STAGE 1 PROJECT

The number of candidates resubmitting projects was low. Therefore generalisations are difficult to make. However the comments made regarding the summer projects still apply. The biggest complaint would be the lack of understanding of basic marketing practice. Candidates were unable to identify and discuss the marketing practices of some of Ireland's largest companies, e.g. Kerry Group, Glanbia, etc.

Content Issues

The project brief offered a suggested outline and structure for the report. Students following this structure benefited from having an outline which ensured that each part of the assignment was addressed.

The first part of the project asked students to select a company involved in food processing in Ireland and to provide the reader with some background on the business activities of this company. Generally this part of the report was completed to a satisfactory level.

One comment must be made which was also made in the Summer. A number of students 'cut and pasted' complete sections from company or other websites without referencing the section in the body text. This constitutes plagiarism and resulted in marks being deducted where it was deemed widespread. Students were informed in the project outline that they must acknowledge all sources. Further comment is made on this in the section of the report dealing with technical issues.

The second part of the project asked students to provide a detailed overview of the marketing activities undertaken by the company. Those students who achieved very high marks went beyond a simple overview of the marketing mix and included other areas such as segmentation, targeting and positioning; consumer buyer behaviour; and strategic marketing. Throughout this section students should have demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of marketing. It was encouraging to read the issues raised by some students. Students who achieved lower grades or who failed the project did not adequately address this section and therefore could not analyse the marketing activities. It was disappointing to see that students could not even identify the marketing mix of these companies, much less discuss the segmentation strategies undertaken or other more complex issues.

The third section of the report required the student to analyse the quality of the marketing activities of their chosen company and to compare the marketing practice of the company with the marketing theory from their text books. Again the comments made in the Summer are worth repeating in the hope that future students might achieve better grades.

This section was not well addressed by the majority of students. Many did not even attempt this section or else gave it less than a page of their total project. This comes back to failing to read the project brief. Students should have read that this section of the project was worth 30% of the marks. Yet they wrote pages and pages on the marketing activities of their company but no assessment of the quality of this activity. Rather than grounding this assessment in either the data they collected or the theory they had studied many students just gave their opinion on marketing with broad unsubstantiated generalisations often completely irrelevant to what had gone previously.

Overall where students used various data sources they tended to perform better than those students who depended exclusively on company web sites. By using additional sources the students were able to offer an objective opinion on the activities of the company and in some cases offer comparisons against competitors.

Examiners expectations on grade categories

As. Outstanding projects. Well researched, well structured and well written submissions containing a superior level of analysis and demonstrating a strong command of theoretical concepts. These students followed the project brief precisely in terms of what was required, with excellent references and a professional standard of presentation.

Bs. These were good projects that covered all the points but contained a lower level of analysis and usually did not compare theory and practice to any great extent. In many cases these projects would have achieved the highest grade if the same level of thought was given to considering the analysis as went into gathering the data.

Cs. These were the 'bullet point' projects. The company summary and marketing activities were listed but not discussed and a superficial level of analysis conducted. Students in this category rarely looked beyond the marketing mix as a framework for examining the marketing activities of their chosen company. Generally they were not as well structured or presented as projects achieving higher grades. However a small number were in the 'style over substance' category where presentation was deemed more important than content.

Ds. These projects contained little discussion of the points. In many cases the projects were limited to a very rudimentary examination of the topic and contained little discussion and no analysis. Students here demonstrated a very basic knowledge of marketing concepts which was barely sufficient to allow them to progress. They also tended to be poorly organised, structured and presented.

Many students achieving this grade failed to read the project brief correctly and failed to address key components. The most common component omitted was the requirement to assess the marketing practice of the company in terms of how it matched or deviated from text book approaches. Most of these projects did not even reference a text book!

Es & Fs. These projects failed to meet the brief completely. In most cases they provided a poor summary of the business activities of the company then gave a list of product features with no discussion or analysis. No marketing frameworks were used and no reference made to the theory of marketing. These students failed to show that they had a sufficient understanding of marketing concepts and how these concepts might be applied in practice to be worthy of progression. They were almost exclusively dependent on the company website for all of the data offered. To conclude these projects were weak in content, poorly presented and usually contained spelling or other errors.

Technical Issues

A number of common faults were found in the projects.

- Spelling errors are unacceptable given the technology available to all students.
- Multi coloured text is not always easy to read and often not effective.
- Font sizes less than 10 with single spacing are very difficult to read.
- There is strong evidence of a misconception that proof reading is unnecessary. PROOF READING IS ESSENTIAL. Ensure that at least one other individual reads your project.
- The level of referencing is very poor. Tables, charts and graphs were included without any reference. Students seemed to think that a one line bibliography, typically a web address covered everything. Instructions were given as to how to write the references both within the report and in the bibliography. This instruction seemed to be largely ignored.
- Abstracts, where included, were generally located at the end rather than the beginning of the report.
- There was an overuse of bullet points. Weaker students tended to depend on this format for almost their entire project and failed to discuss the points they listed.

All of these technical issues have been included in previous examiner's reports.

Students should remember that this is a professional qualification and so professional standards are expected from the commencement of their studies to their completion. Therefore they should always ask themselves, "would I give this report to a client?"