

## BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

### Overall grade boundaries

<b>Grade:</b>	E	D	C	B	A
<b>Mark range:</b>	0 - 7	8 - 15	16 - 22	23 - 28	29 - 36

### The range and suitability of the work submitted

It was pleasing to see that an increasing number of students followed the requirements set up for the May 2009 examinations and produced excellent or very good extended essays. These students produced essays that were well researched in terms of the use of varied secondary sources, the application of relevant models for this subject and the research question. The use of critical thinking /evaluative skills was often combined with well substantiated conclusions and recommendations.

Still, the range and suitability varied considerably both between centres and within centres. While some students were awarded the top 34-36 marks, some earned very few marks overall, 7 marks or under which could well be contributing to a candidate failing the IB Diploma.

Although a relatively wide range in performance is somewhat expected, there were some noticeable reasons for candidates not performing perhaps as well as they should have done.

The **most noticeable** issue **still** being observed by many examiners was the fact that students in some centres based their research on **only or mainly primary sources**. Moreover, the focus of their research was narrow. This important issue has been raised in other reports but it appears that some supervisors and hence students are still not aware of the current requirements.

The focus has been changed to '*Students should use as the basis of their extended essay, secondary data supported, where appropriate, by primary research*'. The new focus was agreed by senior examiners in order to:

- distinguish the EE from the IA
- help with the difficulty for students in various parts of the world getting access to real organisations.

**Hence, the expectation now is that the students produce a more academic research paper with the main focus on secondary data.** Basing the essay on only or mainly primary research affected students' performance, particularly in criteria C, D, and K.

As mentioned in previous subject reports, it is expected that under the current focus, students should use a variety of secondary sources and not use solely or mainly text books/ theoretical

Internet sites as their secondary sources. Some examples of possible sources are given in the new guide.

Moreover, some supervisors still commented on how difficult (as well as time consuming) it was for their students to carry out their primary research. These difficulties could have been avoided had the students changed the focus of their research.

Other general issues were that:

- several essays covered lots of areas/topics but in a superficial manner.
- in some centres, the research questions were very similar (but applied to different organisations) and identical models were used and applied in a very similar manner even where the appropriateness of such models was somewhat limited. These essays/methods seemed to be guided by the supervisors. Such a generic analytical approach could also prevent students from displaying a more personal insight with individual flair.
- many students continued to produce a glorified IA. Judging by the supervisors' reports, they had done so with the full support of the supervisors.

### **Ethical issues**

A minority of candidates wrote unsupported assertions regarding corruption and the use of bribery in a particular country (ies). This approach is unacceptable academically and ethically and is not in the spirit of the IB Diploma. If there is evidence of corruption and this evidence can be fully referenced and accounted for, then the students should have done so. If the source of such an assertion is the manager his/her strong words should have been countered and checked. Some critical thinking should have been exercised.

### **The choice of the organisation.**

Very few students did not base their research on an organisation or an industry. However, it was surprising to see that some students did not disclose the name of the organisation. As the research is expected to be academic rather than practical (as for the IA) the rationale for confidentiality is not really valid. Moreover, secondary sources should be used and referenced accurately.

## **Candidate performance against each criterion**

### **Criterion A: research question**

**Nearly all candidates used a question which is good practice.**

More students (compared to previous sessions) chose a research question which was sharply focused, making effective treatment possible within the word limit. Some research questions were too broad and lacked focus, making them difficult to be treated effectively. The better titles/ research questions were forward looking and/ or back ward looking ones that encouraged analysis and evaluation.

As before, some titles were very backward looking and **descriptive**. The students simply described what organisation X had done. A small number of titles were entirely inappropriate and resulted in generalised descriptions of an event, only loosely related to business and management. Students should take care to write the research question in the introduction.

### **Criterion B: introduction**

A good number of the students were successful in demonstrating the context of the research question. Moreover, these students clearly explained the significance of the topic and why it was worthy of investigation. Nevertheless, many were awarded 1 mark out of 2 due to lack of substantiated evidence of an issue / significance.

There were a few candidates who made no attempt to explain the worthiness/importance of the topic.

### **Criterion C: investigation**

As mentioned above, the inappropriate focus used by many students resulted in poor performance here. Primary researches were credited **if they actually added value** to the secondary research. Consequently, many candidates were not able to reach the top two descriptors bands as only *'a limited range of appropriate sources have been consulted'*.

The good candidates had consulted a wide range of appropriate sources and collected sufficient data. In most cases, the students did not challenge the validity/ reliability of the information. Many students also did not search for or use conflicting data/ evidence.

Some students still asked a small sample of customers/employees questions on a global or even a major strategic issue of a well established organisation. This type of primary research did not add value to the overall quality of the research.

Again, an IA type research question, which focuses on a small organisation, resulted in students interviewing the managers and perhaps some employees or customers but their research lacked academic rigor and the subject's requirements were not fully met.

### **Criterion D: knowledge and understanding of the topic studied**

As stated in the guide *'this criterion requires students to show detailed knowledge and understanding of the topic being researched and its academic context'*

Explicit use and explanation of the academic context was often lacking. Many students did not go beyond some reference to or definition of the nature of a model like PEST or SWOT given in any text book or popular websites. The use of textbooks and students' online sites does not imply sound, rigorous academic research.

Many models were superficially used. Unsubstantiated comments/ arguments were often apparent.

The PEST and SWOT models were often mechanically used by many students, often in the same centre. Many students assume that these models should not be used at all times even if the question is backward looking. Moreover, students did not make the connection between

the PEST and the SWOT framework. Such an inappropriate use of models did not add to answering the research question.

In some centres students used many models in a very mechanistic way which resulted in a very superficial and often unsubstantiated application and analysis. For examples, the PEST, SWOT, Porter 5 Forces, the decision tree, Lewin force field analysis and some methods of investment appraisal were used together.

Please note:

*'To demonstrate an appropriate level of knowledge and understanding, it is likely that the students will have to use a range of sources'* (EE Guide P.55)

### **Criterion E: reasoned argument**

This criterion is about constructing an argument and how the students expressed both sides of any relevant arguments within a secure theoretical framework.

The candidates who reached the higher levels were the ones who made a very clear and logical link between the research question, the data collected and arguments presented and the conclusions. Many did so. Those students who were not able to access the top bands were the ones whose essays were narrative and descriptive.

### **Criterion F: application of analytical and evaluative skills**

Those candidates who presented the relevant argument in an analytical manner, used critical thinking combined with an appropriate use of theories/ concepts and relevant data, were the ones who were able to reach the top levels in this criterion.

The reasons that many candidates were not able to reach the top bands were because:

- the relative value and importance of arguments presented were lacking. Many essays were largely one sided.
- there was a lack of evaluative skills and the use of critical thinking throughout the essay.
- there was a lack of empirical and grounded theoretical support. Again, students should go beyond a minimalistic use of definitions and concepts from text books.

### **Criterion G: use of language**

An effective use of business and management language which communicated clearly was evident in many essays.

Only a few weaker essays demonstrated limited use of business terminology which at times lacked precision.

### **Criterion H: conclusion**

Many students produced relevant, substantiated conclusions that were consistent with the evidence presented. Some students produced conclusions that were not entirely consistent with the evidence or unsubstantiated due to lack of critical thinking.

However, a small number of students produced conclusions at the beginning of their research and the rest of their essay largely attempted to support it. Other students provided new information in their conclusions. Some obvious unresolved issues were often missing. Consequently, these students were not able to reach the top level.

**Please note:** for many good and focused research questions **recommendations** are not essential and even impossible. Students were not penalised for not providing recommendations.

### **Criterion I: formal presentation**

Most of the students produced essays that merited some marks. In some essays the presentation was excellent. These essays conformed to the required academic standards. It was also pleasing to see that most students adhered to the word limit.

It was noticeable that many students still do not write the 'Bibliography' section in an appropriate way. Confusion between 'references' and 'bibliography' still exists. Dates of access of various web sites were all too often omitted. Lack of references throughout the research was also apparent among many students. Please note that unreferenced information is really unsubstantiated information and this practice is not acceptable in academic research. Students should be aware that all information/ data have to be sourced including the appendices and in the SWOT/ PEST analysis.

Some students, notably from certain centres, produced their research in a report format and /or a document for the management. Unlike the IA, the extended essay is an academic research essay.

Students should attempt to show evidence of use of sources in the body of the essay not just produce a long list of Internet sources and text books with minimal evidence of the use of such sources.

### **Criterion J: abstract**

Many students were awarded the top marks for their abstracts. Those who were not were the ones that omitted one of the required elements: often the scope/ how the investigation was undertaken. Only very few students exceeded the 300 word limit.

Two marks were awarded for abstracts that presented a good overview of the research and had stated all three elements required. Students lost marks if they did not include all elements or did not state them clearly.

### **Criterion K: holistic judgment**

Many essays were judged to be routine and hence were awarded level 2 or less. Considerable evidence of such quality' was missing in most essays.

When students:

- used primary sources/ research only

- followed a very prescribed format and/or used and apply the same subject models in the same manner as their peers in the same centres
- were supervised for more than the recommended hours (the length of supervision varied considerably, up to 10 hours were declared by teachers)
- used no more than the text book to define/ explain some models and theories

They were judged to demonstrate only 'some' or 'little' evidence of intellectual initiative, depth of understanding and insight.

## **Recommendations for the supervision of future candidates**

Ensure that the essay titles are sharply focused and therefore within the scope of the 4000 word limit. Over ambitious RQs normally result in superficial and shallow analysis. Ensure that the research question is wider in scope than the ones chosen for the IA. Ensure that the research is based on secondary sources beyond text books/websites. If primary research is carried out to supplement the secondary research, it should add value and really target some influential people within or outside the organisation

Advise students on what is meant by good evaluation i.e. more than just summarising previous arguments/comments or making a brief recommendation.

Advise students on appropriate ways of citing references and writing the bibliography. There are many web sites that help on how to write a bibliography and citations.

Stick to the suggested 3-5 hours of supervision.

Encourage your student to show individual flair and use their own initiative.