



HERIOT-WATT MANAGEMENT PROGRAMME

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT / INTERNATIONAL STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT - STAGE 3

EXAMINER'S REPORT – DIET: DECEMBER 2009

Overall Comments

Taking all scripts into account, the spread of marks was much as one might expect, although it is always disappointing to find a proportion of failures at this stage.

There were three concerns noted when marking the scripts:

First, there is a certain incidence of candidates passing overall despite not attempting all three questions. This was not an exceptional situation and seems intuitively unsatisfactory.

Second, there was a certain incidence of candidates not attempting parts of individual questions. Candidates clearly need advice on the dangers of this approach.

Third, more generally there is a growing incidence of 'scrappy' answers, including candidates answering questions in parts in random order across their whole script without indicating to the examiners where to find additional material, failing clearly to begin each new answer on a fresh page (despite the Instructions to Candidates on this matter) and a generally poor layout of answers.

[Board of Examiners Comment: While the results were allowed to stand at this diet, concern was raised that students were passing without attempting all three sections. The Board indicated that this would be reviewed at future diets and students who did not attempt all three sections may not be given passing grades by the Board]

Overall however, it has to be recognised that the performance of candidates was reassuring.

General Comments: Section A

This section was generally well done, with candidates overall showing a clear understanding of Porter's framework. My own experience of teaching retailing strategy is that the application of the Five Forces Framework in this sector is perhaps more difficult than first appears. I was therefore quite forgiving of what I would regard as 'mistakes' in respect of some dimensions of the framework on the part of individual candidates (particularly competition from 'substitutes'), providing candidates demonstrated a clear understanding of the framework itself. Again following the pattern of last year, many candidates regarded section (c) of this question as an opportunity to have some general afterthoughts, whereas the question is quite specific in its requirements at this stage. Marks awarded in this section were

generally lower than for parts (a) and (b).

General Comments: Section B

This comprised an unfamiliar area of questioning for most students, but one that was entirely relevant and which had the effect of distinguishing among the quality of the candidates. My only slight reservation is that with four sections, some of which attracted relatively low maximum possible marks, it is difficult to reflect accurately the comparative quality of the individual answers given by a student and overall the marks for this question reflected the quality of the answers for each candidate taking their full answers for the section together.

General Comments: Section C

Questions in this section also allowed one to distinguish among the quality of the candidates. In both C1 and C2 the latter part of the questions, however, presented some problems for candidates. Candidates should have paid particular attention to the 'consequences for consumers' in C1(b) and marks were deducted if this focus was not applied. However, in C2(b) very few candidates paid particular attention to 'the internal organisation structure' dimension of the question, and was more forgiving if candidates reflected on more general aspects such as business culture and personnel matters. Students should read questions carefully and focus on the question asked as the questions themselves were entirely fair.