



## HERIOT-WATT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

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### HRM / ORGANISATIONAL BEHAVIOUR - STAGE 2

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#### EXAMINERS REPORT – DIET: JUNE 2010

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| Overall Comments (to be supplied by each examiner)  |
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| <p>Answers to the questions in section A were a mixed bag. Some very good and some very poor answers were given. Most answers fell within the grades D and E. It appears that candidates do not like to be asked to use their understanding of a topic but prefer to be asked to reiterate what has been written elsewhere.</p> <p>The best scores were achieved by combining a relatively high standard in terms of language, structure and content. The marks and grades were consistent across both subject areas, Organisational Behaviour and HRM. The students marked at the upper end of the scale struck a good balance between description and analysis. These students also linked theory and practice and this was particularly evident in the questions relating to stress, flexibility and reward systems. Students thus demonstrated both subject knowledge and understanding, and applied this to relevant work situations. Further, students at the upper end of the marking scale set their answers out in a clear and readable structure and avoided the pitfalls of simply regurgitating lecturers' slides, etc.</p> <p>A weakness across all students was that they failed to critically question the concepts, ideas, models, etc. given in the questions.</p> <p>There is still a major failing on many students' parts to ignore the question on the paper and answer the question they wished was on the paper. It was also evident that many students had revised questions that did not appear on the paper and rather than waste their knowledge they applied it regardless of the question asked. This was especially the case with the question on Assessment Centres where many students wrote answers on performance appraisals which were by and large irrelevant. They were marked down accordingly.</p> |

### **General Comments: Section A**

The questions in section A of the paper were constructed such that the answers would require students to apply their knowledge rather than to regurgitate what is written in the text books. As such, it has only been moderately successful. Many students gave answers to questions that they wish had been asked, rather than using the information they had gathered.

### **Question A1**

Fewer students attempted to answer this question. Many answers talked about leadership styles in general. Those that answered the question correctly gained good marks, though few knew of the dyad model of leadership.

### **Question A2**

Many answers to this question presented the causes of occupational stress and not methods of coping with organisational stress. Cooper's model of stress was presented in many answers, though this was not asked for. Those who gave only the causes of stress gained less than half marks.

### **Question A3**

This question was well answered, and most candidates appeared to know how power at work is gained. Many students wrote of the 5 sources of power given by French and Raven, and if that was the main content of the answer, this would gain about one-third of the available marks.

### **Question B1**

The majority of students who tackled this question correctly identified the four main forms of flexibility. Those who gained a low pass mark outlined the four forms but did not go much beyond that. Those at the upper end of the marking range included a model of the flexible firm showing the distinctions between core and peripheral workers and these students noted that there are two peripheral groups along with the use of sub-contractors and outsourcing. The better students gave a clear outline of the strengths and weaknesses of the model by highlighting, amongst other things, the contrasting conditions under which core and peripheral workers operate. Factors taken into account here included the impact of flexibility on the quality of staff, products and organisational commitment. The better answers also considered the extent to which divisions between the two groups might lead to organisational conflict and the ways in which the organisation might have to deal with the outcomes of division.

### **Question B2**

The better answers considered a wide range of factors from both internal and external perspectives. Answers at the upper end of the scale structured their answers around the three key determinants of a reward system which are the need to attract staff, retain staff and motivate staff and developed these in detail. Factors taken into account by the better students included the ability of the organisation to pay market rates, the levels of skills, knowledge and experience of current staff, the fit between the culture of the organisation and the ways in which it rewards staff, the timing of rewards and from an external perspective they considered benchmarking against competitors, legal constraints such as minimum wage payments and discrimination law and the state of the macro economy.

The better answers also addressed factors such as the need for transparency, equity and fairness in any reward system.

It was clear from many of the weaker answers that the students were stuck for a third essay and they elected to set out a great deal of irrelevant information on either schedules of reinforcement or performance appraisal, topics they evidently had studied but which unfortunately for them did not appear on the exam paper.

### **Question B3**

The better answers correctly placed assessment centres in the context of the recruitment and selection process and pointed out that is one tool amongst many. These students focused on the issues of the reliability and validity of the selection methods and considered the extent to which assessment centres are both reliable and valid. Further, the better answers outlined in suitable and sufficient detail the various activities undertaken at an assessment centre such as simulations, role-playing, group discussions and brainstorming and linked these to aspects such as career development. Further, the better answers highlighted the similarities between assessment centres and development centres.

The weaker students saw it as an opportunity to tell the reader everything they knew about performance appraisal, amongst other things but which was completely redundant.