

Examiner's interim feedback

November 2019 Management Case Study Examination

The purpose of this document is to give some feedback on the November 2019 Management Case Study (MCS). It also aims to provide some useful advice for candidates re-sitting this exam in February 2020 who are preparing for their exam. If you are planning to re-sit in February 2020 under the 2015 syllabus, remember that the exam will be based on the same pre-seen as November 2019. You don't need to know or use any information from the variants of the exam that was taken in November 2019.

The full set of post-exam materials (applying to both November 2019 and the February 2020 re-sit) including the full examiner's report, along with model answers, variants and marking schemes will be available 2 weeks after the May 2020 exam results are released.

General comments

The MCS for November 2019 was based on GCS, a sports clothing company. Key information about GCS was made available in advance within the pre-seen material and five exam variants were set, each presenting additional information and setting four tasks to be completed. Each task was split into either two or three specific elements.

The sports clothing industry is an interesting one that should have been accessible to candidates from all countries. It raises a number of topical issues in the real world and it was encouraging to see that many candidates had conducted some research into recent events affecting the industry. Many candidates supplemented their answers with references to real-world cases and examples, which was helpful when they were relevant to the requirement.

Below are comments in relation to the competencies:

Technical	<p>If you scored a strong pass, then your answer undoubtedly demonstrated a strong grasp of the technical content in the syllabus. The expectation is that candidates preparing for a case study exam will recognise the need to adapt and apply their technical knowledge to suit the scenario.</p> <p>Weaker answers generally demonstrated a limited grasp of technical content that is clearly 'core'. That was particularly true with regard to financial reporting questions, where candidates did not draw upon F Pillar study materials in order to justify their arguments.</p> <p>Weaker answers also tended to reveal gaps in some of the more technical areas of management accounting, such as project appraisal and performance measurement.</p>
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Business	<p>Most candidates demonstrated confidence with regard to business skills. Candidates preparing for future exams should maintain their skills in this area.</p> <p>If you scored a strong pass, then your discussion of business issues was likely to have been underpinned by a strong grasp of the content of the E Pillar and its application to the scenario.</p>
People	<p>If you scored a strong pass, then your answers probably demonstrated realistic expectations concerning the behaviour of employees and other interested parties.</p> <p>Weaker answers often failed to grasp the implications of the scenario to the interactions with colleagues or other contacts that arose from the scenarios.</p>
Leadership	<p>The points arising with respect to leadership are similar to those from people. As with people, there was a tendency for weaker candidates to make unrealistic or inappropriate recommendations in relation to leadership decisions. Again, that could be attributed largely to a weak grasp of the scenario and the application of the syllabus content to a specific scenario.</p>

Weak answers tended to demonstrate some or all of the following characteristics:

- Some scripts were very short and contained too few points to earn an acceptable mark. There is nothing wrong with a concise writing style that sticks to the key points while developing relevant arguments. Brevity only becomes a concern when candidates produce very short answers that lack content and demonstrate little real value.
- Some candidates missed parts of questions altogether. That appears to have been due to an inability to address a requirement and indicates poor preparation rather than poor exam technique. Candidates should revise for the case study on the basis that all questions are compulsory and so skipping topics may prove costly.
- Some arguments lacked relevance. Some candidates offered extensive summaries of the syllabus material that was not related to the scenario. All of the tasks sought specific answers to practical problems arising from the scenario and so it was disappointing when candidates could not relate their understanding of the study material to the case. Other candidates wasted time by describing real-world cases that have no relevance to the scenario or the requirement. It is encouraging that candidates gather real-world material but there are no rewardable marks if this does not relate to the scenario or task.
- Some answers did not address what was asked.

Hints and tips for resitting candidates

Whether you failed in November 2019 and will be resitting or whether you are sitting the new MCS for the first time in February 2020, there are things that you can do to help improve your chances of success.

Before the exam:

1. Reflect on your understanding of the study materials. Are you confident in your ability to apply the syllabus content from all three Pillars; Enterprise, Financial and Performance?
2. Review the pre-seen carefully. Think about the nature of the business. Be ready to take the nature of the business into account when you apply your understanding of the syllabus material to the requirements in the case. It is worth spending a substantial amount of time reading and taking notes on the pre-seen, making sure you understand the business. You can't afford to waste time during the case study exam looking at the pre-seen, so do it now.
3. Have you practised answering case study questions? The only way to tell whether you can write a realistic answer to a case is to look at past cases and attempt to write a detailed answer. Reflect on what you have produced and ask whether you would be confident of getting a job if you offered those responses to interview questions.
4. If you were close to passing at your previous attempt, then a little more preparation and study of the technical areas should help you pass next time.

During the exam:

1. Focus on the task and think about what is being asked. Weaker scripts tend to pay little attention to the task.
2. Attempt all the tasks. If you have revised thoroughly then you should be familiar with the whole syllabus and should not have any major weak spots. Everybody has favourite topics and others that they are less comfortable with. If you are unlucky enough to be faced with a less favourite topic then take care to plan your answer even more carefully in order to make the most of your understanding.
3. It may be helpful to draw upon information provided in the pre-seen and to refer to that as and when it would be relevant or would support an argument. It may also help to refer to material gathered from independent study. Be careful, however, not to waste time by including irrelevant material. If a real-world example (such as a real case associated with sports clothes) is relevant then it may be worth additional marks, but only if it relates to the task.
4. Don't waste time on elaborate presentation. All that is really required is a clear and relevant answer that is split into paragraphs. Headings can be helpful when planning your work. There is no real benefit in significant use of bold type or underlining unless it helps you to plan your work, there are no extra marks for this. Similarly, there is no need to use valuable time on writing greetings, in emails for example, or other social niceties in your responses.