

Examiners' Report/ Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2010

GCE

GCE Applied Business Coursework (6918) Paper 01

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PM report on unit 6918/01

General Comments

Annotation of Portfolio Work

The minimum requirement for annotation of portfolios is laid down in the Ofqual Code of Practice to be identification of where a candidate's evidence of criteria coverage may be found in the work. Many centres provided this but there were still examples where little or no annotation was evident and moderators were left trying to identify where and how marks had been awarded. The recommendation to annotate by reference to "Mark Band" achieved and "Strand", "Theme" or "Area" covered e.g. MB1a, MB2b etc is currently still not being followed by some centres but, however this is done, it is worth emphasising again the importance of clear annotation and internal standardisation for the benefit of candidates as well as for external moderation purposes.

Presentation of Portfolio Work

Much of the work seen was efficiently presented with a minority still inaccessible and unsuitably presented with work either tightly packed into plastic wallets (that split on opening), left in ring binders or clipped into plastic folders (this simply makes the process of extracting the work more laborious than should be the case). The preferred format remains loose-leaf or treasury-tagged sheets that can be easily opened and read.

General Issues with the Specification:

There was, again, slightly less evidence of the largely "academic" approach i.e. candidates producing masses of theory on sampling or pricing without the required "application" to a suitable choice of product or service to be marketed or re-marketed.

A number of assessors are still not assessing against the assessment criteria or are not fully reflecting the omissions or inaccuracies in the candidates' coverage of these criteria in their assessment decisions. Also assessors do not always use the assessment objectives listed against the assessment strand (a-d) to focus their assessment decisions on the candidates' knowledge, ability to apply knowledge, use of methods of obtaining information for analysis or their ability to evaluate and reach reasoned conclusions as appropriately directed. The lenient assessment involving the higher mark bands is often due to the assessor not using the operative verbs in the assessment criteria for these mark bands to identify valid evidence. Consequently, lengthy descriptive and theoretical work continues to remain over-rewarded.

Assessment criteria are best met more directly in a practical way demonstrating knowledge and understanding of marketing principles and concepts whilst applying these in context. In the cases of the best work an integrated approach was again apparent with the choice of product or service justified by careful research from several sources that, in turn, informed the final choice of marketing mix. Weaker approaches continue to be found where candidates tried to launch or re-launch a whole range of products or services (sometimes a complete business or brand) and this made for real difficulties when detailed consideration of the "mix" was attempted e.g. it was difficult to come up with effective pricing when candidates

often regurgitated pricing theory to cover a range without arriving at any actual prices.

As with “Investigating Business” in Unit 2, the best approach was when candidates took basic products or services and came up with practical suggestions for a suitable marketing mix that incorporated a clear idea of product, price, promotion and place (distribution) i.e. the “4P’s” (or some variation) linked clearly to the market research. Weaker work underestimated e.g. the costs of promotion and advertising and made assumptions about budgets that would be unsustainable in reality. This emphasised again the need for clear, simple ideas, costs and prices. In the best cases, candidates were able to produce e.g. mock-ups of advertising and promotional campaigns as part of the mix and these added to the whole approach.

Areas of the Specification:

It is still worth remembering that each section of this Unit is directed towards a specific Assessment Objective so that, for instance, (a) requires demonstration of knowledge and understanding (AO1); (b) concerns research and findings (AO3) and so on.

- (a) The tendency here remains where candidates over rely on the use of theory, and state what they were going to do rather than provide substantiated reasons for their choices. Where candidates had been required to investigate the market, brand, range or some generic product rather than a particular product or service this made for difficulties of analysis. Where an existing product or service is chosen it needs to be made clear what proposed changes are being made to this as well as there being some information about the current mix. Often, the actual product or service itself was not well explained (candidate and assessor assuming it too obvious to require any explanation) and marks were lost as a consequence. Where candidates had been guided to a clear choice, the outcome was usually better. What is still needed is a clear description of the product or service with reasons given for the choices made and for the marketing objectives, segmentation and target market to be clearly explained as well. There is no need to make the (assignment) brief too elaborate, candidates tend to become distracted by other issues such as product design and lose sight of the requirements of the specification as a result. The target market and segment were usually identified and often defined, but weaker candidates did not demonstrate that they fully understood these concepts through their choice of target market. Some candidates tended to discuss the business aims and objectives of the company rather than explain the marketing objectives that they would set. Better work demonstrated a clearer linkage of the product to the marketing objectives, segmentation and the target market together with some justification for these, thus raising the possibility of marks in Band 3.

- (b) Please note that up to three marks (one per mark band) were available in this strand from September 2009 for ‘Quality of Written Communication’ (‘QWC’) and the moderation process included this for the first time in this series. Many assessors did not seem to have included assessment of ‘QWC’ within their decisions, but this is expected from now on. Once again this year there were too often copious amounts of market research theory

which was unnecessary. The majority of candidates provided evidence of carrying out both primary and secondary research, although some of this could have been better directed in order to identify or justify the target market, size of market, degree of competition, and to inform the choice of the marketing mix. In some cases the range of methods used tended to be limited to a basic questionnaire and a search of the internet. In order to access the higher mark bands a greater range of methods and/or sources are required. The results were presented in chart, graph and table form and what these showed was stated or described. The stronger candidates analysed their results, drew reasoned conclusions from them and extracted information to be used later to support their marketing choices. In the best work there was again good evidence of suitable research both primary and secondary as the basis for much of the unit coverage. Where candidates had investigated a wider range of sources (including interviews with relevant people and the use of focus groups) and then linked their analysis to the target market and segmentation highlighted in (a) above coverage tended to be fuller. Sometimes primary data was too restricted or inappropriate e.g. conclusions based on an unsuitable sample size; or a product targeted at teenagers based on a survey adults! Stronger candidates were able to use good research findings to link analysis to the target market identified above or as a basis for a different target market altogether.

- (c) The majority of candidates were again able to describe the relevant P's of their marketing mix. However, this often lacked the detail required for Mark Bands 2 and 3 that could have demonstrated how the product/service was differentiated to appeal to the specific target market; how the promotion and advertising was targeted at the chosen market segment and how these, along with the pricing strategy, contributed to the marketing objectives. Most candidates linked at least one component of their marketing mix to their research, usually the pricing strategy. A number clearly linked all their marketing mix to their research although fewer linked it to their chosen segment. Higher marks arose where the "mix" developed through full links to the research findings (from (b)) especially in relation to the target market/segment identified in (a) above. Much theory was also in evidence with weaker candidates failing to apply this to the chosen mix. The "mix" was too often buried in a mass of discussions about the business or buried in theory eg of "pricing" and it was often difficult to find out eg what actual price(s) would be suggested. One improvement in this area would arise where the reasons and justification for links between the elements of the chosen mix were fully explained. Sometimes, (c) was done in isolation to the (extensive) research findings that could have informed the "4 P's" so much better and more clearly. In many cases candidates had been encouraged to use marketing tools such as the Boston and Ansoff matrices, product life cycle and so on and many applied these to the mix in an attempt at justification. In reality, the nature of the choice of product or service often rendered discussion of these tools largely irrelevant since they would more commonly apply in the case of larger, multi-product businesses.

- (d) Whilst this remains the least well understood of the four assessment areas there were some noticeable improvements this time. The required evaluation needs to be of the individual components of the suggested mix rather than just of the (nature of) the chosen product, service or the whole business as was still sometimes the case. In some cases, candidates investigate "external influences" on the marketing mix and better candidates steer this towards an evaluation of their suggestions in (c) but weaker candidates find this approach difficult. "PEST" and "SWOT" - style methods of evaluation were often employed but were not always directed at the marketing mix. The stronger candidates tended to include their justification for their marketing mix along with the supporting evidence when proposing the mix under area 'c'. Better, more specific evaluations arose where candidates used relevant "SWOT" and/or "PEST"- style approaches (and their variations) and applied these to the components of the mix identified in (c). In some cases, evaluation occurred throughout the work and in the weaker cases simple, unjustified statements were much in evidence and the whole was more about the tasks or assignment (and how these could be improved) rather than about the required evidence presented. The comments regarding assessment in the "general issues" above are also relevant here.

Administration:

Most of the work was again submitted on time together with the appropriate forms - Mark Record Sheets ("MRS") and "OPTEMS" although not all were fully signed to indicate authenticity and some of these had to be requested separately. In general, marks on the work conformed to those on the OPTEMS with occasional discrepancies.

Where centres design their own mark record sheets, it is important to ensure that all the relevant information is present i.e. candidate and Centre name and number, centre marks, assessor's and candidate's signatures and, where relevant, of internal moderation or internal standardisation.

The work submitted again demonstrated similar approaches in content and style from earlier series. Assessment seen was generally consistent with still some evidence of leniency and assessment in some of the work around or just outside the limits of tolerance. There were again a few instances where assessment was found to be rather harsh.

Grade Boundaries - June 2010

6918	Total	A	B	C	D	E
Raw Mark	60	48	42	36	30	25
UMS	100	80	70	60	50	40

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