Moderators' Report/
Principal Moderator Feedback

Summer 2013

PL Retail Business
(RB302/RB303/RB304/RB306/RB307 & RB309)

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PL Retail Business Level 3 coursework June 2013

General Comments

The standard of student work in this series has been the highest to date. In general, centres are slightly more accurate when awarding marks although some still tend to be lenient. There are incidences when marks are awarded when no evidence is presented. This mainly occurs in the units with Mark Grids A and B. Centres are reminded that only evidence based work can be awarded for Mark Grid A as there were some incidents when marks were awarded for ephemeral evidence already accounted for in Mark Grid B.

Centres are reminded to review the students work and establish the mark band. The level of the work then needs to be identified within the band to relate to the quality of the work presented. For example work that assesses all the criteria for Mark Band 2 (MB2) can be awarded the top of the band if the assessor is sure that level of award is justified. Work which addresses all the criteria but demonstrates some weaknesses should be awarded marks to the middle or bottom of the band. There is still a general assumption that work allocated to the correct mark band is 'automatically' awarded the top of the mark band. Centres really need to consider more carefully where in the mark band a student'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 late in submitting their sample work and one centre was extremely late which almost delayed the whole awarding process. Centres need to be aware of the potential impact of delays in submitting work. A few centres were not using the Candidate Record Sheet (CRS) and those that did were sometimes missed vital elements of information, for example, not always including student examination numbers on the CRS. One centre did not include any of the OPTEMS/EDI sheets with any of their units. This makes it more difficult to moderate as extra research needs to be carried out to establish whether the highest and lowest marked work is included in the sample before moderation can begin. This adds an inordinate amount of time to the moderation process. Centres also need to ensure that marks are recorded accurately on the CRS.

Centres are also reminded that students 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 student.

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).

Marking Grid A

Unit 2 – Developing Retail Channels

This unit gave students the opportunity to consider different activities in setting up a retail channel. Students generally described in some detail the features of different retail channels. However there was a lot of work presented on PowerPoint slides which do not offer enough scope for students to develop the points they were making. There was too much tendency for bullet points and no depth of explanation. Centres need to find a suitable vehicle for students to carry out work that offers opportunities to demonstrate learning and understanding.

The more successful students offered work that followed the setting up of a new business. This lent itself well to demonstrating the procedures for setting up and operating in new retail channels. This approach does seem to offer a vehicle that gives opportunities for students to be able to develop their ideas more clearly. It is also important to ensure that when students are asked to provide an explanation of procedures of setting up and operating retail channels they do not just create checklists there needs to be explanations of what is required at each stage and how this helps the business.

In considering the factors that influence changing patterns of use of retail channels many of the students resorted to bullet points. To improve students need to discuss in detail the points under the relevant bullet point. One way to improve would be to get them to compare several channels and also not to present work on PowerPoint slides only.

It is clear that many students still do not understand the requirements for a whole organisation approach to branding. Branding is still often presented in terms of the logo without considering that branding is understood as the complete package of image, service and culture of a retail business. The Learning Outcome asks students to provide a *plan* for maintaining the brand consistency and this needs addressing by centres in their assignment briefs to allow students to access higher marks. There was very little evidence of a planned approach to brand consistency in any of the work presented. It is also important that students make 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. The cash flows tended to be start up costs incorrectly presented as a cash flow forecast. There was often no evidence of predicted sales income or overhead and stock costs so this was not formatted as a cash flow forecast. This meant that marks could only be awarded for basic calculations and students could not access the higher mark bands. As noted in previous reports, all of the learning outcomes cannot be achieved by the presentation of a cash flow forecast. Students 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'. Some students calculated break even points but then did not discuss what this meant to the business. There needs to be a much more robust approach to this from centres and the work needs a more thorough application to the unit specification if students are to be able to access all of the marks available for this unit.

In terms of legislation, many students listed the titles of the appropriate Acts as they appear in the specification (on their PowerPoint slides) but other than this identification did not go onto explain what this means to the retailer on a practical level.

In selecting appropriate locations there was very little evidence of research and this was dealt with very generically. Some centres dealt with location in the broadest terms with very little application to a real business. Some of the stronger work discussed influencing factors in more detail. In general this would be improved if there was more evidence of 'live' research of local venues to enable students to engage in more in depth dialogue about the pros and cons of various locations and the factors that would influence specific decisions for a particular location. Assignment briefs need to be clear about the research that needs to be undertaken. Students 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 students provided brief and basic assessments of the risks of financial loss. Most focussed on internal and external theft but ignored potential loss through wastage and breakages. There were often general explanations of risk of fraud but this was often not related to different payment methods. To improve students need to talk about all the payment methods. 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. There were lots of mind maps to illustrate potential management activities, which was an interesting vehicle to use but needs to be supplemented by more in depth discussion in order to access higher mark bands. There was some potentially excellent work on different motivational and training methods with students quoting different models using Herzberg and Maslow. However this was often generic and not applied to retail which missed the point. Students need to consider evaluating the motivational and training methods then look at benefits and problems of each method will ensure real improvements in scores.

Unit 3 – Buying Practices of Retail Businesses

This unit was of variable quality with some students offering detailed explanations and comparisons whilst others were brief on the key features and benefits of buying practices. Stronger centres required students to identify different named retailers to make the comparisons with. To move into higher mark bands all students need to include comparison of benefits and features of different buying practices rather than focussing on one aspect.

Students often gave brief explanations of the impact of retail buying practices on suppliers. There was a tendency for the impacts on suppliers to be implicit rather than explicit. Advantages and disadvantages were discussed in relation to the retailers rather that the suppliers. Students need to thoroughly explain the impacts of several types of retail buying practices on suppliers and focus on advantages and disadvantages to the suppliers, with examples to illustrate each type.

Most of the students offered brief discussions of either, legal, cultural or ethical issues considered by retailers when sourcing and buying and there was too much reliance on bullet points. This meant the work was not detailed enough to access the higher mark bands. Many only discussed one aspect rather than all three. By omitting one or more of these issues students struggle to achieve above Mark Band 1. It might be helpful for students 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. Students 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 student's achievement.

Many students gave very brief explanations on the generic importance of networking. One centre used a newsletter style assignment which produced some interesting work and creative ideas but the nature of the presentation meant the work was naturally brief. This would be improved by including supporting research and notes behind the newsletter to access higher mark bands. It may also be worth students looking at networking skills in practice and then suggest ways to improve these.

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

Many of the students carried out at least basic market research to identify target customers. The market research is considered basic when only one method is used which was a questionnaire. In this series some students included secondary research through ACORN to enable them to access the higher mark bands. The criteria asks for customer profiles (plural) so the expectation is for more than one customer profile from the market research which most students achieved. To move into higher mark bands the students need to use several types of market research methods and to generate more than one customer profile to be considered detailed or extensive.

Most of the students carried out quite developed analyses of qualitative and quantitative research. Most students illustrated their results with graphs or pie charts and stronger students used these to support in depth analyses of their quantitative results. To move into the higher mark bands students would need to carry out an extensive analysis which means more detail in the supporting notes of their visual analysis.

Most of the students offered no evidence of the validity and reliability of their data, although a few briefly assessed validity and reliability. This was generally the weakest section in this series. Students 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 student's actual research and not theoretical.

Most of the students were able to briefly present the factors involved in developing product ranges. The use of PowerPoint slides hampered the ability of students to present the detailed/extensive work required to access the higher mark bands. Some students gave detailed explanations of some of the factors and illustrated these with good examples in supporting notes. A number of students assumed that the reader knew the product ranges under discussion but the notes only referred to 'bedroom'. This did not actually identify the product ranges. Students 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 students generated costed ideas for product ranges to be offered. Most presented on a PowerPoint slide which did not enable in depth analysis and could not access the higher mark bands. Some of the students produced realistic ideas for new product ranges. Some related the new product ranges to their customer profiles. To move into the higher mark bands students need to ensure the ideas they present for new product ranges are clearly linked to the customer profiles from their market research and the information on the slides is supported by in depth notes.

Students usually gave brief generic assessments of product quality. A few applied their discussion to the product ranges being considered. None of the students discussed product quality in terms of different quality processes. To move into higher mark bands students 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.

Unit 4 – Retail Supply Chain Management and Logistics

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

Most of the students offered some detail in describing interrelationships and interdependencies in different sub sectors. There were a few good examples used to illustrate the interrelationships. Some students produced a different flowchart for each sub sector. To move into higher mark bands students need to thoroughly explain the interrelationships and interdependencies in different sub sectors using examples to illustrate.

Most of the students focussed on what a supply chain is rather than the information and communications flow and did not offer any real discussions on how they are used to manage competing demands. Few students discussed this in any great depth. Marks tended to be credited where this was implicit in the work for other learning outcomes but very few students could access higher mark bands. To improve students should look at a pressure or demand and look at the ways communication can be used to resolve the pressures/ demands.

Most of the students were able to give at least a brief explanation on the impact of technology on supply chains using bulleted lists which were not developed enough to access higher mark bands. A noticeable number of students did give more detailed explanations. To improve students 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 (CPA) was generally disappointing and tended to be explained in terms of what CPA is rather than how it can be used to manage the improvement of stock flow. Stronger students were able to identify improvements they could make using the CPA activity but these were very much in the minority. For more students 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 students did not offer any descriptions of how to improve profitability.   A few students did include some brief general notes but then did not apply this to the supply chain.

This was one of the units where there tutor witness statements to conversations held on profitability were used as assessment evidence. This is ephemeral evidence and should only be used for units with learning outcomes on Mark Grid B which is not the case for this unit. Only substantive student produced evidence should be presented. To move into higher mark bands students need to offer extensive descriptions of ideas to improve profitability that is applied to the supply chain.

In general most of the students identified several legal factors but did not apply these to their influence the supply chain. Most of the work was generic, identified several legal Acts but then applied these businesses as a whole rather than to the retail industry. It is important that students consider how the legal factors will affect different parts of the supply chain in detail.

In this series, most of the students did not explicitly identify how external factors impact on the supply chain. Some students identified wider issues such as extreme weather conditions and referred to recent heavy and prolonged snowfall. Most focussed on transport legislation such as driver time limitations but it was very generic and not applied to supply chain location decisions. To move into higher mark bands students need to consider other location factors than transport issues. Centres may find it useful to ask students to select a specific 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 students gave very good descriptions of negative impacts on the environment but then omitted to identify how these can be minimised. Some students discussed generic legislative information but did not apply it to retail supply chains. To move into higher mark bans more detail is required on how they could reduce their negative impact on the environment linked to other parts of the supply chain.

Most of the students proposed very brief ideas for logistics storage problems. In one centre, students proposed practical ways forward for logistical storage problems for the retail company they did their work placement with. They were able to use this experience to generate 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.

Most of the students did not generate clear Critical Path Analysis (CPA) diagrams using ICT. However, most produced flowchart diagrams and showed some dependencies and this was accepted. The supporting dialogue was sometimes weak and tended to explain what CPA was rather than how it could be used to solve problems for supply chains.

The cost/benefit analysis in one of the case studies was based on a controlled assessment logistics delivery issue. The activity was rather brief and did not challenge the students. The information provided or generates by the activity was not substantial enough to enable students to complete a detailed cost/benefit analysis. This would have helped access the higher mark bands.

Many of the students tended to identify risk assessments within health and safety requirements. Some students carried out real risk assessments based on their work placement company. Most discussed generic health and safety issues but did not apply to retails supply chains. Most students omitted to explain how time and resources would be organised or actions prioritised which would be needed for the higher mark bands.

Unit 6 – Merchandising in Retail Business

Most of the students gave very brief descriptions of the purpose of merchandising. In one centre, students produced detailed training notes that focussed on a number of different stock control systems but they were discussed in terms of how these could support the merchandising function. The vehicle of designing a training program worked very well and the focus was correctly developed to that of the merchandising function rather than just stock control systems.

Most of the students offered several elements in describing interrelationships between merchandising activities. To move into the higher mark bands students need to thoroughly explain the interrelationships between the different elements and apply these to a real retail business.

Many of the students offered some detail in discussions of some of the factors that affect stock control. Some students discussed this across different size and retail sub sectors but unfortunately about 50% of the students did not. This lack of detail and explicit links to size and sub sector limiting retailer performance affected the opportunities to access higher mark bands.

Most of the students gave a basic sales forecast using previous sales data. A few students offered more detail in their future forecasts in their supporting commentary but this was not always explicit. In one centre, students were awarded marks for the discussion of actual sales figures given in the data rather than using the given data for forecasting. Students need to apply previous data to the generation of a forecast with reasons why they have projected it in this way to gain higher mark bands.

Many of the students were able to give brief descriptions on the effects of sales forecasting on their work placement retail business. This enriched the discussions that students were able to offer. Some students went on to discuss either the risks or benefits of sales forecasting. To access higher marks students really need to consider how sales forecasting is actually used by a retail business to plan staffing levels, stock control, marketing etc.

Most students were able to give at least a basic explanation of the effects of the sales forecasting plan. Stronger students were able to discuss the plan in terms of helping to meet sales targets. Higher marks would be able to be awarded if students explained about how the plan will help it meet the targets.

Most of the students gave an extensive set of potential actions a retailer can take to help meet their sales targets. Some of the students did not develop the actions in detail with bulleted explanations of each. Most of the actions offered were realistic. To improve the marks students need to explain in detail how suggested actions would help achieve sales targets.

This was a disappointing section on most of the work. In one centre all students produced a store layout as a rationale for planning stock allocation rather than a stock allocation plan. This was the basis of a good idea but in itself was not substantial enough as there were no units of stock considered in the 'allocation plan'. Some students offered no supporting dialogue to explain the stock allocation on their store layout. In another centre, students looked at different systems that could be used but did not actually offer a plan of how stock could be allocated.

Many students offered developed assessments of the risk of loss to a retail business. Unfortunately many of the students failed to identify the resources required and did not prioritise actions or organise the time required. To access the higher mark bands students do need to prioritise the actions under discussion.

Most students did not discuss or develop any rationale for the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to monitor supplier performance. However, a few students developed very brief or weak KPIs. The learning outcome is assessed against the use of KPIs rather than the rationale behind them. To access higher marks students need to discuss and apply specifically to supplier performance.

This learning outcome requires recommendations for improvements to a stock control system. Most students offered a range of detailed and realistic solutions to stock control problems. This was improved where students applied recommendations to their retail work experience placement.

Unit 7 – Management of Sales in Retail

Most of the students described the psychology of customers in terms of the ambience of the retail outlet they completed work experience with. Some students gave very good, detailed descriptions with stronger students able to discuss the 'Adoption-Innovation Curve' in a way that clearly demonstrated understanding.

Most of the students were able to describe the response to customer needs in some detail. Application of this learning outcome to the work experience of the students enriched the information and helped demonstrate understanding.

Most students offered very brief discussions of internal customers. Some students discussed internal customers and made inherent reference to external customers. Stronger students gave a balanced discussion of both internal and external customers. Once again this was generally the weakest section for most of the students. To access higher marks students need to offer more detail with examples to illustrate why these are internal or external customers.

Most students gave a well developed assessment of the customer service proposition of their retail work experience placement. The students that had the opportunity for work placement demonstrated a good level of understanding of this concept.

This required discussion of methods used to monitor, evaluate and improve customer service. Most students discussed monitoring and evaluation of customer service but then failed to apply to suggested improvements. Some students offered a few practical ideas to improve but these ideas often lacked detail.

Most students were able give good descriptions of customer service in a retail business. A few students compared their work placement retailer with John Lewis's customer service ethos. To move into higher mark bands students need to ensure they evaluate customer service in more than one retail business as required in the learning outcome criteria (note the use of plurals in the term businesses in the criteria).

Most students produced some good explanations of different aspects of retail environments. Stronger students were able to then make clear links between these elements and customer service but very few attempted to make those links. It is important that students focus the interrelationships between the customers, sales and retail environments.

Standards in this section continue to vary considerably across centres. Most students were able to set basic sales targets with brief commentary on their reasons for the targets set. Only one student included a spreadsheet to illustrate figures but then did not offer any supporting commentary. Some students discussed links between the targets set and the sales as per previous sales period analysis carried out, which would have benefited from more supporting figures rather than just a general commentary.

Most students were able to develop a comprehensive list of practical solutions to increase sales and offer practical solutions. Stronger students were able to break their proposed solutions into manageable steps but very few prioritised these steps.

This learning outcome requires proposed allocation of resources to budgets. Some students gave detailed rationale for their proposed allocations that were well reasoned. Most did not consider the deployment or costs of staff in some of their proposals. Stronger students discussed the risks associated with their proposals. To access the higher mark bands students need to develop each point and make links to their activity for an applied answer.

Unit 8 – Visual Merchandising in Retail Business

All students described the role of the visual merchandiser through the medium of either a training manual or a presentation. There were some excellent pieces of work with stronger students focussing on wider business benefits such as profitability. Poor print quality made it difficult to read some students work.

All students described the importance of visual merchandising principles in retail through the medium as the previous learning outcome. Most of the students identified the principles stronger students were able to state why they are important to retail businesses.

Most students met the design brief by producing a scale drawing with relevant annotations. Students need to be advised that photos and graphics can be used if they are not confident in their own art work as this was apparent in some of their commentary and is not the focus of the learning outcome. The finished artefact should give some indication of the planned visual display. The photos of final installations were particularly useful. Stronger students work was supported by comprehensive notes on the rationale for the display offered. Without annotated drawings students could only achieve in the lowest Mark Band. It is important that they include drawings/visuals with detailed annotations to achieve higher scores.

Most students produced designs adapted in some detail to respond to changing circumstances. Stronger pieces of work were supported with further annotations and notes that gave the rationale for the changes in the design. Some students produced minimal changes and/or did not give any reasons for the changes.

Most students produced brief explanations of the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods. Some students 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 students only gave brief explanations of each method and few applied it to their own assignment work.

Most students assessed the impact of their own visual merchandising installation on customers through the use of questionnaires. Most offered underdeveloped assessments of their results.

The graphical analyses were effective but the supporting discussions were rather brief.

Most students carried out a generic analysis on leadership and team work which was not based on team activities. Assignment briefs appeared to be designed to be completed by individuals rather than in teams. Therefore students were not able to reflect on their own leadership contribution and that of their colleagues so could not move out of mark band one.

Grade Boundaries

Grade boundaries for this, and all other papers, can be found on the website on this link:
http://www.edexcel.com/iwant_to/Pages/grade-boundaries.aspx