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Principal Examiner Feedback

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Principal Learning – Business Administration and Finance

General Comments

The standard of learner work has risen in some cases, but in others, centres are still being over lenient when awarding marks. Centres are reminded to ensure they first establish the mark band and then select the level within the band that best relates to the quality of the work presented. For example work that assesses all the criteria for MB2 can be awarded the top of the band if centres believe that level of award is justified. Work, which addresses all the criteria but has some weaknesses, should be awarded marks to the middle or bottom of the band. This will help centres avoid being out of tolerance and having marks reduced at external moderation. Administration still continues to be an issue with some centres. Candidate Record Sheets have been missing for a small number of centres. Centres are also requested to ensure they send the requested samples to moderators by the deadline. We still have centres sending samples late or in some cases not sending the samples until chased by the moderator. Centres need to be aware that the requested sample must include work from the highest achieving candidate and the lowest achieving candidate, even if they have not been requested automatically. Again if this work is not included, the Centre causes a delay to the moderation process.

Learner Responses

Unit 1 – Business Enterprise

Introduction

The majority of centres are providing learners with clear assignment briefs and sufficient timescales for meaningful projects to be undertaken.

General

Learners must support their work with business theory. In many cases there is limited use of the business theory within the specification to support arguments. This is restricting a number of learners to lower level Mark Bands. Relevant points should be fully developed within paragraphs through connectives. A number of steps should be undertaken to ensure full paragraph development. This requires the focus on one point fully analysed.

It is still apparent that a number of centres are not focusing on evidencing work. Unsubstantiated assertions are a common feature of work. Good practice should entail centres helping learners to develop this skill. Every piece of information should be evidenced, for example, with the use of citations or references to verify where they came from. Learners should get into the habit of referencing all work within an assignment and provide a full list of sources at the back of their work. For example, a weak piece of work would suggest a pricing strategy of low prices to undercut the competition. Stronger work would provide evidence of the pricing strategy of local

competition and evidence of costing to support why the learner has chosen the pricing strategy.

Learning Outcomes

LO1: In general, learners have a good understanding of factors impacting on the success of a business. In some instances there is good application to the business enterprise being looked at. This helps learners' access higher level mark bands. Learners must provide convincing explanation of problems and convincing ideas about how problems are dealt with in order to attain MB3. Contextual analysis is important, applying business theory to the organisation being studied.

LO2: Learners need to combine creativity, innovation and viability within this LO. All of these must be covered by the learner. Learners need to produce their own interpretation of any joint project work within the assignment, rather than presenting others work as their own.

LO3: Business plans are generally clear with some detail. Financial, marketing and operational risks that are listed in the specification should be identified and discussed in assignments. This should provide focus for work and help the learner access higher Mark Bands. It is apparent that some learners have not yet studied financial units making it very difficult for them to develop good analysis.

LO5: Generally well completed. It would benefit learners if they used the key descriptors within the specification to enhance their work. The structure needs to be appropriate and clear; the job description and person specification must be clear, well-structured and well-presented; the learner's own role must clearly link the relevant responsibilities and required attributes. Focus should be on trying to achieve these distinct criteria.

LO6: Some good examples of learners evaluating their own contribution to their projects with supporting evidence. Learners should come to a conclusion through making a judgement. This should be based on previous analysis with judgements made to how improvements might be made. Some learners are looking at the group, rather than their own, contribution.

Unit 2 – Business Administration

Candidates in the past have done well in this unit. In this examination series, there were a limited number of entries so it was not possible to detect whether this trend had continued. As guidance therefore centres are reminded of some of the points made in previous examiner reports.

LO1. Higher mark bands are achieved when candidates produce work, which contains both elements of theory and realistic examples of effective administration. They also need to discuss the consequences of poor admin from the specific organisation(s) they have studied. Examples need to be sufficiently detailed to be considered convincing enough for the award of mark band 3. Lower ability work tends to be theory based, lack sufficient

detail, or uses simplistic examples such as “if admin is not effective, neither is the organisation”.

LO2 Some centres continue to be lenient in the award of marks for this outcome. For the award of higher marks, the event needs to be well planned with all key activities described in detail. This description would also consider resources to be used if it is to be ‘carefully and effectively’ planned. Some candidates mistakenly describe what the event organisers would expect of the participants rather than what the participants expect of the event. Even at mark band 1 their needs to be an estimate of how long activities will take. For higher marks this needs to be more than a list of completion dates. Interdependence of activities also needs to be considered for higher marks. Finally for this learning outcome a contingency plan with realistic, detailed ideas to overcome problems will be required.

LO3 This outcome was once again leniently assessed. Evidence of supporting meetings was provided, (emails, agendas, minutes etc) but MB3 requires a ‘perceptive’ assessment of a candidate’s performance. Many candidates produced simplistic assessments such as “ I did well because my agenda was on time”. Realistic and detailed ways to improve performance are also required for MB3.

LO4. Low ability work tended to identify a few generic risks such as trips or falls. For higher marks the risk assessment needs to relate specifically to the planned event, and there needs to be some prioritisation of improvements suggested. It was pleasing to see some candidates used a model of identifying severity of risk and the likelihood of the risk to help determine which risks were most in need of reduction and thus set priorities. Within this outcome, appropriate health and safety laws need to be considered. This should not be a copy and paste exercise, but candidates should discuss specific legislation applicable to the event and the identified risk.

Unit 5

For this unit, learners are required to consider how a product could be marketed. Information presented for the marketing plan LO.2 should be based on Primary and Secondary research carried out in LO3.1 and presented in LO3(2.3). Learners should also be able to present their ideas on marketing a business online with recommendations. Learners should also be able to assess their own performance in applying sales techniques and relating this to AIDA.

Centres chose a wide range of scenarios which showed evidence of independent research and learning. Most learners were able to access relevant information on the market to be entered and the competitors and this was generally well researched.

LO.1 – Learners had been encouraged to independently choose and research the market to be entered and the competition.

LO.2- Justification of the marketing mix should relate to the evidence gathered in LO.1 and LO.3. Decisions should be based on the findings of research and this should be clearly referred to when presenting the marketing mix decisions.

LO.3 – The quality and quantity of research overall was of a good standard.

LO.4 – Learners had presented their ideas on marketing a business online which seemed to be well researched and considered.

LO.5- Most learners were aware of the AIDA model but did not seem able to competently assess their own performance.

There was evidence that the full range of marks were allocated for all the assessment criteria.

In general Unit 5 had been slightly leniently assessed by centres.

Unit 6

For this unit, learners are required to explain the benefits of effective customer service to internal and external customers giving examples.

They are also required to identify relevant factors which affect the customer experience giving examples of typical customers and factors which affect them and their needs and expectations.

They also need to explain the advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing highlighting the most significant factors.

Learners need to understand what the organisation does to ensure high standards of customer service with examples. They should be able to recommend steps the organisation could take to improve which are realistic. Learners should be able to explain with examples the challenges of providing customer service online from both the customer and organisational perspective. They can assess which challenges are most serious. The learner has to handle at least 2 challenging customer service situations in writing.

Customer service scenarios had been selected individually by learners based on their workplace experiences. Where learners had been encouraged to use their work experience business, this produced good insight and detail. Some excellent reviews of the effectiveness of customer service were presented.

Overall the unit was accurately assessed although centres should reward learners by awarding the highest and lowest marks where appropriate.

For LO.1 and LO.2 some excellent work was produced and centres had focused on assessing effectiveness which was in line with the LO.

Often assessors marked LO.1 and LO.2 slightly harshly and seemed reluctant to award top marks. Most learners work contained detailed examples from the chosen organisation which was in line with the LO.

Centres should discourage learners from presenting too much general theory as it does not carry marks.

LO.3 – Where learners had focused on the LO by assessing which factors were the most significant, higher marks were achieved.

LO.4 – Centres should ensure that learners focus on challenges of customer service online and do not confuse this with the challenges of running a business online.

LO.5 – Overall, customer service transactions in writing were sufficiently challenging. They should note that evidence from grid B is not evidence for Grid A.

Unit 7

Learners are required to assess the effectiveness of communication in an organisation showing an understanding of different types and processes. They are also required to be able to communicate effectively showing an ability to use networking skills. The documentation chosen should be taken from the list in the content page 143 of the specification. Learners should be able to assess team effectiveness including effectiveness of team leaders. There needs to be a judgement of how the team performed giving examples. Learners should also make recommendations for how the team could be more effective.

LO.1 - Most centres chose to evaluate their work experience organisation and this was generally well done. Centres need to ensure that learners actually assess whether the communication is or isn't effective. Where this was done it was done well and centres should not be afraid to award full marks if deserved.

LO.2 – Most centres used examples of communication generated in Unit 1 – some of which were good, but this limited the ability of learners to provide evidence of their networking skills as most of the work had been done in a group. It was also difficult to assess each learners individual contribution to documents produced. This was also the case in some evidence produced for LO.3. Centres need to ensure that moderators can clearly see what part of the evidence presented is attributable to which learner.

LO.3 – Learners need to make sure they focus on the effectiveness of the team and not the activity they are undertaking. Likewise improvements should relate to team effectiveness and not just the activity. Where learners had attempted to assess effectiveness this was either very unstructured or linked so closely to a theory e.g. Belbin that it failed to assess effectiveness and just analysed the team roles.

Most centres applied marks accurately but there was some inconsistency when assessing LO.2 where learners had provided similar evidence/documents and assessors had awarded different marks. The full range of marks was not awarded throughout the Los with assessors failing to award the highest and lowest marks.

Unit 10 – Careers and Employment in Business

This unit needs to be completed over an extended period of time. When this is not the case, the work produced by the candidate can be lacking in detail. For LO1/LO2.1&2, a career plan should be produced that is linked to a specific role in the future. Evidence should be provided that demonstrates research of this role so that candidates can gain higher marks by submitting a career plan that has full and accurate information, rather than a simple job description or job advert. When setting work experience targets, candidates need to ensure these relate well to their chosen career, rather than present simple generic targets such as improve communications or build confidence.

For LO2.2, a diary of work placement activities, or simple comments about achieving work placement goals will not in itself demonstrate how far a candidate has progress towards meeting the career plan. There also needs to be well thought out ideas of how the experiences so far can be built upon to help the candidate achieve their goals.

LO3.1 This was reasonably well attempted with letters of application, CV's and copy application forms providing suitable evidence. In a number of cases the level of detail in these documents was poor and did not show how the candidate's experiences, education and personal qualities would make them a suitable candidate for the identified vacancy. This level of detail is required for higher mark bands. It would help the moderation process if assessors could ensure a copy of the job description is provided with the candidates' own work so appropriateness of the application can be evaluated.

LO3.2 For this learning outcome, candidates need to provide questions and answers to be used both when they are interviewing others and when they are being interviewed. In some cases, candidates had collaborated in the production of questions or had questions provided by the centre, to which they produced their own answers. Centres are reminded that this LO requires original learner work. Few candidates produced questions that they thought they might ask the interviewers at the end of the interview process.

LO4 This outcome was, on the whole, well assessed with candidates providing evidence, usually from their work experience placement, of employment or health and safety legislation and details of the strengths and weaknesses of appraisal systems. Better candidates started to assess the impact of legislation rather than simply describe it. For higher marks, candidates need to ensure they quote the actual legislation they are discussing.

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