Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Advanced Level Qualification

Human Resource Management in Context

May 2014

27 May 2014   09:50 – 13:00 hrs

Time allowed – Three hours and ten minutes
(including ten minutes' reading time)

Answer Section A and five questions in Section B (one per subsection A to E).

Please write clearly and legibly.

Questions may be answered in any order.

Equal marks are allocated to each section of the paper.
Within Section B equal marks are allocated to each question.

If a question includes reference to 'your organisation', this may be interpreted as covering any organisation with which you are familiar.

The case study is not based on an actual organisation. Any similarities to known organisations are coincidental.

You will fail the examination if:

- **You fail to answer five questions in Section B (one per subsection) and/or**
- **You achieve less than 40 per cent in either Section A or Section B.**

Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2014

SECTION A – Case Study

Note: In your responses, you are allowed to improvise or add to the case study details provided below. However, the case study should not be changed or compromised in any way.

The NHS Northcott Foundation Trust provides a full range of mental health services to children, adolescents, adults and older adults within the city and the rural outskirts where it is located. It has 6000 staff, who have a variety of skills. As a Foundation Trust, it has greater freedoms to manage its own affairs and improve local services. Its mission is 'To deliver high-quality care, treatment and support to improve the health and well-being of the people and communities we serve.' The Trust is undergoing a strategic review of the services it provides, following the need to make £50 million savings over the next five years.

The Trust has four strategic objectives. These are: (1) driving quality improvement; (2) delivering operational excellence; (3) delivering innovation, learning and teaching; and (4) developing its business. Its strategic enablers are developing leadership, people and culture, getting the most out of technology, and using its estate efficiently.

The Trust has undertaken a STEEPLE analysis of its macro-environment, led by the HR department on behalf of the Management Team. Its main outcomes are summarised in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1: STEEPLE analysis of the Trust's macro-environment

Socio-cultural	- An ageing population - Increased demand for healthcare - Prevalence of mental ill-health in society and the community - The increase in mental ill-health arising from an ageing population, recession and returning military personnel, where demand exceeds capacity - Increasing patient expectations
Technological	Keeping up with medical and related technological developments
Economic	- The climate of economic austerity - Pressure on budgets to make further £25 million savings - Rising staff costs - Inflation higher than planned for - Loss of contribution to overheads - Outsourcing to make savings costs
Environmental	- Reducing energy use - Reducing carbon footprint - Managing water consumption - Waste management, disposal and recycling
Political	- New health care legislation - Care Quality Commission, especially safety and quality - Need to deliver quality services - Delivering productivity savings of £25 million - Government demands for increased services

Legal	• Clinically-led commissioning • Abolition of private patient income caps for Foundation Trusts • Employment law • EU law • Trade unions
Ethical	• Care of the sick and dying

In addition to this analysis of the Trust's external environment, the Trust has also undertaken internal Strengths and Weaknesses and external Opportunities and Threats reviews, presented as a matrix in Figure 1.2. This identifies four possible strategic options, taking account of the Trust's position, experience and capabilities.

Figure 1.2: SWOT matrix of the Trust and its strategic options

	External opportunities • Abolishment of private patient income caps • New technological advances • Ability of trusts to borrow money from government and private sector	External threats • Increase in mental health problems • Impact of economic climate on funding • Risk of losing service-level agreements • More competition in provision of health care • Shortage of dementia care home places
Internal strengths • Foundation Trust status • Operating surplus • Reputation • Estate and geographic coverage • Use of enabling technology • Provider of mental and physical health services • Good relationships with GPs, commissioners and voluntary sector • Skilled non-clinical staff (e.g. finance) • A strong learning and development centre • Strong management team • Strong track record of managing integration effectively • Record of managing change	Option 1: adopt a strategy to increase income by investing in some private services - e.g. psychotherapies	Option 3: adopt a strategy to tender for any future contract opportunities, as they arise

Internal weaknesses	Option 2: adopt a strategy to provide and manage specialist NHS dementia care homes	Option 4: adopt a strategy to provide and manage specialist care NHS dementia care homes
• Decline in staff morale and motivation • Staff resistant to change • Savings of £50 million required over five years • Inability to cope with rising demand for mental health services • Bed-blocking by elderly acute mental health wards		Adopt an estates strategy to improve cost efficiency and increase funds by maximising use of Trust estate, enabling sale or terminating leases of surplus buildings

The Management Team is meeting shortly to discuss strategic options 1-4, evaluate them and decide which one to adopt. It also plans to discuss other contexts likely to affect the successful delivery of the Trust's preferred strategic option.

As an external consultant, you have been asked by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) to prepare a written briefing paper for the next Management Team meeting. Drawing upon research and current practice, you are asked to cover the following issues.

1. **Based on the evidence provided in the STEEPLE and SWOT reviews, identify which strategic option you will recommend the Management Team to adopt. Give reasons for your choice.**

2. **One of the key internal weaknesses of the Trust, revealed by the SWOT analysis, is a decline in staff morale, motivation and engagement. Explain some measures that could be taken within the Trust to respond to these issues.**

3. **Select and analyse *up to three* social and/or demographic trends which are likely to affect delivery of your chosen strategic option.**

4. **Select and analyse *up to three* technological developments which are likely to affect delivery of your chosen strategic option.**

It is recommended that you spend an equal amount of time on each of the above tasks.

SECTION B

Answer FIVE questions in this section, ONE per subsection A to E. You may include diagrams, flowcharts or bullet points to clarify and support your answers, so long as you provide an explanation of each.

A

1. Organisation theory is the inter-disciplinary field of inquiry that examines and applies knowledge of how people act in their roles in organisations and the factors influencing this. It draws on a range of academic disciplines and organisational practice including psychology, sociology, politics, ethics and the experience of management consultants.

    i. Select **any one** theory of organisation and critically evaluate it.

    ii. Explain the relevance and limitations of this chosen theory for your organisation.

OR

2. In a conversation with a new senior colleague in a local firm, you have expressed the view that a lot of interest has been shown in the idea of 'corporate social responsibility' (CSR) in recent years. But CSR has many definitions and its impacts on business practices vary. She has subsequently asked you to provide her with some further information on CSR.

    i. Drawing on research, explain (a) why CSR has emerged on the business agenda **and** (b) why there is little agreement about what it means.

    ii. To what extent does your organisation demonstrate (or not demonstrate) CSR in its business practices and why?

    Draft written responses to both these questions.

PLEASE TURN OVER

B

3. A number of writers have commented on the 'politics of management' such as Clegg et al (2008), Mintzberg (2002) and Hales (2001). One emerging theme in the literature is that mobilisation of power in organisations happens when individuals or groups make claims against an organisation's resource-sharing system.

   i. Drawing upon research, describe and analyse **up to three** ways in which managers behave in the political arena in their organisation.

   ii. Critically assess the importance of managerial politics in your organisation, drawing on what happens in practice.

OR

4. Research has identified many models of the HR function over the past 30 years, including Legge (1978), Tyson and Fell (1986) and more recently Ulrich and Brockbank (2005).

   i. Select **any one** model of the HR function and critically evaluate it.

   ii. To what extent do any common themes emerge (or not emerge) in various models of the HR function and why?

C

5. Mintzberg (1987) supports the need for eclecticism in strategy determination. He provides five interpretations of corporate strategy to enable managers to avoid confusion about it and to enrich their understanding of the processes by which strategies are formed. For Mintzberg, these interpretations are strategy as: plan, ploy, a pattern, position and perspective.

   i.   Drawing on research and current practice, discuss why the concept of strategy is a problematic one.

   ii. Identify and critically review **one** model of strategy which enables managers to respond effectively to market uncertainty and market competition.

   iii. To what extent is this model of strategy appropriate (or not appropriate) to your organisation and why?

OR

6. Issues of vertical integration and horizontal integration are commonly explored in the literature on HR strategy, with Marchington and Wilkinson (2012) arguing, for example, that integration is at the heart of HRM and HR strategy.

   i. Drawing on research, explain what is meant by (a) vertical integration **and** (b) horizontal integration and why they are important in formulating and implementing HR strategy in practice.

   ii. To what extent do vertical and horizontal integration work (or not work) in your organisation and why?

PLEASE TURN OVER

D

7. Globalisation has various definitions. One common definition claims globalisation is the process by which the world is becoming increasingly interconnected as a result of massively increased trade and cultural exchanges. Globalisation has also increased the production of goods and services and the largest companies are no longer national firms but multi-national corporations with subsidiaries in many countries.

    i.   Drawing on research, discuss whether or not this definition of globalisation is a satisfactory one and why.

    ii. Assess the impact of globalisation on the labour markets from which your organisation recruits and selects its workforce.

OR

8. With the growth in importance of the global economy, there is a variety of international non-governmental organisations that seek to influence patterns of international trade, national economic policies and economic development.

    Drawing on research, critically evaluate the role of **any one** named international non-governmental organisation in the global economy.

E

9. In democratic states, such as the UK, there is broad agreement about the ends of public policy but disagreement about how to achieve these ends. The UK provides a case study of one contentious issue in public debate currently, where a referendum is planned on independence for Scotland from the UK.

    i.   Provide **up to three** arguments supporting the case for Scottish independence.

    ii. Provide **up to three** arguments against it.

OR

10. You have received the following email from a managerial colleague: 'I've got to make a short presentation at a local management conference on the role of business pressure groups in politics. Please advise me on two issues:

    i.   Drawing on research and using examples, critically review how business pressure groups try to influence the public policies affecting them.

    ii. Assess some of the ethical issues in this field of business practice.'

    Draft what you will write in your reply and why.

END OF EXAMINATION

Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2014

Introduction

This report reviews the May sitting of the Human Resource Management in Context advanced level examination of the CIPD. This is a core module within the advanced level qualifications framework and draws upon the "Strategy, Insights and Solutions" professional area of the CIPD's HR Profession Map.

On this occasion, 274 candidates sat the examination. Of these, 186 achieved a pass standard or more, giving a pass rate of 68%. The breakdown of grades is shown below.

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Grade	**Number**	**Percentage of total** (to 1 decimal point)
Distinction	7	2.6
Merit	35	12.8
Pass	144	52.6
Marginal fail	21	7.6
Fail	67	24.4
Total	**274**	**100.00**

The examination consists of two sections, a seen case study in Section A and short answer question in Section B, where candidates have to attempt five (out of ten) questions, which are divided into five sub-sections. All the learning objectives of the unit are assessed on the examination paper.

In addition to demonstrating knowledge and understanding in this examination, successful candidates are expected to match the CIPD vision of the HR professional as a business partner and a thinking performer who can deliver day-to-day operational requirements and reflect on current procedures, systems and contexts, so as to be able to contribute to continuous improvement and change initiatives.

Candidates are expected to achieve M-level performance in the examination, drawing upon evidence-based argument, critical thinking and broad understanding of their field of study, not only within their own organisation and sector but also across a reasonable spectrum of other organisations and sectors.

Section A

Learning outcomes: 4 and 6

This section consisted of a seen case study with four questions, where candidates were expected to answer all questions. The case study touched on a number of issues covered in the module's learning outcomes. There were a number of ways in which this case could be approached but the following summary points could be developed in answers. All answers

were expected to demonstrate M-level performance and the ability of candidates to develop logically structured and clearly focused responses. They were also expected to show familiarity with recent research and examples of good organisational practice.

Task 1

This question asked candidates to identify which strategic option they would recommend the Management team to adopt, based on STEEPLE and SWOT analyses provided in the case. There is no preferred option in responding to this question, so candidates had to make their own choice. Their responses were assessed by the justifications they presented and the rationale of their arguments.

Option 1 utilises the organisation's internal strengths to maximise external opportunities. This increases income by investing in some private services. It fits with the Trust's strategic objective of developing its business and it can invest in its reputation, experience, expertise and financial surplus towards the provision of private psychotherapy services. The issues involved include: promotion of private services; generation of private income; pursuing commercial opportunities; and better care for NHS patients. But it has disadvantages too.

Option 2 minimises current weaknesses. This provides and manages specialist dementia care homes. It fits in with the Trust's vision of delivering excellent, high quality care, treatment and support to help improve the health and well-being of individuals and communities. It supports the objective of developing the Trust's business. It also addresses the external threats of cuts in NHS funding and rising demand for NHS mental services due to an ageing population. Other factors are likely to ensure that the new service is delivered at best value, whilst maintaining high quality care.

Option 3 uses the organisation's internal strengths to minimise external threats and allows the Trust to develop its business further. This tenders for future contract opportunities arising from mergers/amalgamations. The Trust is experienced and successful in tendering for service contracts in the past. But it needs to stand back and consider its current position, analyse what value has been added and integrate the new organisation into its activities, before embarking on further service-level agreements.

Option 4 minimises the Trust's internal weaknesses and the external threats. This maximises enabling technology and sells surplus estate, as well as fitting its objective of using its estates efficiently and maximising its resources; for example, mobile technology, working from home, reducing the need for office space and so on. The selling off of buildings/estates can reduce overheads and provide income for the Trust, for example. But this could impact on the organisation by limiting its ability to make use of future opportunities if they arise.

Most candidates answered this question quite well. The popular choice of strategy was option 4, which made most sense because it aimed at rationalising the operations and assets to save money. The government requirement for further savings is not going away, so something must be done. Stronger candidates choosing this option justified it by arguing that it fitted best with the business objectives of expansion and greater efficiencies without compromising quality. Those choosing other options justified these by using various elements of the SWOT or STEEPLE analyses. Some candidates adopted the approach of rejecting three of the options on certain grounds, such as risk, which meant the remaining one was chosen. Sometimes this was at the expense of failing to fully evaluate the benefits

and possible limitations of the chosen option. The weakest candidates failed to choose any of the options.

Task 2

This question required candidates to provide some measures to respond to a decline in staff morale, motivation and engagement.

The key is to build on the Trust's recognised reputation for recruiting and retaining highly trained, skilled, and dedicated clinical, professional staff, as well as its skilled non-clinical staff such as IT, estates, HR, finance, governance and operational services. Its strong learning and development centre could play a key role here, with its recognised delivery of employee expertise. This is related to providing training and development opportunities at all levels, opportunities for CPD and professional updating facilities.

Consulting staff and their representatives in the managing of change, maintaining/improving communication and information flows with staff horizontally and vertically, minimising job losses, and replacing any key staff leaving the organisation are all important factors in promoting staff morale and motivation. Positive staff engagement initiatives may also help; but these may be difficult to mobilise in practice. Building and maintaining trust between the organisation and management, on the one hand, and all categories of staff, on the other, is another key factor in promoting morale, motivation and engagement.

On the whole answers provided for this question were disappointing. It is not expected that HR students cannot sensibly recommend how to increase engagement and motivation levels within an organisation. Answers ranged from general comments about encouraging employee voice, but with no suggestions how this might be achieved, to more sophisticated answers with clear initiatives suggested that were underpinned by reference to the Macleod Report, for example.

Task 3

This question asked candidates to select and analyse up to three social and/or demographic trends likely to affect delivery of the candidates' chosen option.

Candidates had a wide range of demographic and social trend choices to select from. These include the changing population structure in terms of age, geography and migration and their effects on demand for the Trust's services and its labour supply. Social trends include issues of gender, ethnicity and diversity, as well as changing social values and educational standards, affecting the demand and supply of medical services in the Trust.

There seemed to be some confusion by some candidates as to what is a demographic and a social trend and in some instances an incorrect reference was made to what was thought to be a social trend. However, most candidates were able to identify some relevant trends to form an answer, which required only discussing up to three.

Ageing was the key trend cited by most candidates and it was usually reasonably well analysed in light of the candidate's chosen option. Some candidates failed to show a clear understanding of what is meant by social and/or demographic change and included internal organisational factors and a set of random issues. Better candidates elected to discuss

relevant issues and explain the likely affect positive and negative effects on their chosen strategic option.

Task 4

This question asked candidates to analyse up to three technological developments likely to affect delivery of the candidates' chosen strategic option.

The technological trends affecting the Trust are both medical and managerial. Medically, these include diagnostic and analytic procedures, for example. But the more important ones in the short term are likely to impact on the managing of the organisation. These include procurement of suitable IT systems, electronic patient records, electronic prescribing, research and development, website development, data management, performance monitoring and improving efficiency within the Trust.

Most candidates were able to make a reasonable attempt at this question, but weaker answers concentrated on existing technology rather than technological developments. However, responses to this question were the weakest element of the case study responses, with some answers cited existing and already well-used technologies, such as the internet and familiar forms of ICT. These tended to write rather pedestrian answers, which were not linked to their chosen strategic option. Other candidates considered issues which couldn't really be classed as technologies at all. Better answers were more forward-looking and focused on technologies pertinent to the NHS and delivery of treatments, thus making reference to the strategic direction of the Trust.

Section B

In this section, candidates had to choose one question out of two in each of five sub-sections that covered the remaining learning objectives not examined in the Section A case study. Most questions consisted of more than one part and candidates were expected to attempt all parts in each question.

Question A1

Learning outcome: 1

This question asked candidates to select any one theory of organisation and critically evaluate and explain its relevance and limitations for their own organisations.

Candidates had a wide range of theories of organisation to choose from: such as bureaucracy, scientific management, human relations theory, culture management, post-bureaucracy, change management or mixed models. They then needed to relate this choice of model to their own organisations in terms of relevance and limitations.

Although this was not a popular question, there were no real problems with the answers. The theory most often chosen was bureaucracy. The differentiators of answers were the extent to which candidates produced a critical evaluation of the theory and the effective application of the theory to their own organisations. For some candidates, comments on these were just about adequate, whilst for better candidates they were thorough and well analysed.

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May 2014

Question A2

Learning outcome: 1

This question asked candidates to explain why corporate social responsibility (CSR) has emerged on the business agenda and the extent to which their own organisations demonstrated CSR.

CSR builds on stakeholder theory and where companies seek to integrate social, environmental and business concerns with their interactions to stakeholders. There is also growing recognition within some members of the business community that sustainable business success and shareholder value cannot be achieved solely by maximising short-term profits. Consumer pressure groups and environmental groups add pressure to businesses to do this. Socially responsible and ethical organisations are also rewarded by their customers. However, definitions of CSR differ largely because of the differing markets, objectives and interests of each business, as well as the costs of CSR.

Most answers to this question were of a pass standard or higher. Candidates should separate out their responses according to the various parts of the question and make it clear which part of the question they are answering. Part (i) prompted very cursory answers in many cases or was skated over completely by some candidates. Candidates tended to give examples of CSR and quite broad definitions. Some of them said there was a difference between ethics and CSR but failed to say what the distinction was. Part (ii) was treated similarly, with plenty of general and plausible observations as to why there is little agreement on what CSR means. Better answers indicated that candidates knew some of the CSR literature and they gave a more cogent answer here. Most answers came to life in part (ii), when candidates were asked to discuss their own organisation. Better answers focused on the 'why' element of CSR, rather than simply describing practice.

Question B3

Learning outcome: 2

This question asked candidates to analyse up to three ways in managers behave politically in organisations and the importance of managerial politics in their own organisations.

There are a variety of ways in which managers act politically in organisations and candidates had a wide choice of behaviours to choose from. In general, to be effective managers need to use their power resources which are typically based on variants of coercion, reward, referent power, expert power, legitimate power and informational power. But other models of power in organisations were acceptable in responding to this question. In the second part of the question, candidates could draw on their experience to provide examples and critiques of managerial power in action.

Clearly candidates achieving good marks showed an ability to draw on the literature, outlined various ways in which management behave in the political arena, and then considered managerial politics in his/her own organisation. Weak responses tended to write about managerial roles but not managerial behaviour in the political arena as the question asked.

However, most answers required a more balanced view of the importance of organisational politics and the ability to provide arguments for and against its existence. Some answers were naive about managerial politics, where candidates made statements such as: "Politics is unimportant in my organisation because we are a small team, see eye to eye and get on well together". This misses the reality of organisational life.

Question B4

Learning outcome: 2

This question asked candidates to select any one model of the HR function and critically evaluate it. They also had to discuss any common themes in various models of the HR function.

Any one model of the HR function could be explored. These include Legge, Tyson and Fell, Monks, Storey, Wilkinson and Marchington, Reilly, and Ulrich and Brockbank. The common themes running through these models include: the HR role evolves and changes over time; at organisational level the HR role is eclectic and pragmatic; HR operates at both strategic and operational levels; and the scope of HR depends on business strategy, the organisation's business position, and managerial awareness.

The most positive observation from answers to this question was that candidates were able chose a *functional* model of HR not an HR strategic model. Some chose Legge's model but the majority chose the 'three legged stool' or 'business partner' models by Ulrich. None of these candidates had difficulty describing the models but fewer were able to offer a cogent critique of their value, other than to say that the business partner has been criticised for a lack of business savvy. A limitation in some answers was the extent to which candidates were able to establish common themes in the second part of the question. Comments here were generally limited to the need for HR to adopt a more strategic role. Other themes such as the organisation's context and managerial dispositions were not discussed.

Question C5

Learning outcome: 3

This question asked candidates to identify and critically review any one model of strategy and discuss the extent to which it is appropriate or not in their own organisation.

Basically the concept of strategy is problematic because every organisation has its own organisational characteristics, structures, histories, personalities and market opportunities. Leaderships change, markets change and business prospects change. Research on strategy and practice in the field are therefore pragmatic and contingent. Candidates had a wide range of strategic models to choose from and some critical examination of their chosen model was expected. They were also expected to relate this model to their own organisations.

Unsurprisingly, answers to this question varied from very good to very weak. Weak answers contained little valuable commentaries in each of the three parts of the question, whilst commentaries in good answers were extensive and well developed. Most candidates were able to argue that strategy is problematic, because internal and external organisational

contexts are varied and change over time. Answers generally discussed either rational or emergent strategies and whilst their descriptions were satisfactory the critical review was commonly weak. A further differentiator was discussion on suitability of strategy to candidates' own organisations. These answers were mostly descriptive and did not demonstrate critical reasoning.

Question C6

Learning outcome: 3

This question asked candidates to explain what is meant by vertical and horizontal integration and to what extent these are achieved in their own organisations.

Vertical and horizontal integration are key concepts in the formation and development of HR strategy. Vertical integration is the links between HR and the wider business strategies and external political, economic, social, legal and institutional forces helping shape them. They relate to the external fit between HR activities and strategies, the management of the organisation and the competitive contexts within which it operates. Horizontal integration is the fit between different internal HR strategies and practices and the degrees to which they support or contradict one another. It concerns the degrees of internal fit between core HR activities.

Answers to this question were generally disappointing. There was a significant number of candidates that did not fully understand the terminology and significance of vertical and horizontal integration. If this was misunderstood or appeared confused by candidates in part (i) of the answer, then it was inevitable that they were going to perform badly in part (ii). Even for those candidates that were able to provide definitions, some were able to offer any practical examples which would have further demonstrated their understanding of these important concepts in HRM. It is rather disconcerting that some candidates entering the examination can only guess what these terms mean by using a dictionary understanding of the word 'integration'.

Question D7

Learning outcome: 5

This question asked candidates to define globalisation and assess the impact of globalisation on their own organisation.

The definition of globalisation provided is a relatively narrow one and candidates were expected to be able to improve and extend upon it. The more complex features of globalisation encompass a number of additional features such as: the globalisation of financial markets; internationalisation of corporate strategies; diffusion of technology; transformation of consumption patterns; the diminished role of national governments and several others. The second part of the question provided candidates with scope to relate globalisation (or not) to the labour markets in which their organisations operate.

This was a popular question but in part (i) less able candidates simply argued that the definition was satisfactory because it was true. More competent answers argued against this by saying that there were factors facilitating globalisation, such as market deregulation,

changing consumer needs, and a hollowing out of the nation state. In most answers, there was little reference to research other than Gray.

Those earning just a pass standard of performance usually presented limited answers to part (ii), by generally referring to a wider pool of applicants and a flow of immigrants who are prepared to do mundane work.

Unfortunately, there were too many candidates who had revised the advantages and disadvantages of globalisation and were expecting this as a question. They offered these as their answer to part (i).The quality of answers depended how well the candidate was able to relate this to what was actually being asked. Some candidates were more skilful than others in achieving this.

Question D8

Learning outcome: 5

This question asked candidates to critically evaluate any one named international organisation in the global economy.

There was very wide scope in this question for candidates being able to select any one international NGO, such as OECD, IMF, ILO, WTO and the World Bank and its role in the global economy, and build answers around it. Candidates were expected to identify and evaluate the commonly controversial role of these organisations in promoting free global markets, market de-regulation, reducing the size of the public sectors and public spending, and supporting privatisations.

There was not a popular question and only a few candidates really understood what they were writing about. The common choice of institution was the IMF. Those who failed did so because they were unable to define the role and aims of the organisation properly. In more competent answers, there were some acceptable criticisms of its role based on a modicum of research. But on the whole, it appears that the study of these global institutions is generally poorly done in many centres and only given minimal attention by candidates.

Question E9

Learning outcome: 7

This question asked candidates to consider up to three arguments supporting Scottish independence and up to three against.

There are many arguments supporting independence for Scotland. These include: access to North Sea oil and its revenues provide substantial funding for the Scottish government, similar to the case in Norway; the Scots will be better off detached from the dominant South-East of England; control over defence and foreign policy; the principle of Scottish self-determination; the additional member system is arguably more democratic than the first-past-the-post system in the UK; Westminster is too detached from Scottish interests; and it could instigate a cultural renaissance. The arguments against include: the economic burdens and risks of becoming independent; independence is a large economic gamble; Scotland's membership of the EU is unclear; Scotland is partly responsible for British debts; Scotland

will have a smaller voice in international affairs; and the hidden economic costs of independence.

Few candidates were attracted to attempting this question, for what was in fact a fairly straightforward task. Those who did attempt it did very well, achieving at least a merit standard of performance. This appears to confirm that those who tackled this question were well prepared and confident in their knowledge of the topic. Weaker candidates presented arguments for and against that were often too brief, unclear and what seemed like guesses rather than informed analyses.

Question E10

Learning outcome: 7

This question asked candidates to critically review how business pressure groups try to influence public policies affecting them and to assess some of the ethical issues in this area.

Private businesses try to influence public policies that impact on them. Sometimes they do this on an individual basis, in other cases they form and join business pressure groups. These bodies act locally, nationally, and internationally. Their objective is to try and influence ministers, government officials, local councillors, MPs, Euro-MPs and so on. The methods used include lobbying, campaigning, public relations exercises, press campaigns and using the mass media and 'spin'. Candidates were expected to be able to recognise some of the less obvious ethical issues involved in these processes, where senior business people are likely to socialise with political leaders, contribute to party political funding and raise finance for political parties (such as News International in the UK and the Berlusconi media empire in Italy).

Many candidates showed some understanding of the nature of business pressure groups and better candidates provided reasonable comments on both parts of the question. Those doing less well did so because it was the last question answered and there was not enough time left to complete it. Other weak answers, defined pressure groups and their aims but offered little comment on the methods used and the extent of their power and influence in business politics.

Conclusion

The pass rate in this examination diet was 68%. The marking team is of the view that this examination paper provided a good test of all the learning outcomes and the indicative content of this unit, and it was a fair test of candidate knowledge, understanding and application of knowledge within the module. The marking team observed the following general points in assessing candidates in this examination:

1. It was evident that better candidates had prepared well for the case study so that they were able to demonstrate a sound understanding of the relevant issues. Those who were underprepared struggled to consider the options in a sensible way and subsequently struggled to tie answers to Tasks 3 and 4 to their strategic choice. Many candidates appeared to carelessly lose marks by failing to focus on the questions set. The issues in the case and the organisation and its context may have

had a bearing too, since good scripts contained empirical evidence from other trusts to inform their answers. For weak candidates, there was need for more thorough and balanced analyses and evaluation to earn higher marks.

2. There was a range of questions in Section B of the paper giving a balance between business and HR orientated questions, which gave candidates every opportunity to play to their strengths. What was disappointing was to observe some candidates choosing questions that might appear to be the easy option because they were HR-related, and then under performing in their responses.

3. As is often the case, some questions on the examination paper were more popular than others but this was due to the topic areas, not the nature of the questions set. However, candidates who mistakenly wrote about HR strategy rather than the HR function in Question 4, for example, received few if any marks for this, thus making it hard for them to pass Section B, despite some otherwise good responses to other questions. In other cases, some candidates generally performed well in Section B but were sometimes let down by one weak answer. Better candidates performed consistently well across Section B, showing a breadth of knowledge and scored well.

4. As is often the case too, some candidates performed less well in Section B than in Section A. In Section B, the weakest areas related to organisation politics in Question 3 and integration in Question 6. In general, those failing need to consider providing more than just descriptive responses and to include within them research evidence and current organisational practice when required. There is also a need for weaker candidates to examine and understand their own organisations in more depth.

5. As this is an M-level examination, candidates are expected to provide evidence-based answers to the questions set, drawing upon relevant research and good practice of HRM in its contexts. This means that they are expected to read around the subject matter of this module. At a minimum, the core text provides an overview of the literature and identifies and reviews key studies in this field of professional knowledge and understanding.

6. On a positive note, candidate performance generally appears to be improving, now that the format of the paper is better understood by candidates and centres. Further, proportionally more merit and distinction grades were awarded in this examination diet.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge my team of markers for contributing to the assessment process on this occasion. The markers were Derek Adam-Smith, John Ashcroft, Helen Bessant, Chris Evans, Alan Peacock, Amanda Thompson and Dee McGhee, who joined the marking team for the first time.

Professor David Farnham
Chief examiner