

Unit 33: Supporting Business Activities

Unit code:	Y/502/5456
QCF Level 3:	BTEC National
Credit value:	10
Guided learning hours:	60

● Aim and purpose

The aim of this unit is to enable learners to understand the importance of providing effective and efficient support for an organisation, and be able to develop skills and knowledge for carrying out tasks to support business activities.

● Unit introduction

Supporting business activities offers learners the opportunity to perform a wide range of different roles across all industries and sectors, such as manufacturing, service providers and retail. This unit examines the variety of tasks performed in support roles which provide a sound basis for progression to supervisory and management positions. Every business organisation needs efficient support, not only to achieve the organisation's purpose and values, but also to survive in the competitive business world.

Large organisations might have a centralised department to support different functional areas such as finance, customer service and human resources. This unit looks at the support function either as part of a larger team or as an assistant to an individual. Smaller organisations' infrastructures are often not so clearly defined and the support needs may be met through one role, such as reception or a secretarial office. Whatever the size of the organisation, or the range of tasks performed, people working in support roles need to have excellent communication and interpersonal skills, including problem solving and time management.

The ever-expanding global marketplace means that people working in support roles, such as sales support or customer service, need an appreciation of cultural differences, especially if they are likely to interact with international customers or colleagues. Often the support function is situated in an office environment. In this unit learners will understand that contributing to reviewing the effectiveness of systems and procedures is essential to ensuring that the workplace is organised in order to meet organisational and legal requirements for policies and procedures, as well as being conducive to safe and efficient working.

Finally in this unit, learners will be able to demonstrate their own planning and support skills when carrying out a range of tasks to support the business function.

● Learning outcomes

On completion of this unit a learner should:

- 1 Know the purpose of supporting organisational activities
- 2 Understand the support role in the structure of organisations
- 3 Know the requirements for reviewing support services
- 4 Be able to plan work and carry out a support role.

Unit content

1 Know the purpose of supporting organisational activities

Support: definition – set of agreed, coordinated organisational procedures that support management plans

Tasks: receiving visitors; taking messages; sending communications; monitoring stationery; monitoring stock levels and ordering new stock; organising events

Functional areas: operations; finance; customer service; sales and marketing; support; research and development; human resources; how the functional areas interlink in an organisation; support for business aims and objectives

International support: diversity; cultural awareness; different roles eg customer service, sales

2 Understand the support role in the structure of organisations

Structure: ways to structure (function, activity, product, area, customer, process); organisational structures eg hierarchy, simple structure, matrix; theorists eg Handy, Mintzberg; contribution of support role

Sectors: factors determining support role eg different sectors, size of organisation (small, medium, large)

3 Know the requirements for reviewing support services

Requirements: systems eg diary systems, telephone systems, electronic communication systems; office equipment; storage and archiving materials; methods of communication

Reviewing: methods; reasons for reviewing; suggested changes and proposals eg to line manager; feedback; evaluating; monitoring; implementing

4 Be able to plan work and carry out a support role

Planning: prioritising work, negotiating realistic targets and setting timescales; flexibility; tools eg action plans, schedules; resources; own responsibilities; efficiency of time; meeting deadlines; dealing with problems eg interruptions, inability to meet deadlines; working under pressure

Techniques: customer service; reception; diary management; organising and coordinating events; team leading; supervising an office facility; monitor information systems; organising work area; supervisory and management career pathways

Policies and procedures: organisational policies and procedures (storage and archiving materials, security and confidentiality); reporting problems; interpreting organisational procedures; providing feedback; employment responsibilities and rights; the impact of external factors eg health and safety, legal requirements, data protection, customer service, manufacturers instructions for using equipment

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 describe the tasks that support the functional areas in an organisation	M1 compare and contrast roles supporting organisational structures and functional areas in organisations	D1 evaluate how efficient support contributes to a selected organisation's success
P2 outline factors involved when working in an international support role	M2 review the effectiveness of different support roles in a selected organisation	D2 justify any improvements that could be made to a selected support role.
P3 explain how support roles vary in different organisations		
P4 describe the effectiveness of support roles in a selected organisation		
P5 plan time and resources for support tasks [SM3]	M3 analyse policies, procedures and techniques used in a support role.	
P6 adopt suitable procedures and policies in providing support for an activity. [IE4]		

PLTS: This summary references where applicable, in the square brackets, the elements of the personal, learning and thinking skills which are embedded in the assessment of this unit. By achieving the criteria, learners will have demonstrated 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

This unit is intended to be delivered in the workplace or under simulated conditions. Tutors must ensure that sufficient time is provided to support the knowledge and understanding for this unit. If simulations are being used, care must be taken to ensure that learners appreciate the type of organisation in question.

It is advisable for learners to base some learning activities on a selected organisation to gain an appreciation of the possible responsibilities in an support job role. This could be the organisation they work for, one chosen with tutor guidance, or the centre. Discussion groups can share ideas on the different support roles they can expect to carry out, and develop this further by examining how these would apply in different sectors. Visiting guest speakers could provide a valuable input on the career pathways a support role could enable.

The growth of the international marketplace, with many businesses now operating internationally – either with satellite offices abroad or through a customer base – means that many support roles will involve dealing with colleagues or customers abroad. It is therefore important to raise awareness of the growth of international support functions and the possible issues associated with this, especially communication through email or telephone (for example time differences, language barriers and cultural differences).

Discussion groups can explore different ways work areas can be organised and the procedures for different departments or organisations. Examples could be brought in from the workplace or organised by the tutor. Visits could be made to different offices and to the library. Procedures from different organisations also need to be available so that discussion can take place on differences and similarities. Learners need to develop their knowledge and understanding of the impact, and importance, of external procedures on the support function in an organisation. Learners should be encouraged to research this either through visits or their own work experience, especially health and safety, employment responsibilities and rights, and data protection.

When it comes to reviewing and monitoring, it is essential that learners should be able to draw on experiences in the workplace, through employment or work placement. Case studies could also be used to illustrate any of the above situations. Learners should be able to practise giving and receiving both positive and negative feedback, and role play activities can be used for this

Learners need to know how to plan work and be accountable to others. Discussion groups will be useful for examining the types of problems that may occur, such as interruptions, and how these can be resolved. Learners can carry out in-tray exercises relating to prioritising tasks, and examples of job plans and time management tools and techniques would be helpful.

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/assignments
Theory components of different support tasks
Learner research on support tasks in functional areas in organisations
Theory components of international support
Research and group work
Assignment 1 – What is Support?
Theory components on organisational structures
Learner activities using different systems
Research and group work
Theory components of reviewing and implementing improvements
Role play activities on monitoring performance
Research and group work
Assignment 2 – The Effectiveness of Support Services
Theory components of planning work and techniques
In-tray exercises for planning work
Theory components of organisational procedures and policies
Support activities/role plays for different business activities
Research and group work
Assignment 3 – Demonstrating Support Skills
Supervised assignment time
Non-supervised study time and completion of assignments

Assessment

Learners will be expected to produce evidence that shows their knowledge and understanding of working in a support role. They can provide records to show how they have reviewed, evaluated and implemented improvements for office users. These can be in the form of witness testimonies, tutor observations, or a logbook kept by the learner.

For P1, learners must describe four different types of functional area and identify how the different tasks carried out contribute to organisational efficiency. Learners must describe how these functional areas interlink to achieve business objectives. This can be achieved using examples relating to two businesses that learners have visited. Evidence can be in the form of a report or a presentation.

For P2, learners should illustrate their answer with examples of different roles (for example customer service, sales) and relate these to understanding how factors, such as cultural differences and time zones impact on the support role.

For P3, learners must provide evidence of researching a range of roles they can expect to encounter when working in support. This should include a broad overview of the types of roles and responsibilities, from diary management and organising events through to supervising an office facility. Learners will need to know how the support role varies across different sectors and size of business. The evidence is likely to be in the form of a presentation, either individual or group. Information researched and gathered from their visits and/or guest speakers should be used to describe the career pathways available to them.

For P4, learners must describe the key stages of the review process, from comparing user requirements with the existing system and suggesting improvements through to implementation and monitoring of improved systems. Learners must be able to describe the importance of feedback.

For P5, learners must provide evidence of their own planning. This can include diary logs, and records of in-tray exercises carried out. They must describe the types of problems that can occur and comment on how these can be overcome. Evidence for dealing with interruptions can be shown through role play supported by tutor observation records.

For P6, learners must demonstrate how they have adopted a range of internal policies and procedures which are relevant to a specific support activity. They must identify legal and organisational requirements in relation to storing and archiving material, security and confidentiality, and employment responsibilities and rights. They must be able to identify the procedures to follow if they have concerns regarding these requirements. Evidence can be in the form of written records, witness statements, observation reports and a written account.

For M1, learners must extend their knowledge of organisational structures and functional areas and explain how these contribute to the efficient operation of the business. They can draw on their evidence for P1 and select different organisational structures such as one hierarchical in the public sector and one matrix in the private sector. This will enable them to identify the contrast in functional areas.

For M2, learners should identify the key stages of the review process for support services by comparing user requirements with the existing system used for reviewing and suggesting improvements. Learners must be able to describe the importance of feedback. The system should be selected in consultation with the tutor, and could be integrated with the development of evidence for the Unit: *Managing a Business Event*. The effectiveness of this system can be evaluated for D2.

For M3, learners can draw on evidence for P5 and P6, and identify the appropriateness of these in terms of contributing to the smooth running of the support role.

For D1, learners must further extend their evidence by demonstrating their depth of knowledge and understanding. They must use justified examples to illustrate their work.

For D2, learners can develop the evidence produced for M2. They must make justified recommendations for the effectiveness of the improvement.

Programme of suggested assignments

The table below shows a programme of suggested assignments that cover the pass, merit and distinction criteria in the 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, P3, M1	What Is Support?	Brief from work experience placement wanting information about knowledge of support tasks.	Prepare a group presentation on the different tasks and roles which support organisational functions across different sectors.
P4, M2, D1, D2	The Effectiveness of Support Services	Brief expanded to include details of effective and efficient support in an organisation.	Written records of implementing improvements to organisational systems.
P5, P6, M3, D2	Demonstrating Support Skills	Learners to demonstrate own skills when planning work and using support systems	Produce a portfolio of evidence of written records of planning activities showing any amendments made witness testimonial and/or observation reports from tutor confirming legal and organisational requirements have been followed when carrying out admin activities and implementing improvements to organisational systems.

Essential resources

Centres need to have access to a range of office equipment and systems for learners to practise and develop their support skills in a workplace environment. This may be in the form of a model office comprising a computer, printer, photocopier and telephone. Learners will be encouraged to use their own organisation as a resource for investigating organisational structures, policies, procedures and values.

Employer engagement and vocational contexts

Visits to other organisations would be beneficial for learners to observe and experience work environments. Learners will also require access to research facilities and the internet. Case study materials will support areas that cannot be delivered practically. Guest speakers can provide a valuable input to support the underpinning knowledge and understanding of the unit.

Indicative reading for learners

Textbooks

Carysforth C and Rawlinson M – *NVQ Level 3 and Technical Certificate Business and Support* (Heinemann, 2006) ISBN 0435463349

Fleming I – *The Time Management Pocketbook* (Management Pocketbooks, 2003) ISBN 1903776082

Gleeson K – *The Personal Efficiency Program: How to Get Organized to do More Work in Less Time* (John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2003) ISBN 0471463213

Websites

www.cfa.uk.com

Council for Administration

www.hse.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive: information on health and safety practice in the workplace

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	adopting suitable procedures and policies in providing support for an activity
Self-managers	planning time and resources for support tasks.

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> identifying and clarifying which activities need to be completed when completing support tasks carrying out research into support functions within an organisation comparing support requirements of different support jobs in different sectors, exploring the functions when working in an international context
Creative thinkers	adapting procedures and policies when providing support for an activity
Reflective learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assessing the effectiveness of an existing support system and suggesting improvement prioritising the support tasks by setting goals for the support tasks they need to carry out
Team workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> carrying out tasks to support a function, collaborating with others to work towards common goals adapting their behaviour depending on which support tasks they are performing taking responsibility for organising their work
Self-managers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> showing flexibility when plans for the support tasks need to be changed working towards the goals of planning support tasks dealing with competing pressures while carrying out support tasks
Effective participators	identifying improvements to support systems that would benefit others as well as themselves.

● Functional Skills – Level 2

Skill	When learners are ...
ICT – Use ICT systems	
Use ICT to effectively plan work and evaluate the effectiveness of the ICT system they have used	using electronic diary systems for planning activities
Manage information storage to enable efficient retrieval	using electronic information management systems
Follow and understand the need for safety and security practices	using office equipment and following organisational and legal requirements
ICT – Find and select information	
Select and use a variety of sources of information independently for a complex task	researching tasks that support functional areas of a business
ICT – Develop, present and communicate information	
Enter, develop and format information independently to suit its meaning and purpose including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • text and tables • images • numbers • records 	preparing a presentation on support roles in different functional areas
Bring together information to suit content and purpose	researching support roles in different business sectors
Present information in ways that are fit for purpose and audience	preparing a presentation on support roles
Select and use ICT to communicate and exchange information safely, responsibly and effectively including storage of messages and contact lists	using electronic diary systems while planning tasks to carry out an activity
English	
Speaking and listening – make a range of contributions to discussions and make effective presentations in a wide range of contexts	participating in a group presentation planning work with others
Reading – compare, select, read and understand texts and use them to gather information, ideas, arguments and opinions	reading user guides for office equipment and systems
Writing – write documents, including extended writing pieces, communicating information, ideas and opinions, effectively and persuasively	preparing written plans.