

Examiner's interim feedback

November 2019 Strategic Case Study Examination

The purpose of this document is to give some feedback on the November 2019 Strategic Case Study (SCS). 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 SCS for November 2019 was based on Runn, a courier company. Key information about Runn was made available in advance within the pre-seen material and five exam variants were set, each presenting additional information and setting three tasks to be completed. Each task was split into two specific elements.

Courier companies operate globally and it is reasonable to expect that candidates have dealt directly with courier companies in the real world, either in their professional or their personal lives. The courier industry is, for example, a key enabler of online retailing. It was encouraging to see that candidates generally wrote in a logical manner and had researched the courier industry.

Below are comments in relation to the competencies:

Technical	<p>If you scored well in the exam then you have probably mastered both the theories and models that are included in the syllabus and demonstrated the ability to apply those models to the scenario that you were allocated. Technical skills are important because they enable recommendations and decisions to be explained and justified in terms of logic that has been applied frequently in the real world. When they are applicable, these technical models reflect the links between different factors that will be affected by a decision. In the real world, one should always be ready for a superior to challenge a recommendation or, at the very least, to seek an explanation for it.</p> <p>Weaker answers often reflected a recall of the technical models and formulae. It is not sufficient to know what the models are and to explain their logic in detail. It is vitally important however, to be able to weigh up</p>
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	<p>their explanatory power for a particular set of circumstances. For example, some models are based on assumptions that simplify the real world in order to make it more easily understood. Some models remain robust in spite of such assumptions and others do not. Weaker candidates often memorise models, but pay little attention to their applicability to the task set.</p>
Business	<p>Stronger candidates demonstrated the ability to approach a business problem in a practical manner that read as if it would be an adequate response to the strategic challenge posed. Good candidates generally reflect the ability to offer responses that would be regarded as worth implementing in the real world. The qualities that are likely to score well in the exam would probably also be effective if used in a job interview or in a management meeting. Sensible suggestions that could be implemented in the real world are always likely to impress employers or colleagues and will therefore be rewarded in an exam.</p> <p>If your mark was weak then you might consider paying more attention to the business news. Knowing how real companies handle strategic problems will equip you to improve your performance in future exams. It would also be worth considering how to make better use of any practical business experience that you might have. You should certainly reflect on your employer's business practices and should ask questions at every opportunity.</p>
People	<p>The SCS requires a good understanding of people and their behaviour. Questions frequently deal with aspects of human behaviour that reflect issues such as ethics, compliance with procedures and agency. Stronger candidates tended to demonstrate a realistic understanding of human behaviour. Again, this is an area in which skills can be reinforced by reflection on practical experience.</p> <p>Human behaviour can often be complicated and people do not always behave in the manner that they 'should'. Weaker answers did not always factor this in.</p>
Leadership	<p>Leadership lies at the heart of governance, which is a significant element of the SCS. Stronger answers tended to reflect the same sense of realism that has already been referred to. As suggested previously, candidates will benefit from reading widely about business and reflecting on the ways in which successful leaders behave.</p> <p>Again, weaker answers demonstrated a lack of engagement with what can happen in the real world.</p>

Hints and tips for resitting candidates

Before the exam:

1. Reflect on your understanding of the study materials. Do you feel that you can explain the content in a manner that demonstrates genuine understanding rather than just recall? It is a good sign if you can explain a concept without relying on technical terminology.
2. Review the pre-seen carefully. Think about the business itself and the factors that are required for a company in this industry to remain strong and healthy.
3. Take time to practise answering case study questions. Don't just read past papers and their associated suggested solutions and assume your ability to understand the questions and answers means that you can prepare convincing answers. Writing detailed answers is time consuming, but it is the only way to check that you have the ability to prepare a realistic answer.

During the exam:

Deal with the requirements by combining your grasp of the technical models with your understanding of business. As a rule of thumb, answers should reflect a balanced mix of technical content to provide structure and rigour and of practical insight based on the pre-seen, the unseen scenario and your wider reading and experience. Neither is likely to be good enough on its own.