

Level 7, Unit 1, Strategic Business Management and Planning (25 credits)

Assessor's guide to interpreting the criteria

RQF general description for Level 7 qualifications

- Achievement at Level 7 requires a learner to command and display mastery of the complex and specialised area of business studies, demonstrate expertise in highly specialised and advanced technical, professional, and research skills.
- Learners at this level are expected to be able to conduct professional activity, including research, using and modifying advanced skills and tools, and designing appropriate research methodologies. They would be expected to effectively communicate results of such research to peers.
- Learners should be able to develop new skills to a high level, including novel and emerging techniques, and act in a wide variety of unpredictable and advanced professional contexts.
- The level of accountability at Level 7 expects the learner to accept full responsibility for relevant decision-making, including supervision and a significant degree of responsibility for other people's work, initiating activity and taking the lead.

EQF general description for Level 7 qualifications (RQF Level 7 is mapped to EQF Level 7)

- Achievement at EQF Level 7 reflects the ability to build, use and transfer highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in the field of business, as the basis for original thinking and/or research. The learner must also demonstrate critical awareness of knowledge issues in the field of business and at the interface between it and other fields.
- This level commands specialised problem-solving skills required in research and innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.
- A learner at this level is expected to manage and transform work and study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches.
- The levels commands that learners take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice, and for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.

General requirements

- Conformance of individual student's performance to unit criteria and standards must be confirmed by a trained assessor.
- Centres, in collaboration with the assessors, must ensure that there is system in

place allowing collection and storage of routine evidence of students' work (e-portfolios). E-portfolios should be in a format allowing online access, on request, by a TLM account manager.

- When the assessor is satisfied with a candidate matching all the criteria to the specification subject to the guidance below, the Centre can request a review of the e-portfolio by an account manager.
- If the account manager confirms the assessor's judgements, the student will get 30 marks towards his/her final mark, and be allowed to sit a final examination.
- When the student passes the final examination (see below Method of assessment), the student is considered to have completed all the requirements for the qualification.

Expansion of the assessment criteria

1 The learner will understand the nature, scope and need for strategic business management and planning.

This set of criteria is a good candidate itself for being assessed in a single task, unless assessors decide to structure their work around a different approach. However, it is expected that answers to individual criteria, at this qualification level (see the general QCF/EQF descriptors), reach beyond the narrowly defined scope of each criterion, and sometimes beyond the subject matter of the unit itself. As long as this is well justified and contributes to the comprehensive nature of the answers, it should be encouraged and will attract higher marks in the examination.

1.1 The learner can explain the scope, nature and characteristics of strategic business management and planning in a global environment.

Candidates must show deep and critical understanding, and be able to explain, using relevant terminology, the scope, nature, and characteristics of strategic business management and planning in the global environment.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

In their responses to assignments, learners should successfully position strategic business management and planning, and relate it to other levels of management. They should explain the complex nature of global business, understand its role and importance beyond national borders and within a much larger international framework of interconnected economies, as a context for strategic business management and planning. Global environment factors and the multifaceted approaches they require must be discussed as a pair. Answers should be structured and include robust awareness of the related problems and threats facing companies and societies.

1.2 The learner can critically analyse the need for strategic business management and planning in a global environment.

Candidates must use analytical approach of high quality, and strong critical reasoning, to explain why and how strategic business management and planning are needed for a company to succeed in a global environment.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

It is important that all aspects of the criterion are addressed with analysis rather than description drawing on cited work and with a clear emphasis on strategy. Even if local the business must be positioned in the global context, for example through a growth strategy or search for more diversity in supply.

1.3 The learner can appraise the international dimensions of strategic business management and planning.

Candidates must be able to compare the businesses' strategic management and planning approaches at national, regional and international levels, and outline the differences in terms of process and substance.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

In order to differentiate this criterion from 1.2 the candidate should compare and contrast outcomes of analysis and come to clear judgements based on the evidence that they have studied. It is expected that evidence from secondary sources will be used regularly and appropriately referenced.

1.4 The learner can analyse the different levels of organisational strategy and their relationship with tactical and operational decision making.

Candidates must be able to conduct a full and comprehensive analysis of the levels of organisational strategy, and elaborate on their interconnectedness with decision making at tactical and operational levels. Answers should also touch on the issues of objectives and planning in hierarchical terms, relating this criterion to 3.1 and 3.2.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

In order to differentiate this criterion from 1.2 and 1.3, the candidate should establish clear relationships between overall strategic aims and practical and detailed tactical interventions that will make the strategy more likely to be achieved, reducing risk and/or looking for competitive advantage.

1.5 The learner can explain the distinction between profit and not for profit organisations in terms of strategic business management and planning.

Candidates must explain and justify the different approaches to strategic management and planning which for profit businesses and not for profit organisations require.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

Candidates should avoid stereotypes such as "for profit businesses are more efficient" or "not for profit always provides better value to the community". A lot depends on the culture in the

organisation and motivation of those controlling the business. For profit businesses can be philanthropic and not for profit can be self-serving bureaucracies. Political bias will often determine how individuals see things. Candidates should try to separate themselves from politics and treat the subject in as dispassionate and rational manner as possible.

2 The learner will understand a range of classic and contemporary models, concepts and tools in business strategy and planning.

As a common characteristic of this set of criteria, the standards presume a structural approach to assessment, where centres and assessors have the freedom of choosing which particular subject matter and content should be used to assess individual criteria. Criteria broadly refer to two main categories of models, concepts, processes, and tools, related to business planning and business strategy. These main categories are tentatively labelled as 'classical' and 'contemporary', whilst the precise content -- referring to both scope and depth -- is to be considered within the framework of the curriculum adopted in any single academy or centre.

The reasoning behind this approach is the existence of multitude of concepts, models, tools and instruments, strategy classifications, generic strategy types, etc., and the preferences thereof which different schools of thought tend to prescribe. In assessing these criteria, attention should be paid to structure, quality of arguments, correctness of definitions, comprehensiveness, relevance and appropriateness of answers, ability to extend knowledge and suggest innovative approaches based on existing models, correct identification and proper differentiation between presented models, concepts, processes, and tools, ability to draw conclusions and make effective summaries/presentations, adequacy of suggested exemplars, etc.

2.1 The learner can identify classical and contemporary models, concepts and tools that support business strategy.

The learner should demonstrate that they have researched a range of models, concepts and tools with appropriate referencing.

Evidence: Evidence from documented coursework.

2.2 The learner can critically appraise the use of classical and contemporary models, concepts and tools in supporting business strategy.

Candidates must compare and appraise the use and effectiveness of key classical and contemporary models, concepts, frameworks and tools in supporting business strategy.

Evidence: Evidence from documented coursework.

2.3 The learner can compare and contrast prescriptive and emergent theories of corporate strategy and their relevance to organisations.

Candidates must demonstrate that they can link theory and practice, and critically compare prescriptive, innovative and emerging theories of corporate strategy in terms of their relevance and potential.

Evidence: Evidence from documented coursework.

3 The learner will understand the processes by which organisations identify and develop their goals and values.

3.1 The learner can identify the processes by which organisations prioritise and project their goals and values.

Candidates should lay out the process of setting organisational goals and objectives, discuss their hierarchy. Corporate mission and vision must be discussed as well, both in terms of theory and practical use, within the organisation and beyond.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

3.2 The learner can provide responses to conflicting needs, power and influence of stakeholders on an organisation's goals.

Candidates must outline and justify strategies and approaches aimed at responding at, and resolving situations of, conflicting needs, power and influence of stakeholders on organisational goals.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

Suggested responses must be from a wide cross-disciplinary spectrum and multitude of tools and instruments (e.g. communications, behavioural and organisational psychology, decision making and consultations process design, etc.), in line with level descriptors for this qualification level. Answers should go beyond the organisation and acknowledge the varied nature of stakeholder groups.

3.3 The learner can summarise the influence of corporate governance and regulation on the corporation's strategic approach.

Candidates must describe, in a concise manner and in generalised terms, how corporate governance and regulation impact the corporation's strategic approach.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

4 The learner will understand the impact of social, technological, economic, environmental, political, legal, ethical and democratic, (STEEPLED) factors on an organisation.

4.1 The learner can explain the potential impact of the external environment on organisations, relating it to general principles of organisational strategy.

Candidates must explain how external environment impacts the organisation and the process of strategic planning and strategy implementation, by making hypotheses and extending their

knowledge and skills on the subject to an abstract forecasting of a complex and dynamic environment.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

4.2 The learner can compare and contrast individual elements of the STEEPLED range in terms of their likely impact on a specific organisation.

Candidates should make a detailed analysis of the individual elements of the STEEPLED analytical framework, and be able to compare them in terms of their potential impact on a specifically chosen business organisation.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

4.3 The learner can identify the sensitivities of an organisation to environmental change and make appropriate recommendations.

Candidates must identify how prone an organisation may be to environmental change and which are the most vulnerable areas. They should extend this analysis by suggesting appropriate offsetting approaches and explaining their mechanisms of influence over the organisation.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance :

Although candidates may focus on a specific organisation in order to be specific in the first part of their answer (analysis), they should be able, in line with the level descriptors at this qualification level, to generalise and make reasonable projections and forecasts in the second part (recommendations).

4.4 The learner can critically assess the Porter's Diamond theory as a strategic planning tool.

Candidates should make a concise presentation of the Diamond model and apply their theoretical knowledge and analytical skills in discussing the successes and criticisms of the model as a strategic planning tool in contemporary use. Evolution of theory and the accumulated body of empirical evidence since the creation of the model should be explored, including the factoring of the international dimension and the extended Double diamond model

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

5 The learner will understand the key forces that present opportunities and threats to organisations.

5.1 The learner can identify the capabilities and competences that allow organisations to achieve competitive advantage.

Candidates must focus on the internal aspects of organisations and identify a range of capabilities and competences which allow them to achieve competitive advantage, by outlining their nature and the mechanisms via which such advantage is created.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

5.2 The learner can critically analyse strategies by which an organisation positions itself to outperform its competitors.

Candidates must compare and critically analyse strategies aiming at outperforming competitors, outlining their likelihoods of success in some typical sets of circumstances.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

5.3 The learner can evaluate the turbulence of environmental change with a focus on the opportunities this can generate.

Candidates must analyse different strategic approaches in response to changing environment which creates new opportunities for the organisation and possibly extend their existing strategies.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

5.4 The learner can describe organisational strategies that can mitigate negative outcomes from environmental change.

Candidates must analyse different strategic approaches in response to changing environment which creates new threats for the organisation and limit their existing strategies.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

6 The learner will understand the strategic processes enabling an organisation to achieve competitive advantage.

This set of criteria explores knowledge on strategic processes and their influence on organisations' competitive advantage.

6.1 The learner can identify the capabilities and competences that allow organisations to achieve competitive advantage.

Candidates must identify the source of organisation's internal capabilities and competences -- in terms of processes -- that allow them to become competitive and have an edge over the other players in the same industry/market.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

6.2 The learner can critically analyse strategies by which an organisation positions itself to outperform its competitors.

Candidates must compare and critically analyse strategies aiming at outperforming competitors, outlining their likelihoods of success in some typical sets of circumstances.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

This particular criterion is a duplicate of 5.2 in terms of wording. However, it should be interpreted and attempted from the perspective of the entire 6.0 criteria set, i.e. focus on organisation's processes.

6.3 The learner can identify and evaluate appropriate strategies for emerging, maturing and declining competitive positions.

Candidates must outline and critically compare strategies for 3 different scenarios - emerging, maturing and decline in the organisation's competitive position.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

6.4 The learner can describe the mechanism for market disruption based on innovation that enables new customers into a market.

Candidates must demonstrate full understanding of the disruptive innovation theory and be able to describe the mechanisms it uses to displace an earlier technology by following market demands.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

Learners should clearly distinguish between disruptive innovation and the new markets it creates, and the classical innovation approach of evolution of existing markets. They would be expected to appropriately exemplify their answers.

7 The learner will understand the future challenges affecting strategic business management and planning decisions.

7.1 The learner can analyse the impact of global trade agreements on strategic business management and planning.

Candidates must critically analyse how global trade agreements impact strategic business management and planning, not dismissing from mind international politics.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

7.2 The learner can appraise and report on the effects of global warming and the increasing scarcity of commodities on business strategy.

Candidates should make an assessment of the degree and areas of impact of global warming and the increasing scarcity of commodities on business strategies.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

Learners should attempt to reproduce the main arguments in the global debate on global warming, attempting an unbiased analytical approach, and discuss possible and potential impact on business organisations. The answers should attempt the issue of scarcity of commodities regardless of the links, or lack thereof, to the global warming which the learner is willing to accept and justify as reasonable and backed by scientific evidence. This criterion is not about finding the learner's personal positions on global warming or, say, food scarcity debate, but about the businessman's and analyst's view and the attention companies must pay to issues of such magnitude.

7.3 The learner can evaluate the potential opportunities and threats presented by emerging international economies.

Candidates must demonstrate comprehensive knowledge of the definition of emerging markets, be able to identify the key emerging market economies and their alliances, and discuss in which areas and to what extent they might represent business opportunities or pose threats to companies' operations.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

7.4 The learner can explain the need for calculated risk taking in response to the impact of the increasingly competitive global environment.

Candidates must explain why it is important and indeed necessary to undertake calculated risks in response to the increasingly dynamic and over-complex competitive global market.

Evidence: Evidence from assessor's observations and documented work.

Additional information and guidance:

Learners should concentrate not only on risk taking, but also on designing and implementing appropriate risk-assessment processes within the organisations. They should compare risk-taking and risk-averse strategies, preferably by presenting relevant examples, and draw conclusions and recommendations.

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