

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

PL Retail Business (RB302, RB303,
RB304, RB306, RB307 & RB308)

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PL Retail Business Level 3 June 2012

General Comments

It was pleasing to see that the standard of learner work has risen in some examples. However, some centres are still being rather lenient when awarding marks. Centres are reminded to ensure the work they assess relates to the criteria in the marking grid. First, review the work and establish the mark band, 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. Any work which addresses all the criteria but demonstrates some weaknesses should be awarded marks to the middle or bottom of the band. There is a general level of assessment that identifies the correct mark band but then 'automatically' awards the top of the mark band. Centres really need to consider more carefully where in the mark band a learner's work realistically sits. This will help centres avoid having marks reduced at external moderation.

Administration continues to be an issue for some centres. A few centres were not using the Candidate Record Sheet (CRS) and those that did were often missing vital elements of information, for example, not always including candidate examination numbers on the CRS. Centres are reminded that samples sent to the moderator should always include candidate work with the highest and the lowest scores to avoid delays in the moderation process.

Centres need to ensure that marks are recorded accurately on the CRS. Again, there were a few centres who did not present their marks as they appear against the learning outcomes in the marking grid. This in itself is not an issue but the candidates marks were incorrectly recorded against the learning outcomes on the CRS. This meant that differences between assessors and moderators marks were not in agreement until the error was rectified. This added an inordinate amount of time to the moderation process and could have adversely affected the final marks the candidates received.

Centres are also reminded that candidates must understand that copying work directly from textbooks, the internet or the specifications amounts to plagiarism unless this is suitably acknowledged, referenced and interpreted appropriately by the learner.

Centres are reminded that it is good practice for assignment briefs to be internally verified prior to issue. This includes Edexcel Tutor Support Materials (SAMs).

PL Retail Business RB302

This unit gave candidates the opportunity to consider different activities in setting up a retail channel. Candidates generally described in some detail the features of different retail channels. To improve some needed to focus more on the features and less on the advantages and disadvantages.

Once again, some candidates presented work which went through procedures when setting up and operating a new retail business. This approach does seem to offer a vehicle that gives opportunities for candidates to be able to develop their ideas more clearly. However, it is important to ensure that when candidates provide an explanation of procedures of setting up and operating retail channels that they do not just create checklists of what must be done but offer an explanation to what is done at each stage and how this helps the business. In some instances, brevity marred the work and affected the grades the candidate could achieve.

In considering the factors that influence changing patterns of use of retail channels many of the candidates resorted to bullet points. To improve candidates need to discuss in detail the points under the relevant bullet point. One way to improve would be to get them to look at several channels as they often focussed on one.

Some candidates were able to demonstrate some understanding of the concept of branding and brand image. However it is clear that many candidates still do not understand the requirements for a whole organisation approach to branding. It is still being presented in terms of a logo, posters and strap lines. There is a need to ensure that branding is understood as the complete package of image, service and culture of a retail business. The Learning Outcome asks candidates to provide a plan for maintaining the brand consistency and this needs addressing by candidates to access higher marks. It is also important that they make the links in the branding between different retail channels.

The cash flows presented tended to be rather basic and had a number of problems that meant they achieved Mark Band 1. Several of the cash flows were inaccurate and the balance at the start and end of months were often incorrect. Some of the figures were also unrealistic, for example the stock and delivery always being the same when sales varied. As noted previously, all of the learning outcomes cannot be achieved by the presentation of a cash flow forecast. Candidates were not able to provide sufficient evidence to access many marks for this unit because they did not calculate gross and net profit as required under 'Return on Investment'. Most candidates used the figures produced in the cash flow forecast to demonstrate profitability. However, cash flow forecasting not necessarily related to gross and net profit. Candidates failed to calculate gross profit and net profit for the year to access higher mark bands.

In terms of legislation, candidates could identify and explain the laws but need to offer more in terms of what the retailer will have to do on a practical level. A number of candidates only identified a few of the appropriate Acts and they should be directed review the specification which provides a fairly comprehensive list.

In selecting appropriate locations one centre provided an excellent scenario and candidates supported their decisions with live research from local estate agents. That said it was often difficult locating the research that this Learning Outcome requires. Assignment briefs need to be clear about the research that needs to be undertaken. Candidates need to be directed to research and focus location decisions. It is important that they actually select a location and then justify this based on the factors given within the specification.

Most candidates provided a basic assessment of the risks of financial loss. Most of them focussed on the solutions to the risks and in this discussion picked up some credit. It would be better if candidates focussed on the risks of financial loss. There were often basic explanations of the procedures for reducing the risk of fraud for different payment methods. To improve candidates need to talk about all the payment methods as some focused only on cards. It is also important that they explain how the procedures reduce the risk of fraud.

The sections on leadership styles, motivation and training were generally the weakest. Some candidates just listed potential management activities; others talked about leadership style without applying this to their own scenario and were given generous marks. It is important that candidates explain the activities involved in retail management. Offering relevant activities that a Retailing Manager would undertake would enable them to apply their knowledge to achieve higher marks.

All candidates offered a brief evaluation because they failed to consider the advantages and disadvantages of different motivational and training methods. Candidates need to be directed towards evaluating the motivational methods and training methods they consider- a simple look at benefits and problems of each method will ensure real improvements in scores.

PL Retail Business RB303

Work in this unit was varied with some being rather brief and others being a thorough comparison on the key features and benefits of buying practices. Many of the candidates carried out a good comparison of key features of retail buying practices. They identified different retailers to make the comparisons with. To move into higher mark bands candidates need to include comparison of benefits and features of different buying practices rather than focussing on one aspect. This learning outcome was generally accurately assessed.

Candidates often gave brief explanations of the impact of retail buying practices on suppliers. In the stronger pieces of work, candidates were able to explain these impacts in more detail and used different retail businesses to explain their points. Candidates need to thoroughly explain the impacts of several types of retail buying practices on suppliers using examples to illustrate each type. Where improvements are required, candidates should look more specifically at how the different practices affect suppliers.

Most of the candidates offered brief discussions of either, legal, cultural or ethical issues considered by retailers when sourcing and buying but a few only discussed one aspect. By omitting one or more of these issues candidates struggle to achieve above Mark Band 1. It might be helpful for candidates to have a separate section discussing legal, cultural and ethical under these headings to make it easier to locate the work. They may benefit from looking at examples when sourcing say from abroad. Candidates need to develop more depth on these important issues as they affect standards of national and international compliance and are necessary to allow retailers to continue trading. Giving examples relating to buying and sourcing in other countries would help support candidate's achievement.

Many of the candidates were able to give at least a brief explanation on the generic importance of networking. A few stated the importance of networking but did not develop this further into why it was important to retail buying practices. Most of the candidates offered some suggested improvements but these were often not related to networking skills (for example, attend more events). It may be worth candidates looking at networking skills in practice and then suggest ways to improve these.

Candidates gave brief descriptions of negotiating procedures of retail businesses of different sizes. Some were able to relate this across different sub sectors. To move into higher mark bands candidates need to offer thorough descriptions of the differences and make comparisons between different sized retailers and the different sub sectors.

Market research to identify target customers was generally very basic. Market research is considered basic when only one method is used, which was usually a questionnaire. Not all of this was focused on identifying target customers. The criteria asks for customer profiles (plural) so the expectation is for more than one customer profile from the market research.

It is important that candidates conduct primary and secondary research methods and to generate more than one customer profile to be considered detailed or extensive.

Most of the candidates carried out a brief but generic analysis of qualitative and quantitative research. Most candidates illustrated their results with graphs or pie charts. There was some misunderstanding regarding qualitative analysis, for example, handing out questionnaires does not constitute opportunities for in depth interviews. It is important that candidates actually analyse their results and that this contains both quantitative and qualitative research as without this they cannot achieve above mark band 1.

Many of the candidates briefly assessed the validity and reliability of their data although a few offered no evidence at all. Some were able to discuss the validity and reliability of their own research but often focussed on one aspect. For example, one learner discussed checking data entry fields rather than the wider aspects of validity and reliability. Candidates need to carry out an extensive assessment of the market research they undertook and recognise what else they could do to strengthen their validity and/or reliability within their own research. It is important that this is done for candidate's actual research and not theoretical.

Most of the candidates were able to briefly present the factors involved in developing product ranges. Some were able to give detailed explanations of some of the factors and illustrated these with good examples. Candidates need to provide thorough descriptions that show depth and understanding of the factors involved in developing product ranges. Several examples should be used to demonstrate the points under discussion.

Most of the candidates generated costly ideas for product ranges to be offered. Some of the candidates produced realistic ideas for new product ranges. Some related the new product ranges to their customer profiles. To move into the higher mark bands candidates needs to ensure the ideas they present for new product ranges are clearly linked to the customer profiles from their market research.

Candidates usually gave brief generic assessments of product quality. A few applied their discussion to the product ranges being considered. Most candidates discussed product quality as a post-sales process relying on customer feedback. Some were able to discuss this in some detail and relate their work to the different quality processes. To move into higher mark bands candidates need to thoroughly assess quality in any product from the buyers' point of view. They should look at the process from research, design and development through to delivery to the customer. This learning outcome was leniently assessed.

PL Retail Business RB304

Most of the candidates gave very brief descriptions of the constituent parts of the supply chain. There were examples of flow charts of the process. Candidates need to give more detail in their descriptions.

Most of the candidates offered some detail in describing interrelationships and interdependencies in different sub sectors. Some attempted at least three sub sectors but many looked at different items from within the same sub sector, e.g. three food and drink suppliers. Several of the candidates did not recognise Kellogg's as a manufacturer and discussed as if they were a retailer in their own right. To improve the candidates need to give more specific real retail examples.

Most of the candidates offered very brief discussions of information and communications flows to manage competing demands. Few candidates discussed this in any great depth. Some of the better work looked at communication between different parts of the supply chain and how this supported the management of pressures and demands. To improve candidates should look at a pressure or demand and look at the ways communication can be used to resolve the pressures/ demands.

Most of the candidates were able to give at least a brief explanation on the impact of technology on supply chains. To improve candidates need to look at more ways the technology will impact different parts of the retailer's supply chain. Some of the better work looked at technology and not just how it helped the final retailer but how its use with the supply chain supported the retailer.

Critical Path Management was generally well understood and explained in terms of how it can be used to manage the improvement of stock flow. Most of the candidates offered a brief analysis. Stronger candidates were able to identify improvements they could make using the Critical Path Analysis (CPA) activity. For more candidates to be able to do this they need to look at how using CPA will help improve the flow of stock through the supply chain and retailer.

Many of the candidates were able to give brief descriptions of how to improve profitability generally but then did not apply this to the supply chain. Some candidates were able to identify ways to improve profitability that were clearly focused on the supply chain which was helpful in achieving well. It is important that to improve candidates must explicitly say how the change will improve revenues and/or reduce costs and ultimately result in higher profits.

The quality of this section varied across centres. Generally, most of the candidates identified several legal factors that influence the supply chain. Most of the work was brief, identified laws but then did not apply to the case study. However, stronger candidates identified several legal Acts, applied to the supply chain generally and then went on to discuss the application to the case study. It is important that candidates consider how the legal factors will affect different parts of the supply chain in detail.

Most of the candidates briefly identified how external factors impact on the supply chain. A few candidates appeared to find this confusing. Stronger candidates were able to use part of a STEP or similar analysis to structure their answer. Some candidates identified wider issues such as potential flood or extreme weather conditions where the products were manufactured overseas. In one centre this did not seem to be explicitly attempted and candidates were awarded marks for internal health and safety factors. It may be useful to get candidates to choose a location and look at the external factors that would influence their decision to place or use part of their supply chain there.

Most of the candidates gave very brief descriptions of how negative impacts on the environment can be minimised. Whilst there were some good ideas mooted, none of them were explored or presented in enough detail to access the highest mark bands. More detail on how they could reduce their negative impact on the environment linked to other parts of the supply chain would enable achievement at higher mark bands.

Most of the candidates proposed practical ways forward for logistical storage problems and generated ideas and explored possibilities to create solutions to complex supply chain problems. Some gave only very brief and basic ways forward for the logistics storage problem.

Many of the ideas to create solutions to complex supply chain problems very basic and could only achieve MB1. However, some candidates were able to generate some feasible solutions that were realistic and applied which meant they could achieve higher mark band.

The assessment criterion requires candidates to create a detailed and practical critical path using ICT. Most of the candidates generated clear Critical Path Analysis (CPA) diagrams using ICT. The supporting dialogue was sometime weak which meant the practical detail was not always well explained. Stronger candidates gave clear descriptions of the CPA and what this could mean to the company. One centre did not use ICT and although the candidates were not penalised for this, it is important that ICT is used in some way to generate the critical path.

The cost/benefit analysis in one of the case studies was based on a logistics delivery issue. It was a well designed activity and challenged the candidates. Some candidates were able to develop a very good cost/benefit analysis. Most candidates attempted to develop a definition for cost/benefit analysis as required in the assignment brief. This led them to the wider social issues of cost/benefit analysis but then did not include this in their response when applying the case study. In other centres the costs benefit analysis to transport choices was well done although to improve more detail could be offered. Also other methods of transport could be considered.

Most of the candidates tended to briefly assess risk to health and safety but the work on organising time, resources and prioritising actions need to be explored more. Some candidates included a risk assessment document. Stronger candidates applied this across the supply chain to the overseas suppliers to ensure a corporate approach. Actually getting candidates to organise time, resources and prioritise will help them improve.

PL Retail Business RB306

Most of the candidates gave very brief descriptions of the purpose of merchandising. Looking at the purpose in more detail would ensure improvement generally. In one centre, several candidates produced work that focussed on computerised versus manual stock control systems. Advice here would be to refer to the assessment criteria in the marking grid. Whilst the overall title of the learning outcome is to 'know about stock control systems' Learning Outcome 1.1 is about the purpose of merchandising and there was rather too much focus on the difference between manual and computerised stock control systems.

Most of the candidates offered several elements in describing interrelationships between merchandising activities. Candidates need to thoroughly explain the interrelationships between the different elements and apply these to a real retail business.

Many of the candidates offered very brief discussions of some of the factors that affect stock control. Most considered technology and particularly EPOS which affects the stock control system of retail businesses. Some candidates discussed this across different size and retail sub sectors but almost half the candidates did not. It was the lack of explicit reference and detail of the link to size and sub sector which limited their performance. To improve candidates need to link to this more.

Some candidates did not use the data to forecast sales. Most of the candidates were able to give at least a basic sales forecast using previous sales data. A few candidates offered more detail in their future forecasts but often did not always make it clear how their percentage uplifts were arrived at. The connection with the previous data and the generation of a forecast needs to be more explicit in the work. Giving reasons why they have projected it in this way would help further.

Much of the work offered briefly analysed sales performance of a retail business. Most of the candidates offered a basic analysis. Stronger candidates were able to discuss the sales performance in detail referring to the sales figures of each department. To improve candidates would benefit from looking at more specific sales performance and not just the totals for the whole business.

Many of the candidates were able give brief descriptions on the effects of sales forecasting on a case study retail business. Some candidates went on to discuss either the risks or benefits of sales forecasting. In general, the focus was focussed more on how internal factors and external factors could impact the sale forecast. It may be better to look at some of the benefits of sales forecasting to be able to discuss the effect of forecasting on the retailer. To improve candidates need to look in more detail at how sales forecasting will actually impact on the business including staffing, stock control, marketing etc.

Some of the candidates were able to give a thorough explanation of the effects of the sales forecasting plan. Stronger candidates were able to discuss the meeting of sales targets. Most candidates gave brief explanations using bullet points that were not developed beyond a list. More needs to be explained about how the plan will help it meet the targets.

Most of the candidates gave a comprehensive list of potential actions a retailer can take to help meet their sales targets. Some of the candidates did not develop these lists in detail and gave only a brief explanation of each item. Most of the actions offered were realistic. Stronger candidates were able to give a comprehensive explanation of each section. Candidates have suggested some realistic actions that can be taken to help achieve sales targets. To improve they need to offer more actions and explain in detail how they would help achieve sales targets.

In one centre many candidates produced a comprehensive rationale for planning a stock allocation. All of the stock allocation plans were based on monetary value rather than units of stock. Some candidates found this a bit confusing and did not explain their stock allocation plan clearly. Stronger candidates were able to present a clear plan but there were some with errors. The better pieces of work were supported with a clear dialogue explaining the decisions behind the stock allocation plan. In another centre, the learner used limited planning skills to provide a basic plan for stock allocations. Whilst they looked at different systems they did not plan how stock allocation will be used. Some candidates looked briefly at ways to resolve the stock allocation issues- but this was not really a step by step plan. They must plan how stock allocation will be used. Many did not even look at ways to resolve the issues but just discussed stock allocation.

Most of the candidates gave quite developed assessments of the risk of loss to a retail business. There was a broad range of issues identified in most instances. However, many of the candidates did not identify the resources, organise the time or prioritise their actions. To access the higher mark bands candidates really need to prioritise the actions under discussion.

Most of the candidates developed a fairly comprehensive rationale for the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor supplier performance. However, candidates then went on to develop very brief or weak KPIs. One learner did not add any KPIs at all. The learning outcome is assessed against the use of KPIs rather than the rationale. Some candidates considered KPIs and how they could be used to monitor supplier performance when choosing a new supplier. Others just listed some relevant KPI measures. The work was theoretical when they were meant to use KPI to monitor supplier performance.

This work was brief on recommending realistic improvements to a stock control system. Some of the candidates offered a range of detailed and realistic solutions to stock control problems. Most of the candidates gave comprehensive lists but these were in bullet points and not developed which cannot be considered a detailed answer. To access the higher mark bands candidates need to develop each point to give detailed answers. It would be better to outline the problem and then in detail recommend improvements to resolve the stock management problem.

PL Retail Business RB307

Most of the candidates described the psychology of customers in terms of their buying habits. Some candidates were able to give very good, detailed descriptions with stronger candidates able to detail customer's retail expectations. The responses to this were all set out under the same headings although each piece of work was clearly individual. Some of the work was very brief and marks could not be allocated. Giving more examples would help candidates to improve.

Most of the candidates briefly described the behaviours of sales persons in very general terms. Many candidates used the same sub headings throughout and this may have discouraged the application to the case study, which few candidates did.

Candidates tended to identify briefly or in some detail internal and external customers. Most of the candidates offered very brief discussions of internal customers. Some candidates discussed internal customers and made inherent reference to external customers. Very few of the candidates gave a balanced discussion of both internal and external customers. The stronger candidates identified that their supplier were also their customer base. This was generally the weakest section for most of the candidates. This required in many instances, more detail with examples needed to illustrate why they're internal or external customers.

Most of the candidates were able to give a developed assessment of the customer service proposition of either a case study business or a well know retailer. A few candidates offered brief discussions but there was generally a good level of understanding of this concept.

This required discussion of methods used to monitor, evaluate and improve customer service. Most of the candidates offered a discussion on the monitoring and evaluation but then did not carry through to suggest improvements. Stronger candidates were able to offer some practical ideas to improve but these sometimes lacked detail.

Many of the candidates were able to give basic descriptions of customer service in a retail business. Some candidates made comparison with John Lewis's customer service ethos. A few candidates presented a piece of work that was not actually an evaluation of customer service. To move into higher mark bands candidates need to ensure they evaluate customer service in more than one retail business as required in the learning outcome criteria. It is important that candidates identify strengths and weaknesses of the customer service.

Most candidates produced a comprehensive section on the functional areas of a retail business. There were some good explanations of different aspects of retail environments. A few of the stronger candidates were able to then make clear links between these elements and customer service but some failed to make those links. It is important that candidates focus the interrelationships between the customers, sales and retail environments.

Standards in this section varied considerably across centres. Most of the candidates set basic sales targets with brief commentary on their reasons for the targets set. Some candidates talked theoretically about sales targets but did not actually set sales targets. This limited their performance to mark band 1. Stronger candidates were able to give clear and detailed explanations for their targets which were easy to understand. The strongest pieces of work showed links between the targets set and the sales per square foot analysis carried out, with supporting figures rather than general commentary. Some candidates generated detailed sales targets. Many were realistic and it was useful to relate to previous sales data.

Most of the candidates developed a fairly comprehensive list of practical solutions to increase sales. Most candidates were able to offer practical solutions. However, most of the candidates did not break their proposed solutions into manageable steps. Some of the stronger candidates were able to state their priorities but very few actually did this.

LO5.2: This learning outcome requires proposed allocation of resources to budgets. In general, candidates offered theory on budgets without actually allocating realistic budgets whilst anticipating, taking and managing risks. Some candidates offered proposals for stock allocation to their college's own retail outlet. Some of the candidates gave detailed rationale for their proposed stock allocations that were well reasoned and discussed the deployment of staff. Stronger candidates discussed the risks associated with the stock allocation proposals. Most of the candidates then went on to discuss different types of budget allocations but did not apply this to their stock allocation activity.

PL Retail Business RB308

Most of the candidates described the role of the visual merchandiser through the medium of a presentation. This generally worked out but some candidates missed the point of the activity and did not give as strong a description as they could have. To improve this work it would be useful for candidates to apply this to visual merchandisers in retailers and it would be useful to cover more from the specification under how visual merchandisers work with internal customers.

Most of the candidates described the importance of visual merchandising principles in retail through the same presentation as the previous learning outcome. Most of the candidates identified the principles without stating why they are important to retail businesses. It is important that candidates consider each aspect in a little more detail to improve and focus on how this benefits the business.

Most of the candidates were able meet the design brief by producing a scale drawing with relevant annotations. A few candidates offered 'drawings' that did not depict the final display by using photos of blank mannequins. Candidates should be advised that photos and graphics can be used if they are not confident in their own art work. However, the finished artefact should give some indication of the planned visual display. Without annotated drawings the candidates could only achieve in the lowest Mark Band. Stronger pieces of work were supported by comprehensive notes on the rationale for the display offered. It is important that they include drawings with detailed annotations to achieve higher scores.

Many of the candidates were able produce designs adapted in some detail to respond to changing circumstances. The stronger pieces of work were supported with further annotations and notes that gave the rationale for the changes in the design. Some candidates produced minimal changes and/or did not give any reasons for the changes. In some cases adaptations were discussed but no changes were made by candidates to their design which should be presented as a second version of their plans.

Candidates identified methods to measure quantitative and qualitative effects of Visual merchandising installations on customers, the majority were appropriate. Most candidates produced some good explanations of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods. In one centre, all of the candidates identified questionnaires as a qualitative method which really depends on the questions asked and can be either/or and is often elements of both methods. Some candidates only gave brief explanations of each method and few applied it to their own assignment work.

Candidates assessed the impact of a visual merchandising installation on customers. Most of the candidates assessed the impact of their visual merchandising displays through the use of questionnaires. Most offered quite developed assessments of their results. The stronger pieces of work showed evidence of also speaking to the manager/staff to see if there had been any impact on sales for the duration of their display.

Candidates reflected on leadership skills needed to motivate a team in detail. Some candidates had a lot of theory but they need to apply it to the performance of their team leader and members. In one centre, most of the candidates carried out quite a deep and meaningful reflection on the leadership skills needed to motivate a team. They were able to analyse their own contribution and that of their colleagues. Some candidates were very light in their reflection and this impacted on the work they presented.

When completing this task it would be helpful if candidates set their objectives and then assessed how far they have or have not achieved each. Most of the candidates focussed on the activities they carried out rather than the achievement of their team's objectives. Some candidates repeated chunks of information from earlier sections of their assignment. A few candidates gave quite detailed reviews of their team's success but still focussed on activities rather than objectives. Some of the work was just too brief to be awarded higher mark bands. In one centre it was pleasing that they set objectives and measured their performance against these. Many candidates offered a theoretical look at this section.

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