



HERIOT-WATT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT / INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT - STAGE 3

EXAMINER'S REPORT – DIET: JUNE 2010

Overall Comments (to be supplied by each examiner)
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<p>First, timing of answers – that is, the choice of the amount of time for candidates to spend on each question – is more difficult in this examination than many, given the incidence of the important case-study question. Far too many candidates are not giving sufficient thought to this, with the result that they run out of time in tackling their last question attempted. I strongly suggest that all candidates commence this paper with Question 1, and that they devote at least an hour and a half to it in order to read the case carefully, summarise the main points in their rough notes, and broadly plan their answers to the three parts. Candidates will then have 45 minutes for each of the two remaining questions in the paper, which should be entirely adequate.</p>
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<p>Second, fewer candidates than in the past are showing signs of preparing for their answers to individual questions by drawing up a rough draft of their ideas. This results in answers that move from “First, I want to”, to “and another point is”, to “something else to bear in mind” and “one other thing” rather than telling the reader what is coming and taking the reader through the relevant material in a planned and logical way. Answers written in this unplanned way seldom convey to the reader a mature level of analysis that examiners are looking for at this stage.</p>
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<p>Third, while examples are welcomed of the various ideas to be covered in answers, many candidates are substituting these for a clear statement of the underlying concepts or theories. This relates not only to the various conceptual bases explaining the internationalisation of business but also, for example, to discussion of the importance of business culture. In too many cases candidates showed no understanding of the basic ‘models’ in the literature – and fully discussed in the Core Reading – and merely relied upon their own anecdotal material.</p>

General Comments: Section A

Answers in this Section, particularly when it was the first question attempted by candidates, were generally good. Candidates clearly understand the applications of strategic group mapping and the various components of Porter's Five Forces Framework. Nevertheless, this framework presents one or two additional hurdles when applied to the retail sector. This applies in particular to the distinction between Competitive Rivalry, Market Entry and Substitute Products/Services. The final question in this Section was generally fairly well done.

General Comments: Section B

The first question in this section – on 'pioneering' companies – was generally well done, but the second one was frequently less well done in terms of a lack of focus on the way in which business growth places particular strains on the ability of businesses "to manage their activities".

General Comments: Section C

The questions in this section call for more conventional extended essay responses and were generally well done by students. However, there is a need in both of these questions for candidates to focus their responses around the basic concepts rather than simply spilling out more or less relevant examples. Within this Section, Question C1 (b) was generally better answered than C1 (a) because it invited a factual and organised response. By contrast, even a number of candidates who for Question C2 (a) understood aspects of culture affecting international business were less certain in question C2 (b) as to how companies could improve their performance in this area.