Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Advanced Level Qualification

Human Resource Management in Context

January 2015

27 January 2015 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, A to E)**
  and/or
- **You achieve less than 40 per cent in either Section A or Section B**
  and/or
- **You achieve less than 50 per cent overall.**

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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.

VerdunCo PLC is an international retailer operating 6,000 stores in 20 countries, with almost 1,000,000 employees worldwide. Its headquarters are in the UK, where it employs about 200,000 staff.

As one of the world's largest retailers, VerdunCo was responsible for 5.4 million tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions in 2012–14. VerdunCo recognised this responsibility in 2009, together with the potential to mitigate global climate change. Subsequently, it developed a climate change strategy to curb carbon emissions from its businesses, aiming to become a zero-carbon firm by 2050.

Reasons for adopting a climate change strategy

1. VerdunCo was motivated by its corporate responsibility agenda and to promote competitive advantage with its competitors.
2. High awareness of climate change among UK customers allowed the company to capitalise on its ambitions and make a value proposition to engage them.
3. The company sees climate change at the core of its retail business.
4. A carbon reduction strategy, with reductions in costs and business risks through lower energy use, gives higher energy-security and higher resource-efficiency to the business.

Carbon reductions in buildings

Verdun's baseline year is 2006-07 and it aims to halve its building emissions per square feet by 2020. Buildings consist of stores, distribution centres and offices.

1. Energy efficiency measures are applied in all buildings including: efficient and natural lighting solutions; energy conservation (e.g. doors on refrigerators); and more efficient equipment.
2. Leakages of hydro-fluorocarbon refrigerants are a significant share of the company's footprint. To address this, the company has strict maintenance regimes to minimise refrigerant gas leakage, with over 100 natural refrigerant installations in its markets worldwide.
3. Renewable energy is generated to power and heat company stores, offices and distribution centres. World-wide examples include: solar panels; wind turbines; ground-source heat pumps; and combined heat and power plants running off bio-fuels such as waste fish oil.
4. VerdunCo operates six zero-carbon stores worldwide, four of which are in the UK, using all the measures mentioned.
5. In addition to the low-carbon technology solutions, VerdunCo employs performance management tools to incentivise energy-efficient operations. Stores and distribution facilities have energy budgets, which are reviewed weekly. Energy displays are installed to communicate energy consumption to staff.

Carbon reductions in distribution

By 2015, VerdunCo aims to halve the distribution emissions of each case of goods delivered to its outlets against the 2006 baseline.

1. ‘Fuller cages’ transport maximally-full pallets, relying on warehouse workers’ performance and optimal warehouse planning.
2. ‘Fuller trucks’ provide optimal logistics planning to minimise the miles of empty trucks coming back to a distribution centre. Arrangements are made for company trucks to pick up suppliers’ goods on their way back to a distribution centre.
3. ‘Fewer miles’ optimise the distribution network by using the most efficient routes. VerdunCo has reduced its number of distribution centres in better locations closer to stores in the UK.
4. ‘Fuel economy’ eco-driving practices, and technical vehicle enhancements such as double-decker trailers or aerodynamic improvements, are used. All drivers are monitored on their fuel consumption and driving manner.

There is considerable employee involvement in this strategy, which relies on logistic planners, drivers and warehouse staff to achieve their targets. VerdunCo UK has also transferred some goods from road to rail.

Climate change and the business

VerdunCo’s climate change strategy is integrated into the business at all levels and is embedded in its business operations from strategic to operational level. At corporate level, a climate change team formulates VerdunCo’s carbon strategy, sets targets for emission reductions, and shares expertise on climate science and policies. In addition, within the property and distribution functions, there are environmental specialists with technical knowledge of low-carbon solutions.

Corporate carbon reduction targets are cascaded to country business units, which develop roadmaps to deliver assigned emission reductions. Ultimately, carbon reduction measures are implemented by local distribution and property teams, who work closely with environmental experts and the climate change team.

At operational level, thousands of staff running stores, distribution centres and transporting goods are provided with carbon-related key performance indicators to induce behavioural change.

In 2013, VerdunCo UK had reduced its absolute emissions by five per cent, whilst the business grew by seven per cent. It is estimated that that the green business practices implemented since 2006 had yielded estimated savings of £200 million in global energy costs in 2010. The new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), however, is sceptical about the Company’s climate change strategy, especially its ‘knock-on’ effects on jobs and company costs. He has arranged a meeting with a senior environmental and HR consultant to discuss these issues.

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Drawing upon research and current practice, as the consultant, you have been asked by the CEO to write a report covering the following:

1. **Critically examine the business case for and against the climate change ‘green’ strategy of VerdunCo PLC.**

2. **Critically evaluate the possible impacts of the green change strategy on (a) the number and types of jobs within the company and (b) the quality of these jobs. This analysis should cover technical, warehouse, transport, property, and store staff.**

3. **Critically evaluate the possible impacts of the green change strategy on learning and development within the company.**

4. **Make a recommendation for developing (or terminating) the company’s climate change strategy. Justify your response.**

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

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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. Classical theories of organisation and management were published in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. Examples include scientific management, bureaucracy and human relations theory. But despite developments in organisational theory since then, they are still practised in some organisations today.

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

    AND

    ii. Explain how this theory applies or does not apply to your organisation.

OR

2. There are various methods of classifying organisations to help understand what they are, what they do, how they do it, and why.

    i. Identify **any one** classificatory typology of organisations and critically evaluate it.

    AND

    ii. Critically examine how this classificatory system applies or does not apply to your organisation. Justify your answer.

PLEASE TURN OVER

B

3. Management consists of a number of functional activities (such as finance, marketing and HR), which have the aim of enabling organisations to achieve their goals and operate efficiently and effectively.

   Drawing upon research and/or current practice, identify and critically evaluate **any one** functional area of management in your organisation.

OR

4. You have been asked to give a talk to local sixth-formers on ‘Is management a profession?’ You are expected to incorporate two themes in your presentation:

   i. Whether management in general is a profession or not, giving reasons for your conclusion.

   AND

   ii. The extent to which managers in your organisation behave as a professional group.

   Drawing on research and current practice, draft what you will say and why.

C

5. You have received the following email from a senior colleague: ‘I’ve been asked to give a talk to a group of international MBA students on “Globalisation and what it means to my organisation”. I would be grateful for your advice.’

   Drawing on research, draft a reply, using your own organisation as the case study.

OR

6. Research into multi-national corporations (MNCs) suggests they are complex, many-layered organisations. Managerial and employee behaviour within them is influenced by both cultural and institutional variables. Hollinson (2010) describes these variables as the ‘software’ and ‘hardware’ determinants of behaviour within MNCs respectively.

   Drawing on research, critically evaluate **up to three** cultural variables and **up to three** institutional variables affecting managerial and employee behaviour in MNCs.

PLEASE TURN OVER

D

7. In an age of austerity, it was reported in the Sunday Times Rich List 2014 that the personal assets of the wealthiest 1,000 people in Britain were worth £519 billion, which was up by 13 per cent from the previous year. Furthermore, the wealth of the top 104 of the Rich List exceeds the wealth of the remaining 896 put together.

   The above observation provides one indicator of the trend towards growing economic and social inequality in the UK over the past couple of decades.

   Drawing upon research, critically evaluate the possible impacts of growing economic and social inequality on organisations in the UK. Justify your answer.

OR

8. It is generally accepted that technology has always been a driver of organisational change and renewal and that it continues to be so.

   i. Explain, with examples, how technology is being used in your organisation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the HR function.

   AND

   ii. To what extent has the technology succeeded in achieving this?

E

9. Much public debate recently has been about the UK’s place in Europe. For example, the Conservative Party has promised a renegotiation of the UK's relationship with the EU, followed by a referendum of the UK electorate; the UK Independence Party wants an immediate in/out referendum; the Liberal Democrats want to remain in the EU; and the Labour Party says it will not hold a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, unless there are proposals to transfer further powers from London to Brussels.

   Given the background to this ‘hot topic’ in UK politics, you have been asked to put the business case for continued UK membership of the EU to a group of local management students. Drawing upon research, outline what you will say and why.

OR

10. You have received the following email from a junior colleague:

    ‘As I understand it, “neo-liberalism” is the dominant economic policy orthodoxy of many governments since the late 1970s. Please (a) explain to me what neo-liberalism is and (b) its implications for our organisation.’

    Drawing on research, draft a helpful reply, using your own organisation as the example in response to the second part of the question.

END OF EXAMINATION

Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

January 2015

Introduction

This report reviews the January 2015 sitting of the Human Resource Management in Context advanced level examination of the CIPD. This is a core module in the advanced level qualifications framework and draws upon the “Insights, Strategy and Solutions” professional area of the CIPD Profession Map.

In this examination, 270 candidates took the unit. Of these, 189 achieved a pass standard or more, giving a pass rate of 70%. The breakdown of grades is shown below. Pleasingly, the percentage of distinctions was higher than in recent examinations, as was the percentage of passes.

January 2015		
Grade	**Number**	**Percentage of total** (to 1 decimal point)
Distinction	8	3.0
Merit	28	10.3
Pass	155	57.1
Marginal fail	24	8.9
Fail	56	20.6
Total	**271**	**100.00**

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

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Section A

Learning outcomes: 3 and 4

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. However, it was particularly intended to test in-depth knowledge and understanding of Learning Outcomes (LOs) 3 and 4.

There are a number of ways in which this case can be approached but the following summary points could be examined and developed in answers.

Task 1

The question asked candidates, drawing upon research and current practice, to write a report to the CEO critically examining the cases for and against the climate change green strategy of the case-study organisation.

The case for having a climate change strategy include: the business case in terms of profitability, efficiency and giving the company a competitive edge in the marketplace; the ethical case (or the common good) in that climate change transcends national boundaries and threatens to affect the global population in many different ways - from risks to supply chains, to the direct impact that changes in the climate have on customers' lives and the operation of VerdunCo's stores; future business strategy projections which indicate a more carbon-constrained future is emerging, where carbon energy continues to be more expensive; and where the company wants to operate effectively and sustainably within that future.

The case against includes: whether such a policy is as business efficient as claimed and how costs are measured in the green strategy proposition; the impact of other companies that are not willing to adapt similar policies, thus threatening VerdunCo's strategy; the green strategy's knock-on effect on other corporate strategies; the learning and development costs of the strategy.

The business case for and against the green strategy was reasonably well set out by most candidates but at a basic level. Some tried to address the question via a SWOT, STEEPLE or some other framework not required by the question and so came unstuck. It seems they had anticipated this sort of question and thus attempted to adopt a heterodox approach, even though the question asked simply for the case for and against. Some candidates constantly referred to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and, if they failed to recognise that 'green' was a sub-set of CSR and not the same as CSR, answers attracted less credit.

Many answers were descriptive rather than critical, particularly those presented in tables or bullet point format rather than in prose. A common issue was the proposition that the strategy would provide competitive advantage, positioned alongside the notion that the company must pursue the strategy because all other firms were doing this; few candidates picked up this contradiction.

Task 2

This question required candidates to critically evaluate the possible impacts of the green change strategy on (a) the number and types of jobs within the company and (b) the quality of these jobs. This analysis was expected to cover technical, warehouse, transport, property, and store staff.

The impact on the number and types of jobs in the business includes: the demand for new green jobs such as a team of climate-change experts and policy advisors; environmental specialists in the property and distribution teams to support them; new green jobs in environmental management to facilitate the green business practices within distribution; and all employees within the property function who are likely to be affected by the climate change strategy, because energy-related issues are embedded in most of their activities. The UK distribution team will need a group of transformed green jobs to reduce carbon emissions, which implies behavioural changes or performance targets in their daily work. Moreover, since the carbon reduction strategy is focused on operational efficiency in transport and warehouse activities, it ultimately reduces labour demand given the scope of business.

In terms of job quality, the climate change strategy has affected a number of working conditions among different employee groups. This is more applicable to white-collar employees, who deal with knowledge-specific green issues such as the property development team, logistic planners and environmental experts. The green strategy has an impact on the income of senior and middle management, since carbon reduction targets determine their bonuses. All other employees relate to carbon reduction targets through non-monetary performance appraisal. Drivers benefit from the green change through improved health and safety conditions. Renewal of the vehicle fleet as well as energy-efficiency measures in newly built stores or distribution centres make a better place to work for the employees. Efficiency measures in transport and warehouse pose a need for more flexible working hours for drivers and warehouse staff.

Most candidates answered this question well, but they were better at considering the impact of green technology when addressing the numbers and types of job rather than the quality of these jobs. One weakness in these answers was they were very general, thus failing to pinpoint those jobs that might be under threat and those that might need additional staff.

Another weakness was that more attention was given to the number of jobs and much less to the quality of jobs and how specifically they might change.

Task 3

This question asked candidates to critically evaluate the possible impacts of the green change strategy on learning and development within the company.

The need for developing green skills is significantly different among different groups of employees. Employees in the property function do not need new skills since green business practices are embedded in the standard property operations, with limited changes in daily tasks and responsibilities. It is not the skills that change, but employees need to gain specific knowledge about the green technologies in buildings.

Within the distribution team, the drivers are most affected since they have to acquire fuel-efficient driving skills. All drivers are trained on a one-to-one basis by internal trainers, who are initially instructed by the vehicle manufacturers. For shop and warehouse workers, carbon reduction measures require behavioural changes rather than new skills. Employees need to understand the link between their daily tasks and carbon footprint. This understanding is facilitated by community targets – including carbon emissions applicable to each store or distribution centre. Logistic planners have not seen significant changes in their skills due to the green business practices. Their role has always been to optimise logistic routes to lower carbon emissions.

This question attracted two main approaches to the answer. Some candidates looked at L&D interventions for specific roles, whilst others took more of an overview on the issues L&D would need to address. Either approach was acceptable. Weaker answers tended to review L&D but with little or no reference to the case study. Indeed, this appeared to be an unexpected question and many candidates did not address it in the manner expected. The marking team were generally surprised by what appeared to be a lack of any significant awareness of L&D amongst some HR students studying this unit.

Task 4

This question asked candidates to make a recommendation for developing (or terminating) the company's climate change strategy and to justify their response.

In responding to this question, and taking account of the above analyses, candidates needed to indicate how the company climate change strategy can be developed or terminated, giving reasons for their choice of policy direction. Responses to this question were mixed. Most candidates recommended the development of the strategy. However, many candidates just repeated the points included within the first case-study question, which argued 'the case for' continuing the strategy. The quality of the arguments presented varied, with weaker responses simply saying the company would be losing face to cease the strategy. On the other hand, candidates with confidence to assert a reasoned view generally did so competently and with some evidence to support their line of argument. Answers of the highest standard were able to suggest how the strategy might be developed.

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 outcomes 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 asked candidates to select any one classical theory of organisations (such as scientific management) and critically evaluate it, as well as explaining how this theory applies or does not apply to their organisation.

Candidates could select any one model of organisation such as bureaucracy, scientific management or human relations theory and critically evaluate it. The main writers to be discussed include Weber, F. W. Taylor, and Mayo. Some understanding of the basic arguments of these schools of thought was expected to be demonstrated. Candidates then had to discuss how their chosen model related to their own organisation.

Most candidates chose bureaucracy or scientific management as classical theories, with a handful considering human relations theory. Marks were generally respectable and pass-level answers could cite the main features of the model chosen. Most chose bureaucracy or scientific management, a handful considered human relations theory. Marks were generally respectable and candidates could cite the main features of the chosen theory and attribute Weber/Taylor/Mayo as applicable to their organisations, but they were light in terms of critical evaluation. Some of the application was weak.

Candidates who struggled with this question only demonstrated a patchy level of understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of this topic. This then made it difficult for them to apply them to their own organisation in the second part of the question.

Question A2

Learning outcome: 1

This question asked candidates to identify any one classificatory typology of organisations and critically evaluate it. They also had to critically examine how this classificatory system applies or does not apply to their organisation and justify their answer.

There is a range of classificatory typologies of organisations which range from descriptive to analytical, orientation and ownership, public and private ownership, rules and systems, prime beneficiaries, and others. Any of these could be selected, described and analysed by candidates. The selected typology then had to be related to the candidates' own organisation and explained how it applied to that organisation or not.

This was not a popular question, suggesting that candidates had more to write about in the organisational theory question than on this one. But the relatively few candidates doing it were able to achieve a pass standard of performance. More generally, where this question was attempted, the classificatory frameworks presented were often not the expected ones. For example, one candidate chose Porter's three competitive strategies while another classified companies according to the Miles and Snow analytical framework, which missed the point of the question.

Question B3

Learning outcome: 2

This question asked candidates to draw upon research and/or current practice and identify and critically evaluate any one functional area of management in their organisation.

Any functional area of management could be selected and critically evaluated by candidates. These could include financial management, marketing, strategy, risk, quality, performance and HR. Some evidence of the nature of these functions, drawing on the literature and/or organisational practice, was expected in candidate responses and these would be related to their own organisations.

This was another popular question, with the some candidates choosing to critically evaluate the HR function, which was to some extent to be expected. Unfortunately, many candidates merely evaluated the structure of the function and saw this as an opportunity to include the Ulrich Model. Only a few candidates effectively evaluated the function and highlighted how it enabled the organisation achieve its goals as set out in the question. In practice, however, the stronger answers were from candidates who chose to evaluate another function, such as finance and marketing. Candidates who did less well tended to describe rather than critically evaluate a function, as in the case of the HR function of management. Little research was identified in some answers but current practice tended to illustrate answers more effectively and thus scored higher marks.

Question B4

Learning outcome: 2

This question asked candidates to draw on research and current practice and argue whether management is a profession or not, giving reasons for their conclusion. They also had to critically assess the extent to which managers in their organisation behave as a professional group.

Either side of the debate could be selected by candidates (that is, that management is or is not a profession). The case for is rooted in arguments that management practices are based on a specific body of knowledge, professional expertise, qualifications, and a professional identity.

The case against rests on the fragmentation of management practices, the different (or variable) backgrounds of professional managers, managers are commonly educated in different non-management subjects, there is no agreed central body of knowledge, and management accountability is to organisations and owners, not professional bodies. Another theme might be that some parts of management are a profession, with examples, but others are not. The second part of the question was organisation-specific.

This was not a popular question but those answering it made a reasonable analysis of the topic.

The majority handled the debate well, establishing the recognised criteria by which professionalism might be measured and the extent to which these criteria might be present in managerial roles. Some candidates made the argument that there is no recognised over-arching regulatory body governing the role of management, other than the Chartered Institute of Management and Institute of Directors. But membership is optional and not necessary to become a practising manager. The professionalism of some managers, however, is based on their membership of other institutes such as accounting or marketing bodies and CIPD.

Question C5

Learning outcome: 5

This question asked candidates to outline a talk to a group of international MBA students on "Globalisation and what it means to my organisation".

Appropriate but contested definitions of the complexity of globalisation were expected, drawing upon research, different theoretical schools, and academic areas. There is a wide range of sources for this. This would enable some broader understanding of how globalisation affects candidates' own organisations. This was expected to be demonstrated in their responses with variations amongst them, depending on the type of organisation they work for.

This was one of more popular choices of the questions in this section. There were few very poor answers and some very good ones. Most answers did provide some indication of the meaning of globalisation but others did not. Some helpfully used the characteristics as a framework for the rest of their answer. These were a much better set of answers than in previous examination diets where the topic was examined. Most candidates related globalisation well to their organisations.

Question C6

Learning outcome: 5

This question asked candidates to draw on research and critically evaluate up to three cultural variables and up to three institutional variables affecting managerial and employee behaviour in MNCs.

Candidates had a wide range of cultural and institutional variables to explore. Cultural variables are the shared meanings and understandings that humans pass down through language, symbols and artefacts. These are wide-ranging and are noted in a variety of research studies. These cover individual level (Hofstede), organisational level (Trompenaars and Hampden), societal level (Ingelhart and Welzel). Various methods of classifying culture are used, such as that of Hodgetts and Luthan. Institutional variables include economic, political, religious, legal, and labour market institutions. Such institutions affect firms and governments differentially in nation states.

Few candidates answered this question and those that did were unable to provide a particularly good standard of answer. They seemed to struggle to identify cultural and institutional variables effectively. This was disappointing, given the range of materials on this topic and the increasing impact of global businesses in labour markets.

Question D7

Learning outcome: 6

This question asked candidates to draw upon research and critically evaluate the possible impacts of growing economic and social inequality on organisations in the UK and justify their answer.

In market economies, business organisations exist to produce goods and services for individuals and other organisations in the market place. Perfect income and wealth equality are impossible but in conditions of greater social and economic equality, economic growth is promoted which benefits both organisations and individuals through distribution of new economic resources amongst them. In conditions of greater economic and social inequality, a number of consequences follow. These are likely to impact on organisations in various ways. These include: higher rates of health problems; more social problems (for example, crime and violence); lower demands for social goods; lower levels of economic utility from resources devoted to high-end consumption; lower economic growth; and lower life expectancy. All these and other factors influence market supply and demand for labour, products and services.

Few candidates attempted this question and those that did generally produced a set of weak answers. It appears that most candidates could identify and explain the causes of economic and social inequality but they found difficulty relating the impact upon organisations. There was some broad discussion on labour market issues such as de-skilling and labour segregation but little on the longer-term implications for organisations resulting from further inequality in the distribution of wealth and market disequilibrium in the allocation of finite resources.

Question D8

Learning outcome: 6

This question asked candidates to explain, with examples, how technology is being used in their organisation to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the HR function. Also to what extent has the technology succeeded in achieving this?

Examples of these technologies include self-service HR systems, automation of HR processes and services, web-based recruitment, intranets, e-learning, databases, HR information systems, video-conferencing and others. Candidates then needed to assess the extent to which these technological initiatives work in their own organisations and whether they were effective in achieving the aims they have been established for or not.

This was a popular question and was generally well done. It was clear that most candidates were comfortable discussing IT in their own workplaces and in HR functions and the benefits of these. Better answers homed in on the efficiency and effectiveness issues too.

Candidates who examined efficiency and effectiveness issues provided particularly good answers. Weaker candidates were descriptive about the technology and failed to provide any meaningful evaluation.

Question E9

Learning outcome: 7

This question, drawing upon research, asked candidates to put the business case for continued UK membership of the EU to a group of local management students.

There are many arguments for continued UK membership of the EU for UK businesses. These include: UK firms are part of a single free trade market with a combined GDP of £11 trillion and 500 million people; provides a level playing field for UK businesses within Europe; end of many non-tariff barriers; possibilities of foreign direct investments opportunities; free movement of labour; protection of intellectual property rights; lower telecom costs; creation of a single energy market in 2014; a common set of business rules for 27 member states, which helps businesses.

Candidates attempting this question were again well informed and stronger ones showed enough understanding to earn a pass. The arguments presented covered the benefits of the free movement of labour and capital; access to a wider trading bloc, and little restrictions on the freedom of trade.

Weaker answers usually lacked depth and breadth, probably because it was the last question to be tackled and time was running out. The main problem with weaker scripts was reluctance amongst candidates to focus on the thrust of the question; that is, ‘the business case for continued membership’. Consequently, some answers covered the institutions of the EU, the current political debate around continued membership (not as a context for the answer), and the wider philosophical reasons behind its foundation. Other answers concentrated on the skills gap issues that immigration from the EU might solve.

Question E10

Learning outcome: 7

This question asked candidates to explain what neo-liberalism is and what it means for their organisation.

There is a variety of analyses of neo-liberalism or supply-side economics in contrast to Keynesianism. But five basic economic tenets run through the neo-liberal agenda: the dominance of and preference for free, de-regulated markets; cutting public expenditure;

reducing regulation, ‘red-tape’ and institutionalised labour markets; privatisation; eliminating the concept of the ‘public good’ and replacing it with individual provision and private supply.

The implications of each of these tenets for candidate organisations are likely to vary in each case. So answers to the second part of the question depended on the sort of organisations candidates work for.

This was not a popular question but the few candidates doing addressed it with confidence and consequently provided some excellent answers. Amongst weaker candidates, answers showed very limited understanding of neo-liberalism and as a result were not able to effectively assess the implications of it for their own organisations.

Conclusion

As noted earlier, the pass rate in this examination diet was 70%. 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. Most candidates seemed to have been prepared effectively for the case study; many of them handled the questions well showing reasonable competence in most areas. But responses to Task 1 were often better than to Tasks 2, 3 and 4. Overall, the quality of answers was competent but not outstanding. The majority of candidates appeared to have carried out some research prior to the examination, commonly citing information from the carbon trust and with good organisational examples such as from Tesco, Aldi and other similar organisations. Among stronger candidates, there was clear evidence of relevant research being undertaken in advance of the examination.

2. On the other hand, the results for the case study in this examination sometimes disappointing, particularly as this is a seen case. Many candidates did not produce answers that clearly showed their appreciation of the contexts of the case organisation. Further, many candidates did not demonstrate their ability to take a strategic view but were largely operational at best in their discussions. Finally, there were still a significant number of candidates who appeared to have weaved content that they had learned for ‘anticipated questions’ into those that were asked. It is difficult to give credit for knowledge, understanding and application that does not fully apply to the actual exam questions.

3. In Section B, the choice of questions by candidates was not evenly spread but apart from Question C5 and Question C6 the range of questions answered demonstrated good coverage across the indicative content. Lack of research and critical evaluation to some questions was noted and some scripts were particularly weak in this respect. It was unusual that there was strong preference towards some of the questions in each sub-section, at the expense of others. These topics must have been covered quite thoroughly by the centres and this may have been one reason for improved performance in Section B compared with some previous occasions.

4. The marking team were of the view that in Section B of the examination, the indicative content of the unit was fairly represented and candidates had a good choice of questions in each pairing. Naturally some areas are always more popular to candidates than others (for example, globalisation) and consequently certain questions in a pair were more popular than others.

5. In the paper overall, good candidates are usually distinguished by their ability to deliver critical analysis and justification of the arguments used. They are also able to apply relevant knowledge and application of this knowledge to their own organisations. Weak candidates tend to provide descriptive answers without demonstrating M-level performance or knowledge of appropriate research frameworks.

6. In this examination diet, it seemed that many candidates were better prepared in answering questions covering all the learning outcomes than previously. But there remains, in some cases, a need for better evaluation of concepts and a more thorough application of these to their own organisations.

7. Candidates responding to questions descriptively, and in a basic fashion in Section A, tended to continue to respond in this way in Section B and thus did not improve upon their performance across topics. In the worst cases, candidates did not appear to be well prepared for the case study and they failed to demonstrate the breadth of knowledge required in Section B of the examination paper, Common issues arising in weak examination scripts - as in previous examination cohorts - included: failure to answer the question set; poor application to own organisation; lack of research and/or practice to support answers; description rather than M-level skills; excessive use of bullet points; and poor time management.

8. The marking team commented on the scope this paper had in testing candidates' knowledge, understanding and application of knowledge in the questions put. It also provided an opportunity for all candidates to demonstrate their level of capability. In particular, there were a number of questions that were related to the individual's own organisation, so even if some had less theoretical knowledge than others, they had the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of their employer, which they did.

9. To conclude, 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 they are expected to read around the subject matter of this module. At a minimum, the core texts provide an overview of the literature and identify and review key studies in this field of professional knowledge and understanding. But this is not enough. As mentioned in other examiner's reports, this needs to be supplemented through wider reading by candidates. These sources include relevant academic journals, professional periodicals and the quality press, as indicated by their subject tutors.

To conclude, I would like to acknowledge and thank my team of markers once again for their professional contribution to the assessment process, within a relatively short time scale. The markers were Derek Adam-Smith, John Ashcroft, Helen Bessant, Chris Evans, Dee McGhee, Alan Peacock and Amanda Thompson.

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