

Selection and Assessment

EXAMINER'S REPORT

November 2007



Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Professional Development Scheme

Specialist Personnel and Development

Selection and Assessment

November 2007

9 November 2007 13:50-16:00 hrs

Time allowed - Two hours and ten minutes
(including ten minutes' reading time).

Answer Section A and SEVEN of the ten questions in Section B.

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 company. Any similarities to known organisations are accidental.

You will fail the examination if:

- **you fail to answer seven questions in Section B and/or**
- **you achieve less than 40 per cent in any section.**

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SECTION A – Case Study

Note: It is permissible to make assumptions by adding to the case study details given below, provided the essence of the case study is neither changed nor undermined in any way by what is added.

Acora plc is the successful software company supplying IT systems to the financial services sector – investment houses, banks etc. It has therefore a discriminating client base which demands high technical standards in software provision and exceptional standards of client service for which in return it is willing to pay high fees.

Acora has designed and developed a new range of highly innovative software packages which have been well received by clients with whom they have trialed. As a result sales have increased by 25% over the most recent six month period, compared to the previous year's sales. This has created the need for Acora to expand its technical staff numbers. It now has 30 vacancies for software engineers and project managers. It can offer up to 20% above the market rates for suitable candidates and expects, therefore, to attract large numbers of applicants.

You are the company's Human Resources manager only appointed six months ago to develop and implement a professional HR policy framework designed to recruit, retain and motivate talented and committed staff. As a first stage you have just completed job descriptions and person specifications for all software and project manager roles across the organization. The Operations Director has now agreed to your recommendation to introduce an objective selection process as an aid to meeting the company's manpower needs. Her requirement is that the process must be timely, cost effective and produce a high calibre short list for final interview by the five senior project managers and software section heads.

Set out in detail your proposals for meeting the Operations Director's requirements, assuming an anticipated response to the company's vacancies of around 150 to 180. Your recommendations should define:

- (a) The specific selection processes with the evidence of their relevance and validity.**
- (b) The costs and estimated time scales to complete the recruitment programme.**

You should spend 80% of your time on task (a) and 20% on task (b).

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SECTION B

Answer SEVEN of the ten questions in this section. To communicate your answers more clearly you may use whatever methods you wish, for example diagrams, flowcharts, bullet points, so long as you provide an explanation of each.

1. Define and explain the relevance to the design and implementation of an objective selection and assessment method of:
 - (a) Meta-analysis
 - (b) Concurrent validity.

2. What criteria would you use to assess the quality of an ability test from a supplier when considering its use as part of a selection process in your own organisation? Explain the evidence that you would require for such an assessment.

3. E mail to you, the Company Recruitment Manager, from the Finance Director:

“I have been reviewing your recruitment costs for this year and your budget proposals for next year in respect of the assessment centres you run for management vacancies. I am concerned that the cost per manager selected is over £2000, which rises next year on your budget assumptions by 10%. Please explain to me how such a cost can be justified, with evidence of the return which we get from such costs.”

Formulate your reasoned reply.

4. Summarise the latest evidence on the extent to which personality traits remain relatively stable in adults over time and explain its implications for the outputs from development centres.
5. How is a standard deviation calculated? Provide the relevant formula and explain the use to be made of standard deviations in interpreting ability test scores.

PLEASE TURN OVER

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6. You are the Human Resources (HR) Manager of a large legal practice and have just received a letter of complaint from a young applicant for a personal assistant (PA) vacancy. She believes that she has been rejected because an intelligence test (test of general ability), which she had to take as part of the selection process, discriminates against female applicants and thus contravenes the Equal Opportunities Legislation.

Outline and justify your response.

7. Critically assess the role of psychometric testing within the assessment centre process.

8. Outline how you would design a concurrent validation of a personality assessment test, to use as part of the selection process for restaurant manager positions in a fast food chain. Explain the evidence you will require to determine its validity?

9. Email from HR Director to you, the Management Development Director:

“As we discussed yesterday, I would like you to send me an outline recommendation on a more objective development process for the company's senior management cadre. We need to improve our means of identifying and developing the potential in this very important group, given some relative failures of recent promotions.”

Provide this outline with the necessary justification.

10. Email to you the company's Senior Resourcing Manager from the Personnel Director of a large high street retailer:

“Given our large scale recruitment needs at store level is it not possible to use technology (the internet etc) to simplify our recruitment and screening processes. Let me have a summary of what might be practical to trial in a sample of our stores.”

Formulate your reasoned reply.

END OF EXAMINATION

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Introduction

There were only four candidates from one centre for this Selection and Assessment PDS examination in November 2007. As commented previously, the number of students taking this examination is disappointing given the importance and increased use of psychometric and objective selection and assessment methods in both the private and public sectors in recent years.

The results achieved by this cadre were as follows

November 2007		
Grade	Number	Percentage of total (to 1 decimal point)
Distinction	0	
Merit	1	25
Pass	2	50
Marginal fail	0	
Fail	1	25
Total	4	100.0

The figures shown are simply calculations based on the number of candidates sitting the examination in November 2007, whether for the first or a subsequent time, and are for interest only. They are not to be confused with the statistics produced by CIPD headquarters, which are based on the performance of candidates sitting the examination for the first time. It is from these figures that the national average pass rates are calculated.

Overall these students demonstrated good subject knowledge, clearly benefiting from relevant tuition, with guidelines provided on the key elements in the syllabus. However, there was considerable variation in how this knowledge was applied and interpreted in answering the questions in Section B, or meeting the report requirements to produce clear and well substantiated proposals in Section A.

The best candidate's paper was distinguished by the objectivity and focus of the report and in a number of the answers provided. Other candidates lacked such clarity on occasions. Thus, it is important to address the actual question asked; for example, if an economical and cost effective proposal is indicated as a requirement, a proposal which sets out a long and complex process fails to meet this requirement. Finally, selection and assessment methods should be grounded on good research based design and careful validation (concurrent and/or predictive) with professional implementation and careful monitoring. Thus answers which largely ignored these needs, of which there were several, will fail to attract good marks.

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Section A

The case study in this paper illustrated the point made above. Proposals for an objective selection process was asked for to meet large scale recruitment needs for software engineers and project managers. It was emphasised in the case study that the methods recommended needed to be cost effective, economical and timely in their administration to produce high calibre short lists for final interviews. Two sets of proposals met this requirement reasonably well. They set out a process of carefully designed and validated ability and personality tests relevant to these roles.

By contrast, one other proposal was extremely complex, lacking any clear focus and was very confusingly presented. Those taking this exam should spend time carefully reviewing the specified need in the case study rather than rushing in and presenting ill considered proposals which are not as specified.

Section B

Of the ten questions in this section each was answered by at least one candidate. It would appear therefore that candidates found the questions set to be relevant to the examination syllabus.

The following summary indicates the quality of the answers given.

	No Answered	Achieving pass standard or better
Question 1	3	1
Question 2	4	4
Question 3	3	3
Question 4	2	1
Question 5	1	1
Question 6	3	1
Question 7	2	1
Question 8	4	4
Question 9	2	2
Question 10	4	3

Thus as this table shows, questions 2 and 8 were answered by all candidates, each of whose mark was at least a pass standard. Conversely only one candidate answered question 5, while the standard of answers to question 1 was poor. A brief summary of answers to these Section B questions follow:

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Question 1

While those answering this question were able to give a reasonably accurate outline of a meta-analysis and its relevance to objective selection and assessment methods, such an understanding was less evident in the descriptions provided of concurrent validation. These lacked the specifics of the basis of well designed study with the required statistical evidence to establish such validity.

It is an essential foundation for a decision to introduce a psychometric selection process and should therefore be a priority for every practitioner to understand how to set up such concurrent validation study and interpret its findings.

Question 2

One of the three questions answered by all candidates, all of whom achieved at least a pass standard. It was pleasing to see that the examinees had the necessary knowledge to assess the suitability of an ability test and its validity for its introduction in an organisation. Furthermore, there was some degree of awareness in the answers of the need to ensure that such an application did not contravene UK legislation and codes on discrimination.

Question 3

This question was also relatively well answered by the three candidates who attempted it. Relevant research from Schmidt and Hunter was referenced with evidence from meta-analysis of the benefits to be had from well designed selection methods and processes. Estimates were also provided of the estimated financial return that might be expected from the higher quality of managers recruited through the well designed assessment centre process.

Question 4

Answered by two candidates, this question addressed a central issue in selection and assessment, namely the extent to which personality traits are stable over time. There was one relatively detailed answer referencing relevant research, but even this did not extend to a reasoned analysis and explanation of the implications for development centres' findings and focus. It is important that such centres focus primarily on developing strongly defined strengths in the individual, rather than trying to remedy perceived limitations or endeavouring to instil radically new behaviour in the individual.

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Question 5

This question was only attempted by one candidate who was able to provide the provide the formula for calculating a standard deviation. However, no clear explanation was provided of the population found within one standard deviation and its use as the basis for calculating and comparing the score of samples taking a psychometric test.

Question 6

Although three students answered this question, the standard of their answers was indifferent. A considered reply to the individual who complained that the intelligence test taken by her was discriminatory should have provided:

- a) Evidence from the test supplier or from an in company validation that the test did not discriminate in respect of gender.
- b) Information from the results of the tests usage by the organisation, giving details of the ratios of male and female applicants recruited or achieving the required test standard.

Such evidence should confirm the lack of gender discrimination invariably found in a well designed ability test.

Question 7

This question was attempted by two examinees, one of whom gave a full and accurate answer. This outlined how aptitude and personality tests would provide if carefully fitted into the assessment centre's programme, objective data and insights on the participants. Relevant examples of suitable tests were included in this answer, although it did not describe how the assessors would be trained to integrate the test information into the total assessment centre process.

Question 8

This question was attempted by all candidates and all achieved a pass standard or higher in the marks awarded. These answers therefore were better than those given to question 1 on concurrent validation. All answers identified the need to select samples of high and average performers, although the criteria for such selections were not always explained. The need for such samples to be of sufficient size for meaningful statistically significant validation evidence to be produced was referenced in the best answers.

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Question 9

Attempted by two candidates, both answers were of pass level. Developmental tools such as Myers Briggs or Strengthsfinder were identified as means of providing the basis for a well designed Developmental assessment process. Feedback would then focus on the positive strengths and abilities and dominant personality attributes identified, as the foundation for personal growth and enhanced performance.

Question 10

All examinees answered this question and the majority achieved a pass standard in their answers. Alternative proposals put forward were for either a web based simple personality assessment as a first stage screener or an IVR telephone screening system. This latter would have the advantage of greater ease of access for some likely candidates for retail positions at store level.

Graeme Buckingham

Examiner