

Business and Management

Range and suitability of the work submitted

Overall, the majority of candidates chose suitable topics and were able to conduct systematic research. There were some very weak essays and some extremely good ones, resulting in a broad range of marks.

The better essays permitted candidates to develop an argument based on their own research data. Generally, the best essays had simple research questions and concentrated upon a small firm or business. Candidates seemed to find the information from such organisations easier to collect and interpret.

Narrow research questions allowed candidates to sharply focus their analysis, giving their essays sophistication and clarity. The better candidates were able to apply theoretical aspects and business techniques to a manageable case study, integrating them into their arguments.

The weaker essays were mainly the result of poor research questions that usually lacked focus or were difficult to research effectively. Some of the research questions were too complex, vague or over-ambitious, often attempting to address the global business practices of multinational companies or the problems faced by an entire industry. In these cases, candidates tended to produce low-quality research based on secondary data and/or very descriptive essays with disjointed answers and no clear analysis.

A few research questions focused on an historical event, which again resulted in descriptive rather than analytical essays. Finally, some titles were offered as statements rather than questions. There is still a tendency for inappropriate essays to be submitted for B&M. Candidates and supervisors must check the criteria and guidance notes.

Candidate performance against each criterion

General Assessment Criteria

Criterion A The Research question

Most candidates presented their research question early in the essay and chose clear and unambiguous topics that allowed for personal research. Some research questions were too broad and lacked focus, making them difficult to be treated effectively and preventing the candidates from developing a convincing argument. Some essays were merely descriptive or chose a question to which the answer was already known, or confirmed a decision that had already been made.

Criterion B Approach to the research question

Performance was usually related to the nature of the question. Most candidates used relevant primary and secondary sources. Some, however, relied solely on secondary research and candidates with too general themes struggled to collect data. Opportunities for SWOT and PEST should be used where appropriate.

Criterion C Analysis/interpretation

Able candidates carried out competent interpretations of the data they had collected, but sometimes the analysis was not thorough and could have benefited from more sophisticated techniques. Very few candidates produced a full analysis that warranted full marks. Weaker candidates tended to generalise about their own experiences.

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Criterion D Argument/evaluation

This was one of the weakest criteria. Almost all candidates made some attempt to produce arguments but very few were completely developed and substantiated. Many candidates were subjective in their evaluation and based their arguments on their own opinions rather than on statistical evidence. More able candidates were able to take their analysis and fully develop a business argument from it.

Criterion E Conclusion

Almost all candidates wrote valid conclusions that were consistent with the research question and followed on logically from the arguments they made. Many candidates lost marks when they did not substantiate their conclusions fully or failed to deal with unresolved questions.

Criterion F Abstract

Most candidates produced an adequate abstract. Some, however, did not follow the guidance and therefore did not state clearly the research question, the scope of the investigation and the conclusions. This is an area where marks are lost unnecessarily. On the occasions the word count exceeds 300 words. Again, this could be avoided.

Criterion G Formal presentation

This aspect was good and there were some outstanding documents. Almost all candidates produced professional essays, making effective use of ICT, diagrams and charts to illustrate their points. The majority made good use of appendices, headings, tables of contents and bibliographies. A few candidates lost marks due to inappropriate methods of referencing and bibliography. At times, useful information that should have been in the main body of the report was put in the appendix.

Criterion H Holistic judgement

Some candidates had clearly become very involved in their research and committed to the project. These candidates produced work of an impressive standard. Many candidates, however, failed to be inventive or creative with the question. Supervisors need to write comments on the extended essay cover to assist with this criterion.

Subject Assessment Criteria

Criterion J Theoretical aspects of organisational activity in relation to an actual case study, or studies

Most candidates showed good relevant use and application of the subject theories, using case studies as a basis for their essays and linking them to their investigations. Weaker candidates made little or no reference to business concepts or did not explain the reason for such use.

Criterion K Formulation of the problem/s to be studied in a decision-making framework

This was generally tackled quite well. Most of the candidates made an effort to use the 'decision-making model' but some methods were quite vague and sometimes the need for decision-making was unclear.

Criterion L Effects of change on organisational activities

This criterion was generally quite weak with many candidates offering limited or no reference to how the organisation would be changed by a decision and how the change would be managed. This was usually due to the research question. Some students showed very good application with implicit reference.

Criterion M Selection and application of appropriate analytical tools and/or statistical techniques

Candidates showed much variation in this criterion. More able candidates used a wider range of analytical tools including SWOT/PEST, questionnaires and investment appraisal - especially those who had chosen a financial question. Weaker ones relied upon SWOT analyses, copied existing analyses or failed to use any at all. Sometimes the techniques were not applied clearly to the essay and

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often the SWOT analysis listed S, W, O and T with no analysis. Opportunities are external but many candidates give internal examples.

Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates

- Supervisors should advise candidates to choose a question that will enable them to carry out personal research rather than summarising various secondary sources.
- Supervisors should discourage candidates from using very long bullet-pointed lists.
- Supervisors should advise candidates not to throw away marks unnecessarily on the abstract and presentation criteria.
- Supervisors should advise candidates to choose focused titles, which would allow more of the business criteria to be met.
- Supervisors should ensure that candidates identify relevant theoretical aspects before starting their research and ensure that candidates concentrate on one specific theory or a very small range of theories.
- Supervisors should encourage candidates to use focused, simple research questions.
- Supervisors should encourage candidates to base their research question on a problem or issue that is currently being faced, instead of one that has already been addressed.
- Supervisors should advise candidates - before they begin their extended essays - that the research question should be based upon an organisation that is willing to cooperate and provide information and, if the data is too difficult to obtain, an alternative research question should be considered.
- SWOT analyses should be used and opportunities should be external.