

Examiner's interim feedback

November 2019 Operational Case Study Examination

The purpose of this document is to give some feedback on the November 2019 Operational Case Study (OCS). 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 OCS for November 2019 was based on Chokolade Box, a leading premium chocolatier, manufacturing and retailing innovative and accessibly priced luxury chocolate. Key information about the company was made available in advance within the pre-seen material and five exam variants were set, each giving additional information about Chokolade Box and setting four tasks to be completed. Each task was split into two specific parts, with each part consisting of between one and three elements.

Many answers were presented well with good use of headings and short, to the point, paragraphs and sentences which were easy to read. Other answers were a continuous stream of text which made it difficult to determine the points being made. Time management did not appear to be an issue for most candidates. Where elements of tasks were not answered, this seemed to be because of a lack of knowledge rather than a timing issue.

The quality of answers in November 2019 varied widely. There were some excellent high-scoring answers, where candidates had clearly focused on what had been asked of them in the task and produced answers which were technically accurate and relevant by applying their knowledge and understanding to the specifics of the scenario. There were also some very poor low-scoring answers, where candidates were clearly unprepared. The majority of answers however, scored in the middle of the marks range, typically with some high-scoring elements and some low-scoring elements.

Below are comments in relation to the competencies:

Technical	Demonstration of technical skills continues to be a challenge to many candidates (please see specific comments to candidates below). For OCS 64% of the marks are for technical skills and it is disappointing candidates are still coming to the exam unprepared in terms of their technical knowledge and understanding, especially for P1 and technical aspects of F1 (other than IAS 16).
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Business	Demonstration of business skills (16% of the marks) was generally good. It was evident that many candidates had studied the pre-seen material and therefore had a reasonable understanding of the business. Application of this to E1 related tasks was reasonably good overall, although sometimes candidates failed to think through the implications of new information given within the exam itself.
People	Demonstration of people skills (14% of the marks) was also generally good for the same reasons as business skills. Again, candidates that scored poorly here did so because they failed to apply new information given in the task or to grasp what was required of them.
Leadership	Demonstration of leadership skills was mixed. Some candidates did well here and gave reasoned decisions or recommendations when asked to do so. Others scored poorly because they ignored making any kind of recommendation despite the task clearly asking for it. Leadership skills accounts for 6% of the marks.

If you failed in November 2019, this is likely to be because you did not:

- demonstrate understanding and application of technical P1 and F1 subjects. The OCS for the 2015 syllabus and going forward for the 2019 blueprint is heavily focused on the application of technical knowledge. You must learn how to apply technical knowledge.
- apply the business context (especially in relation to new information given in the exam) in your answers. Generic textbook style answers score few, if any, marks, and pre-prepared answers based only on the pre-seen material will also limit your marks.
- add depth to your answers. In the OCS we are typically asking for you to explain something rather than just identify a list of points.
- answer all elements of a task. If you don't attempt an element of a task you cannot score the marks and therefore are reducing your chances of passing. We do not give compensatory marks if one part of your answer is excellent but another part is missing.
- answer the task. Some candidates answered the task they would like to have seen rather than the task given.

Hints and tips for resitting candidates

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

1. Revise technical subjects and don't just rely on remembering what you learnt for the OTQ exams.
2. Practise and keep practising past OCS questions (which are all available for use online). Doing this will help you to:
 - understand how to apply the technical knowledge gained from your revision in point 1 above.
 - appreciate how the pre-seen material and new information in the exam itself can be applied in answers.

- get used to how the examiner phrases tasks and, from reviewing suggested solutions, understand what they are looking for in responses.
3. In the exam itself:
- Allocate your time to ensure that all elements of a task are answered. Read the task carefully: don't just assume that because it's on a subject that has come up before that the task will be the same. Think to yourself as you are writing: 'is this really answering the task?'
 - Plan answers rather than launching straight in. This is best done in the body of the answer box by using headings and short points. These can then be expanded to give a fully explained answer.
 - Make sure that you are explaining rather than just stating or identifying a list of points.
 - Use the information given to you in the exam: it's there for a reason! Don't be afraid to use your common sense and think around an issue if needed.
 - Don't give up.

Good luck!