

Systems Principles Again, this paper followed the same format that has been used for the last six or so exams, with candidates required to pass four specific criteria – “Select new technology models for business”, “Manage complex projects”, “Manage project quality” and “Prepare disaster recovery/contingency plans” in order to pass the examination as a whole.

Students were examined on their ability to apply their knowledge to specific issues, and provide solutions in a particular business scenario. This scenario had been made available to students in advance and it was also included in the question paper. In addition, students were allowed to bring into the examination any written or printed paper-based materials.

All questions were centred on the given scenario.

Following the same pattern as previous examinations, the questions were set from all parts of the syllabus, but within the broad context of project management. Future examinations will most likely maintain this emphasis, even though a new examiner has taken over.

The following comments are made about each question. Note that a wide variety of answers are possible, due to the broad nature of the syllabus. The examiner looked for answers that indicated that candidates were familiar with systems principles and development practices and with applications in general, and could apply these appropriately.

Apart from one outstanding candidate, most candidates seemed to do well in some parts of the examination, but did not seem so prepared in other parts, resulting in a fairly low pass rate.

The open book nature of the examination was evident in the lack of preparation, with some candidates copying largely irrelevant sections of answers prepared in advance, or straight out of texts.

The following comments are made for each question:

Question 1

This question examined the criterion “Select new technology models for business”, and asked candidates to consider the extent to which technology might be applied to certain business activities/processes in order to minimise human intervention. The first part requested candidates select one activity that they thought could be fully ‘automated’ – where all processing between the input and output could be done without a person involved – and describe how this might be implemented. The second and third parts were similar, asking them to describe an activity where some, and then significant, human intervention would likely be required.

Whilst there are no definitive answers, the Time Recording process could be automated fairly easily using Time Cards (or face recognition/biometrics for a

more modern solution) to record working times – noting any exceptions or problems. Further to this, almost any of the listed processes could be argued to require some human intervention at some time. However, the Quotations process would probably require mostly face-to-face interaction due to the negotiation required (although some bits of it can still be automated).

Most candidates did well on this question, but a couple tried to describe all the processes, displaying a lack of understanding. Being able to comprehend what is occurring in the current system is critical if you are trying to make it 'better'.

Question 2

This question examined the criterion "Manage project quality", and (similar to the last few examinations) asked the candidates how they might go about ensuring their new project met the organisation's systems development quality standards.

It was split into the three following aspects of quality management:

Planning – decide on a standard (or methodology)

Assurance – decide the process (how we will follow this standard)

Control – measure the result (and provide feedback for improvement)

First, there must be identified quality planning – what standards should we work to. Choosing an appropriate system development methodology, or adopting a standard development process like PMBOK/PRINCE2/ILIT and so on.

Second, there is a need for quality assurance – having set the standard, what processes have we put in place to meet this standard. That is, what methodology have we chosen? How will we make sure it is followed?

Third, there is a need for quality control – monitoring results to ensure that standards are met, and finding ways to improve.

Whilst most candidates were able to correctly identify the 3 aspects of quality management, there was a clear lack of understanding about the Assurance and Control sections. As noted in previous Examiners Report, some candidates focussed on answers from previous examinations – Quality documentation or CRM – or Software Testing, rather than system measurement and improvement.

Question 3

This question examined the criterion "Prepare disaster recovery/contingency plans" and asked the candidates to consider how (at least 3) risks or threats associated with any 3 (only) of the listed activities/processes could be minimised.

Whilst this question was very general, with many possible answers, candidates also had to show an understanding of the current system. Jobs For You already put contractual arrangements in place, with both the client and employee, to

minimise the risks of over or underpayments. Also, these clearly spell out the short-term nature of this type of employment.

Question 4

This question examined the criterion “Manage complex projects” and asked the candidates to provide an overview of the project steps involved in moving from an Access database to one that is more ‘robust and centralised’.

Briefly, all projects start with an initiation phase which includes (amongst others) identification of requirements, the scope of the project, and getting any necessary approvals. Next comes the planning and development phase, that in effect functions as the blueprint for the remainder of the project lifecycle, and involves developing a project plan, schedule and budget. During the implementation (or delivery) phase, monitoring and control are of prime importance, to keep things on track. Lastly comes the evaluation phase, where things are finalised and reviewed – “Have all objectives been met?” Any lessons learned should be incorporated into the plans for future projects.

Only a few candidates outlined the above process, while most others simply focussed on various aspects such as cost or design.