

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

PL Business, Admin and Finance
(BA301, BA302, BA305, BA306,
BA307 & BA310) Paper 1A

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PL Business, Admin & Finance BA301/1A June 2012

Introduction

The majority of centres are providing clear assignment briefs and sufficient timescales for meaningful projects to be undertaken. Most work produced is in line with the specification and allows candidates to access the range of marks. However, many candidates appear to be ill-equipped for the demands of this unit. The synoptic nature of a business plan suggests that this work should be produced near the end of the course rather than in the first year.

General

Candidates must make use of the Learning Outcomes in the specification. It is apparent that a number of centres do not make appropriate use of the specification. In order to attain higher mark bands candidates must make use of relevant theory. Explicit use of the specification to help the development of work is essential.

Candidates are still making assertions within their work. Evidence used within work must be substantiated. Factual information should always be supported with citations or references. Candidates should reference every piece of evidence within an assignment. Centres would do well to work on developing this skill at the start of the course.

Learning Outcomes

LO1: In general, candidates have a good understanding of the factors that impact on the chances of business success. To access MB3 candidates should look to provide a convincing explanation of problems that businesses face. This should be followed with convincing ideas about how these are dealt with.

LO2: Plans showed some evidence of how ideas were creative, innovative and viable. Some learners used profitability, break even or market research data to show convincingly how the business was viable. Better answers also sourced where they gathered the information from. A combination of creativity, innovation and viability should act as a focus to candidates when approaching this LO. All three areas need to be covered by the learner if they are to access higher marks. Interpretation of work produced should be on an individual basis rather than one piece of group work.

LO3: Candidates need to ensure that they are including essential areas within their business plan e.g. finance, marketing etc. Information provided must be evidenced. For example, some candidates produce a cash flow forecast with no evidence of how costs and revenues were arrived at. Candidates must identify risks and how to manage them. A starting point for this should be the risks listed within the specification.

These include financial, market and operational and will provide a focus for candidate work in this LO.

LO5: For this LO a clear, well-structured and well-presented job description and person specification are required. A distinction between relevant responsibilities and required attributes should be made and this should be clearly linked to the candidates own role.

LO6.2: Candidates must provide accounts of the activities undertaken to implement their business idea as well as how these were adapted where necessary. Clear evidence is required for why this was the case.

LO6.3: A number of candidates failed to acknowledge their own contribution, instead looking at the contribution of team members. Good development of analysis and evaluation is required for MB3. Arguments should be substantiated with evidence rather than mere assertion. A well-balanced evaluation of their own contributions is a requirement, many candidates only looking at positives.

PL Business, Admin & Finance BA302/1A June 2012

Introduction

This is the fifth time that this unit has been assessed. Centres appear to understand the learning outcomes and can steer candidates to produce the necessary evidence for higher grades.

General

Work for this unit tends to focus on the organisation of an enterprise activity such as the launch of a product or an outing for a group of students.

These activities allow students sufficient scope to meet the assessment objectives of this unit, as do the tasks set out in the assignments issued by most centres. Most students are set activities that allow access to the full range of grades available.

Where learners do not achieve higher grades this tends to relate to simplistic planning which does not fully address the complexity of the planned events. While most learners attempt to produce a Gantt chart, these do not always fully reflect the range of tasks involved in planning an event and rarely identify the key milestones involved in planning the event. Work frequently addresses the assessment of risks using a generic, institutional risk assessment template the consideration of legality is too often superficial with too many learners using generic descriptions of the key acts laid out in the specification without applying them properly to the context of their assignment.

Learning Outcomes

For LO1, candidates must comment on the importance of effective administration and information, providing examples of the consequences of poor administration. Learners tend to produce a report to address this task. Where this task was less well addressed, learners tended to produce work which focussed on the job roles of individuals within a specific business, often their own school/ college, without considering the content laid out in the specification.

For LO2 candidates must be able to plan an event as part of a team, demonstrating project management skills. Most candidates were able to offer a good description of the intended outcomes of their event but the expectations of participants were not always tackled as effectively, limiting the marks achieved.

Many candidates attempted the second half of this learning objective through the production of a Gantt chart without any supporting evidence. Candidates should be encouraged to use accompanying notes to illustrate the interdependencies of the different tasks in their Gantt chart. Contingency plans were too often generic and lacking the level of

application to context that would qualify them as realistic and convincing.

LO3 requires learners to assess the success of a meeting and their own performance within the meeting, using evidence. A minority of learners assess the meeting without making any comments on their own performance or alternatively, assess the performance of other members of their team.

In some cases candidates omitted supporting evidence such as minutes, agendas or evaluations. In both cases this limited the marks that learners could achieve.

LO4 requires candidates to discuss health and safety legislation and complete a risk assessment. Most candidates used a generic, institutional risk assessment template to address this task. Weaker students offered a generic discussion of the laws detailed in the unit content. Higher marks could have been achieved by linking this content to the context of the assignment.

PL Business, Admin & Finance BA305/1A June 2012

In most cases the OPTEMS mark sheets arrived with the sample of work. Work from the highest and the lowest candidate was sent.

Most samples arrived on time and candidate record sheets were completed and authenticated by students.

Most centres had annotated assignments throughout which was helpful and mainly accurately.

Samples were in line with the specification and allowed students to access the range of marks. Centres had accurately identified where candidates had addressed criteria.

In L0.1 learners were able to provide a clear outline of the product or service. Some learners had difficulty accurately defining either the market to be entered or their competition.

L0.2 To achieve MB3 learners needed to convincingly justify their marketing mix by referencing the market research. This was not done particularly well by some students. Some centres need to review the contents of the specification.

L0.3 (1) Some centres need to review essential items to include in a Business Plan e.g. Finance, Marketing, Aims and Objectives. Also, many learners produced a log of what happened rather than a plan. Some learners failed to identify risks and how to manage them.

L0.4 Some centres presented a comparison of good and bad points of two websites but failed to make well thought out recommendations about content, design, security features and maintenance. Learners need to make and justify these suggestions either for their own website or make recommendations to others.

L0.5 (.4) Some centres provided an overview of the team performance rather than an assessment of their own performance. Most had an understanding of the AIDA model which they were able to apply with reasonable accuracy.

Overall marking was slightly lenient.

PL Business, Admin & Finance BA306/1A June 2012

OPTEMS mark sheets arrived with samples of work. Work from the highest and the lowest candidate was sent.

Most samples arrived on time and all candidate record sheets were completed and authenticated by students.

Assignments were well annotated throughout which was helpful and mainly accurate.

Samples were in line with the specification and allowed students to access the range of marks. Centres had accurately identified where candidates had addressed criteria.

Marks for LO1 and LO2 were awarded together by some assessors which then made it difficult to ascertain where marks had been allocated.

In LO.1 most learners were able to explain the benefits of providing effective customer service however some students only explained the customer service procedures in an organisation rather than giving benefits.

LO.2 Most learners were able to describe typical customers although many presented only a brief outline e.g. Family with young children. To achieve MB3 a detailed description is required. Advantages and disadvantages of outsourcing were done quite well but most learners did not highlight the most significant factors which is required in MB2+3.

LO.3 Throughout this LO, most candidates focus far too heavily on legal aspects/regulations rather than how customer service standards are maintained by the organisation in general.

LO.4 Many learners presented the challenges of trading online rather than the challenges of providing customer service online. However, where there was reference to aspects of customer service, the learner was awarded marks in line with the marking grid.

LO.5 Many students were prevented from being awarded higher marks due to poor grammar, punctuation and or spelling.

Overall marking was slightly lenient.

PL Business, Admin & Finance BA307/1A June 2012

OPTEMS mark sheets arrived with the samples of work. Work from the highest and the lowest candidate were sent.

Most samples arrived on time and all candidate record sheets were completed and authenticated by students.

Assignments were annotated throughout which was helpful and mainly accurately.

Samples were in line with the specification and allowed students to access the range of marks. Centres had accurately identified where candidates had addressed criteria.

In some centres, marks for LO.2 (1) and LO.2 (2.3) were not clearly distinguished as were LO.3 (1.2) and LO.3 (3) which then made it difficult to ascertain where marks had been allocated.

In LO.1 most learners were able to describe communication in an organisation but failed to assess its effectiveness.

LO.2 (1) and LO.2 (2.3) most students showed evidence of networking skills and chose appropriate documents.

LO.3(1.2) and LO.3(3) Throughout this LO, most learners were able to comment on the effectiveness of teams and team leaders, however, recommendations for improvements were generally unjustified and limited to one improvement per team.

Overall marking was slightly lenient.

PL Business, Admin & Finance BA310/1A June 2012

Introduction

This is the fourth time this unit had been assessed. Many centres appeared to have a good understanding of the specification, accurately assessing work which generally of a good standard.

General

Most centres provided learners with an assignment which provided an opportunity to access the full range of marks available in the specification. The context of the assignment for most learners was the completion of a career plan and application for a work experience placement relevant to their career goals. In some cases work was supported by professional mentors from local businesses offering candidates assistance in their preparation for and completion of job interviews.

The majority of learners demonstrated competence in the completion of the application process although, when anticipating interview questions, a minority of candidates produced work which was generic and not relevant to a specific job vacancy.

Learning Outcomes

LO1, 2.1,2

Most learners were able to produce a well researched career plan which seemed to relate to their interests. Stronger candidates have been able to demonstrate a good understanding of a specific career including evidence of research into the required qualifications (e.g. the entry requirements for relevant degrees.)

Some candidates focus on a specific employer rather than a career path. This can limit the grades achieved depending on how narrow their focus was. Centres should note that credit is awarded for the production of a career plan, not for the presentation of large amounts of evidence of their research. Supporting material which does not directly address assessment criteria should be placed into appendices to the task. When setting SMART objectives, some students focussed on objectives for their career overall rather than their work experience. In these cases this went on to limit the marks achieved for LO2.3. A minority of candidates seemed to lack an understanding of SMART, dividing each objective up into a separate statement for each letter or writing a separate objective for each letter.

L02

Most candidates discussed their achievements during their work placements. Stronger candidates linked their assessment of their objectives to their overall career goals.

While some candidates provided evidence of their work experience such as a diary, many candidates did not offer evidence of their experiences during their placement. Some learners are able to link their experiences to the development of skills which are necessary for their chosen career but this is not consistent across all candidates and centres.

L03

Much of the applications submitted were completed well with learners observing conventions of spelling and grammar. A range of documents were presented with most learners combining a covering letter with either a CV or an application form, depending on the role for which they are applying.

Stronger candidates completed their application in the context of their chosen career or their work experience placement, demonstrating some consideration of the person specification and job description for their desired post.

When preparing for a job interview, a number of candidates prepared generic questions which did not relate to a specific career or job. This was equally true of their responses, limiting the marks which could be awarded.

In some cases the work for LO3.2 was derived from a group activity and was not well labelled to indicate whether or not it was the candidates own. Candidates should be guided to label their questions to indicate whether it is their own or produced jointly with others.

L04

The best work submitted for this learning outcome focussed on an analysis of evidence gathered during a work placement. Candidates discussed the health and safety procedures which they had observed, in some cases using examples of their own role in the implementation of these procedures. Weaker learners failed to balance positive and negative points of legislation, focussing purely one side of the issue and normally from the point of view of employee. A minority of candidates considered the perspective of the employer thoroughly. Centers should take care to ensure that they guide candidates to cover the perspective of the employer as well and the perspective of the employee.

The performance management procedures of the organisation were often based on case study material. Weaker candidates discussed theory without showing any appreciation of context. TO achieve higher marks for this learning objective candidates should be guided to cover positive and negative features of performance management in context.

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