

Examiners' Report/
Principal Examiner Feedback

Summer 2012

PL Retail Business (RB301) Paper 01

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Introduction

This was the third series in which RB301 Examining the World of Retail has been assessed and this report gives guidance to centres on the performance of learners. Where appropriate we have advised centres on ways they can help their learners improve their performance.

Generally this paper performed as expected and generated marks across the whole spectrum for the level. There seemed to be fewer students with very low scores. Those achieving U grades were often much closer to the E grade than in previous series. Generally level 3 learners were able to access the questions which began with; identify, outline, describe and explain. Questions beginning with the following; analyse, assess and evaluate performed less well and helped differentiate between candidates and it is success on these questions that will deliver the higher grades.

It was pleasing this series that many centres had clearly taken on board feedback from the January series with identify, describe and explain questions as these continued to improve. There were still significant numbers who did not access above half marks on levelled (analyse, assess and evaluate) questions and full marks on those responses require further development. In addition some of the topics learners struggled with in the two previous series tended to improve once more as centres are clearly addressing issues that are enabling learners to perform better.

General comments

The examination questions were designed to cover all four Learning Outcomes (LO) and the majority of associated assessment criteria. The best learners showed a sophisticated understanding of the relevant material and were able to apply this to Retail Business and specifically IKEA. Learners did less well where they failed to grasp the basic concepts or were unable to apply these to a Retail Business context. A number of concepts were examined for the first time and in some cases performed poorly. For question 4d, learners were asked to analyse how progression opportunities to the success of a store. Many had little grasp of what this concept was and performed poorly. This resulted in many scoring 0 for this question.

Performance on the paper was more consistent with question 3 only doing marginally worse than the other questions. It was a poor part c looking at CSR that dragged the average for the question down. Question 2 performed best thanks to a strong parts a and b which were on the need for good value in an economic downturn and why goods popular in the UK may not be popular in other countries. Concepts students performed least well on included gap analysis, attractiveness of emerging markets, importance of innovation, importance of logistics for profits, desirability of CSR and as outlined previously progression opportunities. The majority of these questions have previously been assessed and continued to cause a concern and may need to be the focus of more preparation for when examined in

future series. Questions where learners performed well included objectives, economic downturn, popularity of products abroad, job adverts and training and development.

For questions requiring higher order skills such as analyse, assess and evaluate it was often the failure to consider alternative viewpoints and to make a justified decision that limited performance. Too often they will give a one sided view and this frequently leaves them, capped at often half marks. In many cases they were demonstrating and making developed answers and had they offered the other side of the argument would have accessed the top mark band. Below you will find specific guidance on performance on each question.

It is necessary for learners to apply their responses to the retail context and developing student's skills in understanding the requirements of the command word to enable them to provide responses that can be awarded marks at the top end.

Comments on individual questions

Q1

The context related to IKEA and its international expansion in to the United Arab Emirates with questions relating to gap analysis, objectives and the attractiveness of emerging markets. Responses this year tended to be weak for gap analysis but learners performed better and more consistently on parts b and c. There were not so many learners achieving full marks on these questions but fewer achieving zero than in previous series. A key development for centres is to ensure their learners can apply to the context of the question. Those that did performed very well.

Q1a

Gap analysis continues to be a challenging concept for learners. The majority scored zero on this question. More effort needs to be made with learners to see how gap analysis will be used to identify gaps in new markets that their brands can fill. Many did not have an understanding of what gap analysis was and focussed on the need for research and competitors. Those achieving the higher grades were not that much more likely to perform well on this question. The best responses looked at how they would have identified gaps and gave examples and then explained how they would have seen it as profitable and therefore entered the market.

Q1b

All Learners identified an objective so were able to access at least the first mark. Where this was clearly relevant to the new store they performed better. Many learners focussed on the reasons for setting the objectives but this was not the question set.

Q1c

This question differentiated well with those learners achieving higher overall doing well on this question and those performing less well doing poorly. The very best responses clearly linked Abu Dhabi's expansion and how the middle class will now need to fill their new homes/developments with furniture. The first mover argument and wealth were most commonly used. The key to success was the link between IKEA and Abu Dhabi.

Q2

This question focussed on IKEA's popularity. Questions focussed on its popularity in a downturn, other countries and innovations importance. The questions on the downturn and the popularity of products abroad were well done with learners able to identify and develop responses for explain questions. Innovation was less well done and all learners were capped at half marks for a one sided assessment. The importance of logistics and the supply chain was poorly done. Very few went on to link to profitability.

Q2a

Most learners were able to identify why good value products are popular in a downturn and went on to develop their responses several time at achieve higher marks. Commonly they talked about falling income and why cheaper products help but also how they want to ensure they buy a durable products that lasts to avoid giving to replace it. This latter aspect was particularly well explained in many cases.

Q2b

The question required learners to explain one reason why products popular in the UK might not be popular in other countries. Learners that did best considered how furniture available in the UK through IKEA might not be appropriate for people in different countries. There were some superb responses from learners who achieved the higher grades but this was a challenging question for weaker learners.

Q2c

This question needed learners to assess the importance of innovation to the popularity of furniture sold by IKEA. As previously highlighted no learner accessed above mark band 2 as they failed to consider another side of the argument, for example about how other factors other than innovation may be important. Learners often knew what innovation was and why IKEA would want to be innovative. To improve they need to focus on why it is so important and why it may be less important. The level of development with some of the one sided work suggests learners who would have been able to access the top marks.

Q2d

The importance of one activity of logistics and supply chain function was poorly understood. Only two learners accessed above half marks for offering a two sided argument because they went on to look at how logistics may not be so important. The majority of learners were able to identify a relevant activity of the functional areas. A significant number went on to develop this to explain why it was important. This question acted as a good differentiator as those scoring higher overall did well on this question and lower scoring overall did less well here. A successful strategy on these sorts of questions would be to look at why the functional areas role is important but then look at how other functional areas may be more important.

Q3

The context related to IKEA and covered concepts including functional areas, TQM and CSR. This question was least well answered by learners and this was mainly due to poor performance on the CSR assess question.

Q3a

Most were able to identify how the product recall would affect the customer service or finance department and offered a point of development in their description. This question was a good differentiator between the top and bottom performing learners.

Q3b

Learners were able to identify why TQM might have prevented a product recall with some limited development. Common answers spoke of picking up errors at different stages and how the problem would have been resolved at an earlier stage. A number of learners spoke about quality more generically and it is important that it is the importance of TQM and not quality control that is discussed.

Q3c

Learners that scored most highly on this question offered a one sided account of how CSR would be desirable. Unfortunately few looked at how CSR would be less desirable for instance due to costs so were unable to access above half marks. The best learners did make links to the questions about how they were achieving CSR by recalling products.

Q4

The next context was focussed on LO4. Learners had to answer questions relating to job adverts, training, internal communication and progression opportunities. It was the final part that most learners struggled with.

Q4a

There was a good understanding of why advertising on a specialist website would be appropriate. Many learners identified that people using the site would have experience in the sector. The best responses developed further how they would need less training.

Q4b

The performance of this question on training and development showed learners understood why it was important. The better learners applied this to new staff at the new store/ warehouse. Weaker learners spoke more generically.

Q4c

The question explored the reasons internal communications were important. Most understood what internal communications were and why they would be important to IKEA. Again weaker learners did not link to the opening of a new large store in Reading. Better learners understood that messages have to go through more people and why it needs to be as smooth as possible to ensure they get through to all staff clearly.

Q4d

The concept was not understood with many not understanding that this was about giving chances to employees to move up through the business. Most learners accessed level 1 and up to 2 marks with very few going to half marks. More work in centres needs covering on this topic.

Q5

The question was about evaluating whether entering the Indian market would be the right decision for IKEA. Again most either looked at how this was a poor decision or good decision without considering the other side of the argument. This limited their performance to half marks. There was good use of the case study to identify points but these needed to be developed in order to access marks just quoting the case without offering any explanation was not credit worthy. A small number of learners did offer a two sided discussion and in these cases it is important that they made a decision and justify this as to whether it is or not a good decision.

Recommendations

- Ensure learners can describe or explain what gap analysis is and how it can be used
- Make sure learners know how functional areas including logistics contribute to profits
- Ensure learners understand what is meant by TQM and that they focus on this and not quality control in questions.
- More work need to be done to explain both what CSR is and how it is important
- Progression opportunities were a concept poorly understood by learners and needs further work in centres.
- Ensure learners follow instructions as to how many points to discuss- if it says explain one only explain one. They will only be rewarded for their best response
- Ensure learners use the marks available for each question to consider how many development points to offer
- Ensure learners understand that analyse will need a two sided discussion
- Ensure learners understand the command word evaluate requires them to offer a two sided argument and then offer a conclusion that they can justify.

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