

How I got 100% in BUSS4

A* student **Megan Lancaster** explains how she got the best grade possible in BUSS4

I chose business studies as one of my A-level subjects having enjoyed it and been successful at GCSE. One of the key selling points of the course was the ability to relate the key theory to businesses in the real world. This was something that I enjoyed doing and our teachers encouraged it by bringing their own examples into the classroom and helping us develop the skill of application by always making us think and relate our own examples to a particular theory such as the Boston Matrix.

I found the AS part of the course relatively straightforward as a section of the specification was similar in content to what we had studied at GCSE. The businesses used in the exam case studies tended to be relatively small- or medium-sized firms and my part-time work in a local hotel and in retail gave me a good grasp of how to relate the content to the chosen context.

Taking it early

By the end of year 12 I was made aware that half of the BUSS4 exam was based on a pre-release case study that was issued at the start of February. Seeing the year 13 students in the study room examining the recent recession and its impact on various stakeholders was something that caught my interest. I approached my teachers with the radical proposition of attempting the paper at the end of the AS year. I had figured that given the pre-release material was the same for both the June and January series of exams, it could be advantageous to try and build up a bank of material from carrying out research into the area early and having the experience of the exam, if necessary taking it again.

It was agreed that my friend and I could do this. However, given that the research appeared daunting for the year 13s I was not sure that my initial enthusiasm was that wise. However, the encouragement of our teachers and the scheduling of my timetable so that I could attend year 13 lessons in preparation helped my confidence grow.

To prepare for the pre-release in the year 13 classes, different groups were asked to concentrate their research on individual bullet points. We were:

- asked to find a range of examples from within an industry and to compare and contrast these with firms in other industries
 - asked to find both winners and losers and build up a bank of resources and case studies that we could use when answering the exam questions
 - warned about 'retelling stories' — the examples that we used had to be relevant to the question and based around the theory
- We ended up with at least 20 usable examples.



Resources to use

Online

We were encouraged to make use of online resources such as The Student Room, Tutor2u and the BBC to find further evidence. These examples were presented to the rest of the group and shared via the school network and the VLE. Feeling initially out of my depth, I was happy to throw myself into the research task and felt very confident with the subject matter.

Mark schemes

The next key issue was how to write a response to a 40-mark essay. The longest questions at AS are worth 15 marks — we were well versed on how to approach this style of question. Writing extensively enough to gain marks for BUSS4 can seem difficult, but unpicking the mark scheme and the lessons I had learnt about developing good application, analysis and evaluation seemed to be good techniques for this paper.

Examiner reports

Looking at the examiner reports, it seemed clear that the biggest mistake was to write a generic response that failed to answer the question set. Given the pre-release material and the essays we had practised in class, the danger was that once in the exam I would simply try and regurgitate an earlier answer. I made it my mission that after every paragraph I wrote in the exam, I made sure that I was still answering the question set. This meant I was evaluating as I went and also ensured that my answer was always focused on the question.

Developing arguments

I also started to try and build up arguments that could be used both for and against a point of view. I developed general lines of argument that showed analysis, i.e. a chain of reasoning, and used examples that were relevant so that I gained application marks at the same time. I also used my own personal experience from my part-time jobs to show a further point of comparison, which I could use in the exam to show that the recession was affecting both large multinational businesses and local firms.

It is important at this stage to highlight that the pre-release task is only 50% of the overall mark for the paper. Section B focuses on A2 material and while the questions set on this section of the paper are meant to be synoptic in nature, they were also based on

specific sections of the specification that I had not yet covered in class — only in revision sessions.

On one hand, I was nervous, on the other, I felt that my research and interest in business in general would allow me to access one or more of the questions set. The use of BUSINESS REVIEW in our classes had meant that we were always introduced to new and interesting articles and I felt that while my main focus would be on Section A, I would still hopefully have enough about me to tackle one of the essays.

Good grades

After sitting the paper for the first time I managed to achieve 71 out of 100 UMS. Not a bad effort and after my paper was returned I saw that I had managed 34 out of 40 on Section A but only 17 out of 40 on Section B — which showed that I was in truth not ready and under-prepared.

However, this did give me a lot of confidence going into the January exams. I had the research to hand and knew that I was on the right track in relation to Section A. With my A2 lessons combining work for BUSS3 and BUSS4 topics, I was now a lot clearer on what theories and models I should bring into my responses for Section B. I was also better off for experiencing the demands of the exam, having sat it once before.

The time allowance is reasonably generous and with me also studying English and psychology I was confident in my ability to structure and write a detailed argument. I felt that for Section B I had failed on my first attempt because I did not show a true grasp of the subject matter early on. I was keen not to fall into this trap the second time around. I made it clear early in my response that not only was I answering the question directly, but also that I was including the new theory early before developing my answer around it. I also had a whole host of up-to-date and relevant examples to bring into my response.

When the results were issued in March I had managed to achieve my goal of an A*. My UMS score on BUSS4 was 100 out of 100, with 82 out of 100 on BUSS3, meaning that I had averaged 91% on the difficult A2 units. I was over the moon with this result and while my approach might have been unconventional, I feel that the lessons I learnt in relation to independent research and collaboration with other students have really helped me in my degree. Most of the presentations we are expected to do rely on conducting research and working together. While BUSS4 was a challenge, it helps in so many ways and looking back I would say that I even enjoyed it.

Megan Lancaster is currently in her first year of studying international business management at the University of Bristol.

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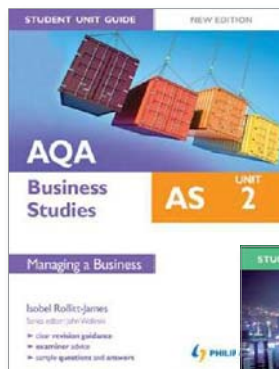
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