Unit 4: Business Communication

Unit code: H/502/5413

QCF Level 3: BTEC National

Credit value: 10

Guided learning hours: 60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to show learners that the collection and management of business information, and the successful communication of that information throughout a business, is critical for the future prosperity of the organisation.

● Unit introduction

A business needs accurate and relevant information from internal and external sources in order to operate profitably. Proper collection of data creates an environment where informed decisions can be taken for the benefit of the business. In order to manage information effectively, there must be good communication systems within the organisation. Staff must possess good verbal and written skills in order to communicate and share information

Business information can be used to obtain competitive advantage and promote efficiency. Organisations generate information internally, recording details of products manufactured, purchased and sold, and their associated costs. Businesses use information to manage not only what is currently happening in the organisation but also to plan for the future and ensure their survival. Information is collected, stored, manipulated, analysed and reported to those who need to use it. People need to become skilled manipulators and users of information to ensure organisations become more efficient and succeed in achieving their stated purposes. Since the development of the personal computer and more recently the internet, communication methods have changed significantly. Gathering relevant information from a range of sources is a skill that needs to be developed using electronic and non-electronic sources.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

1   Understand different types of business information

2   Be able to present business information effectively

3   Understand the issues and constraints in relation to the use of business information in organisations

4   Know how to communicate business information using appropriate methods.

Unit content

1 Understand different types of business information

Types of information: verbal; written; onscreen; multi-media; web based

Purpose of information: updating knowledge; informing future developments; strategic direction; SWOT analysis; offering competitive insight; communicating sales promotions; inviting support for activities

Sources of information: internal, eg financial, human resources, marketing, purchasing, sales, manufacturing, administration; external, eg government, trade groupings, commercially provided, databases, research; reliability of data sources

2 Be able to present business information effectively

Presentation methods to meet the needs of the user: eg document, use of style, verbal presentations, role plays, onscreen multi-media presentation, use of images, web-based presentation, multi-lingual support

Output requirement: eg resolution of images, page layout, text formatting, use of tables, combining information from a range of applications, use of specialist software and hardware

Presenting corporate communication: methods; mission statements, advertising, packaging, logos, livery, strap lines, endorsements, sponsorship

3 Understand the issues and constraints in relation to the use of business information in organisations

Legal issues: relevant data protection legislation eg Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000; other relevant legislation, eg Computer Misuse Act 1990

Ethical issues: codes of practice, eg on use of email, internet, 'whistle blowing'; organisational policies; information ownership

Operational issues: security of information; backups; health and safety; organisational policies; business continuance plans; costs, eg additional resources required, cost of development; impact of increasing sophistication of systems, eg more trained personnel, more complex software

4 Know how to communicate business information using appropriate methods

Audience requirements: eg age, gender, ethnicity, special needs, readability, legibility, attention span, accessibility, interest, distraction avoidance, business experience and knowledge, industry-related experience and knowledge

Methods of written communication: eg letter, memorandum, fax, invoice, flow charts, publicity material, email and screen based, SMS (short message service), www (worldwide web)

Methods of non-written communication: eg telephone call, video conferencing

Technologies: computers; touch screens; digital broadcasting; DVD (digital versatile/video disc); mobile phones; the internet and WAP (wireless application protocol)

Communication skills: formal/informal; verbal/non-verbal; listening; understanding; seeking clarification; responsiveness; eye contact; facial expressiveness; body language; use of appropriate professional language; ability to adapt communication techniques to audience requirements; presentation skills; ability to invite commitment to shared goals

Assessment and grading criteria

In order to pass this unit, the evidence that the learner presents for assessment needs to demonstrate that they can meet all the learning outcomes for the unit. The assessment criteria for a pass grade describe the level of achievement required to pass this unit.

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:	To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:
P1 explain different types of business information, their sources and purposes [IE, CT]	M1 analyse different types of business information and their sources	D1 evaluate the appropriateness of business information used to make strategic decisions
P2 present complex internal business information using three different methods appropriate to the user's needs [IE,CT]		D2 evaluate the effectiveness of business information and its communication as key contributors to the success of an organisation, using examples to illustrate your points.
P3 produce corporate communications [SM]		
P4 evaluate the external corporate communications of an existing product or service [CT, RL]		
P5 explain the legal and ethical issues in relation to the use of business information [IE, CT]	M2 analyse the legal, ethical and operational issues in relation to the use of business information, using appropriate examples.	
P6 explain the operational issues in relation to the use of business information [IE, CT]		

Assessment and grading criteria		
To achieve a pass grade the evidence must show that the learner is able to:	**To achieve a merit grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass criteria, the learner is able to:**	**To achieve a distinction grade the evidence must show that, in addition to the pass and merit criteria, the learner is able to:**
P7 outline electronic and non-electronic methods for communicating business information, using examples for different types of audience. [IE]		

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills applicable in the pass criteria. It identifies opportunities for learners to demonstrate effective application of the referenced elements of the skills.

Key	IE – independent enquirers	RL – reflective learners	SM – self-managers
	CT – creative thinkers	TW – team workers	EP – effective participators

Essential guidance for tutors

Delivery

The unit enables learners to explore the various types of information used in business organisations which will develop their understanding as the unit progresses. By discussing the variety of communication media available and drawing on their work experience or part-time employment, learners will gain a broad introduction to the study of business communication and information. Learners can then expand these ideas to consider the purpose and variety of sources of information.

Tutors should encourage learners to investigate how businesses communicate internally and externally. The presentation of information needs to be explored and how careful selection of the presentation methods meets the needs of the user. Learners should examine the use of documents, style and verbal presentations as well as the range of electronic methods available. Learners should also be encouraged to investigate a number of business organisations and research how their corporate communications are presented. This could involve reviewing mission statements, advertising and other methods of marketing communications, and identifying how these differ from one organisation to another. Displays could be created from learner's research to show the variety of corporate communications being used. This will provide a visual stimulus that can be used to enhance understanding of the importance that business organisations attach to their corporate communications.

Business organisations face a number of issues and constraints in relation to the use of business information and learners need to understand the relevant legislation that controls the use of information in businesses. There are also ethical issues related to the use of email and the internet, as well as the development of codes of practice and organisational policies to give guidance on ethical issues. Similarly, there are organisational policies that cover the security of information and associated health and safety issues. Case studies and newspaper reports can be used to extend learners understanding of issues and constraints in relation to the use of information in business organisations. Television programmes and DVD/videos can also be useful formative tools especially when followed with class discussion or written summary. The internet can be a useful tool, as many larger organisations provide web pages, specifically for learners, on how they control information and their corporate communications strategies.

Tutors may find it useful for learners, working individually or in pairs, to investigate local businesses that may be able to give examples of the types of communication and information that they manage. Learners will need input on how to communicate using appropriate methods and should be encouraged to explore the different types of audience which helps in making decisions on the most appropriate method for a particular situation. Similarly, tutor input will be needed to provide an understanding of methods of written and non-written communication. Learners can obtain examples to appreciate the range of methods available. Finally, learners need to investigate formal and informal and verbal/non verbal methods of communication. Role play will be a useful in helping learners understand the importance of verbal communication and the use of body language.

Tutors may use this unit to convey a range of ideas about business information, for example financial accounts, stock levels or promotional messages. Tutors may, therefore, wish to deliver this unit by following given themes, for example the role of quantitative financial information or qualitative textual information. At each stage, crucial questions can be asked such as What is the central message of this information? What audience is it intended for? What difference should it make to business behaviour? Why is it being presented? Could it be presented more successfully? The emphasis is on developing learners' critical faculties in understanding, interpreting, selecting and applying business information.

Outline learning plan

The outline learning plan has been included in this unit as guidance and can be used in conjunction with the programme of suggested assignments.

The outline learning plan demonstrates one way in planning the delivery and assessment of this unit.

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Introduction to unit and structure of the programme
Different types of information   Learners will receive or participate in: • formal theory input   • a group exercise on information types   • pair work on written information   • a case-study exercise on sources of information in groups   • a guest speaker on information management   • a visit to local business – communication and information   • an individual exercise searching the internet for types of information   • a class discussion on information management   • a group exercise on reliable data sources   There may still be formal tutor input during group work
Assignment Task 1: Types and Purpose of Information
Presentation of information   Learners will receive or participate in: • formal theory input   • a group exercise on presentation methods   • a DVD/video on presentations   • a group exercise on types of output   • a class discussion on the use of images   • an individual exercise on corporate communications   • a class discussion on corporate communications   There may still be formal tutor input during group work

Topic and suggested assignments/activities and/assessment
Assignment Task 2: Corporate Communications
Issues and constraints in use of information Learners will receive or participate in: • formal theory input • a class discussion on legal issues • a guest speaker on ethical issues and information • a DVD/video on ethical issues • individual exercise on operational issues – security of information • group exercise – searching the internet to identify information systems There may still be formal tutor input during group work
Assignment Task 3: Legal and Ethical Issues
Communication using appropriate methods Learners will receive or participate in: • formal theory input • a class discussion on types of audiences • individual research into methods of written communication • a five minute individual presentation on the findings from the research • an exercise on non-written communication in groups • a case study on use of technology in communication • a review of the unit
Assignment Task 4: Electronic and Non-Electronic Communication
Supervised assignment work
Non-supervised study time and completion of assignments

Assessment

For P1, learners need to investigate a business organisation in order to explain the different types of information that are being used, where this information originates and its purpose.

For P2, learners need to present information using three different methods. This could be a verbal presentation combined with a report on the information they obtained. The information could be a financial report from a business which the learner could manipulate into a spreadsheet or chart. Alternative methods could include a web page and a leaflet. Learners can then submit the information, indicating the nature of its intended audience and its likely purpose. The information could be from the business organisation used for P1.

For P3, learners need to produce a corporate communication for a business organisation which could be an advert for a poster or a leaflet communicating information about the business or one of its products or services. The communication could be the information to be incorporated on a product's packaging or a design for the livery on delivery vehicles. The same business organisation used for P1 and P2 can be used.

For P4, learners will evaluate existing corporate communications for a product or service.

For P5, learners need to explain the legal and ethical issues relating to the use of business information. Learners can use the same business, organisation or any other organisation, especially if it is difficult to obtain the necessary information. Learners need to try and obtain the business organisation's policies on ethical issues in relation to business information and explain how that organisation complies with their legal obligations.

For P6, for the same or any other business organisation, the learner needs to explain the operational issues in relation to business information. This would include how the organisation ensures their information is secure. In addition, learners need to explain the health and safety issues associated with information management and also the development of new systems to manage information, the possible need for more complex software and staff training.

M1 requires learners to analyse different types of information and their sources. Again this can be based on the information obtained from the business organisation that they have chosen to research and builds on the work undertaken for P1.

M2 requires learners to analyse the legal, ethical and operational issues in relation to the use of information. Again, learners will need to obtain information from a local organisation and build on the work for P5 and P6.

For D1, the learner has to evaluate the appropriateness of information used to make important strategic decisions. They could look at marketing decisions made in an organisation and evaluate whether the information used to make these decisions was appropriate. Similarly, financial performance of the company can lead to strategic decisions being made. The learner should evaluate at least two sets of information which have been used to make strategic decisions.

D2 requires learners to evaluate the effectiveness of business information and its communication as key contributors to the success of a business organisation. Learners need to use illustrative examples as part of their evaluation and should be encouraged to investigate organisations who have excellent communication and information management systems. Comparisons can then be made with the situation in the organisation that they have studied.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the assessment and grading grid. This is for guidance and it is recommended that centres either write their own assignments or adapt any Edexcel assignments to meet local needs and resources.

Criteria covered	Assignment title	Scenario	Assessment method
P1, P2, M1, D1	Assignment Task 1 Individual work describing types of information, where the information originates from and the purpose of the information.	All three tasks are related to research carried out on a business organisation and how they manage and communicate information.	Written report. Presentation of information using two methods.
P3, P4, M2, D2	Assignment Task 2 Individual work on corporate communications of chosen business.	As above.	Production and evaluation of two examples of corporate communications.
P5, P6, M3	Assignment Task 3 Individual work on the legal and ethical issues of their chosen organisation and explanation of their operational issues.	As above.	Written report.
P7	Assignment Task 4 Individual exercise outlining electronic and non-electronic communication.	As above.	Written report.

Links to National Occupational Standards, other BTEC units, other BTEC qualifications and other relevant units and qualifications

This unit forms part of the BTEC Business sector suite. This unit has particular links with the following unit titles in the Business suite:

Level 2	Level 3
Business Purposes	The Business Environment
Customer Relations in Business	
Business Online	
Business Enterprise	
Starting a Small Business	

This unit also links to the following National Occupational Standards for Business and Administration, particularly Units 301, 310, 318, 320.

Essential resources

For this unit learners should have access to a suitable business teaching environment with access to the internet to carry out research. Tutors may consider building a bank of resource materials to ensure there is a sufficient supply of relevant information on the subjects of business communication and information management. Learners can generate evidence from a work placement or work experience.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Centres should develop links with local businesses. Many businesses and chambers of commerce are often willing to provide work placements, visit opportunities, information about businesses, and provide visiting speakers.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Bevan J, Dransfield R, Coupland-Smith H, Goymer J and Richards C – *BTEC Level 3 National Business Student Book 1* (Pearson, 2009) ISBN 9781846906343

Bevan J, Goymer J, Richards C and Richards N – *BTEC Level 3 National Business Student Book 2* (Pearson, 2009) ISBN 9781846906350

Coupland-Smith H and Mencattelli C – *BTEC Level 3 National Business Teaching Resource Pack* (Pearson, 2009) ISBN 9781846906367

Argenti P – *Corporate Communication* (Irwin McGraw-Hill, 1998) ISBN 0256-21723-8

Davies C – *Finding and Knowing: psychology, information and computers* (Routledge, 2004) ISBN 0851424546

Lowe M – *Business Information at Work* (Europa Publications, 1999) ISBN 0851424031

Niederst J – *Web Design in a Nutshell: A Desktop Quick Reference* (O'Reilly, 2001) ISBN 0596001967

Websites

news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business	The business pages of the BBC website
www.bized.co.uk	A business education resource site
www.thetimes100.co.uk	The Times 100 case studies

Delivery of personal, learning and thinking skills

The table below identifies the opportunities for personal, learning and thinking skills (PLTS) that have been included within the pass assessment criteria of this unit.

Skill	When learners are …
Independent enquirers	planning to carry out research into a chosen organisation
	identifying questions to ask and problems to solve when researching their chosen organisation
Creative thinkers	asking questions to extend their thinking when researching their chosen organisation
Reflective learners	reviewing progress and acting on the outcomes when obtaining information from an organisation
Effective participators	planning and carrying out research into communication in organisations.

Although PLTS are identified within this unit as an inherent part of the assessment criteria, there are further opportunities to develop a range of PLTS through various approaches to teaching and learning.

Skill	When learners are …
Independent enquirers	planning and carrying out research into communication and information within organisations
Creative thinkers	looking at how different businesses communicate
Reflective learners	setting goals, with success criteria, for researching business communication and information
	inviting feedback on their own work and dealing positively with praise, setbacks and criticism
	evaluating their experiences and learning to inform future progress
Team workers	working in groups to discuss communication
	managing activities to reach agreements and achieve results
Self-managers	seeking out challenges or new responsibilities and showing flexibility when priorities change
	dealing with competing pressures, including personal and work-related demands
	responding positively to change, seeking advice and support when needed
Effective participators	planning and carrying out research into communication in organisations.

Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are …
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Select, interact with and use ICT systems independently for a complex task to meet a variety of needs	researching communication and information in business organisations
Use ICT to effectively plan work and evaluate the effectiveness of the ICT system they have used	tabulating information about finance or marketing
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	finding illustrative materials for presentations and tabulations about business communication and information creating diagrams, presentations and tabulations for information presentation
Access, search for, select and use ICT-based information and evaluate its fitness for purpose	exploring, extracting and assessing the relevance of information from websites about business information and communication
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Enter, develop and format information independently to suit its meaning and purpose including: • text and tables • images • numbers • records	bringing together a variety of materials gathered through research preparing information to present about business information
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	
Evaluate the selection and use of ICT tools and facilities used to present information	
Select and use ICT to communicate and exchange information safely, responsibly and effectively including storage of messages and contact lists	communicating with other members of a group

Skill	When learners are …
Mathematics	
Understand routine and non-routine problems in a wide range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts and situations	using numerical data in relation to business information
Identify the situation or problem and the mathematical methods needed to tackle it	
Select and apply a range of skills to find solutions	
Use appropriate checking procedures and evaluate their effectiveness at each stage	
Interpret and communicate solutions to practical problems in familiar and unfamiliar routine contexts and situations	
Draw conclusions and provide mathematical justifications	
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	carrying out group work investigating business communication and information making presentations about business information
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	reading about business information and communication
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	writing reports about business information producing labelled charts and diagrams showing business information.