagement, empowerment and empathy as leadership qualities. One examiner remarked:

'There were some excellent answers which demonstrated a new understanding of their own behaviours. One individual reflected that he initially believed as MD he should know, and be in charge of, everything but recognised this was not the case through the process, acknowledging "our most productive discussions occurred when I passed chairing over to the relevant director and participated in the same fashion as the rest of the group", his full answer to question 4 was truly excellent and showed more insight than I have seen in many managers.'

A note of concern in this year's examination – Q4 revealed a lack of acknowledgement or mention of advisors, mentors or external support by students. All markers noted this.

It may be interesting to note that while Q4 was answered by 54% overall, it was answered by only 40% of those at distinction level.

Q5 (Marketing and promotions), the most popular of all questions, was attempted by 67% of students and by 74% at distinction level. As noted last year, it is hardly surprising that students as consumers themselves are familiar the power of social media as a promotion tool. They are comfortable discussing the subject. It is impressive how confident many are in writing about branding, image and marketing generally.

There was evidence of sharp focus on how their marketing concept should be projected and perceived by customers as illustrated here:

"As a team we also came up with a slogan 'No Star is the Same' which helped get our message across that everyone is different and that our bracelets were designed for everyone."

And in another paper:

"The concept and story behind our product were almost as important as the product itself as we wanted, not only to provide consumers with a gift at a reasonable price, but to challenge and inspire consumers to change their habits of contributing to the masses of wastage produced by the coffee market each year."

Q6 (Ideas generation and innovation) is the second most popular choice. As noted in last year's report, finding the right product or service is a major challenge for most companies. Answers, even in the best papers, are often vague when describing how the idea came about. Most refer to 'collective brainstorming' without any real detail of the process and what they learnt from it.

"We wanted a business aim by finding a clear need for a product before we created our product to solve that need."

This was the starting point for one company that went on to develop an excellent product. Further brainstorming refined the idea further and the paper described the process.

“From the beginning our ideas for products were based around either children or the elderly. After weeks of brainstorming of our options at length, we decided to create products for the elderly. Through personal experiences most of the team had experienced struggles to make and maintain good conversation with their elderly relatives, so this aided our product creation and provided a base to build from.”

Another approach was less logical and more Eureka:

“As a team we found it extremely difficult to come up with the idea and we were overwhelmed when it finally hit us”.

Areas for improvement

Many papers have no return or cover sheets. Need to ensure that digital papers contain these.

Rewriting the questions above the answers is unnecessary and wastes time.

Guidance notes are not read properly; some students do not attempt to answer all four questions, while others attempt all six questions.

Examiners prefer Word rather than PDF format.

As in other years, often candidates devote too much time to the two questions in Section A at the expense of questions in Section B. Papers that ‘run out of steam’ in section B get lower marks.

Student ‘takeaways’ to the best grade

Read the guidance notes

Answer all four questions

Follow the prompts for best structure

Write honestly about the experience

Show how well you performed and how much you learnt

Write as clearly as you can and tell your story in your own words

You will not be marked down for poor spelling or bad grammar

But make sure it is readable

There are no right or wrong answers

Number all questions.

End of Report - Frank Dunne 30 April 2019