

**THE BCS PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION
Diploma**

April 2001

EXAMINERS' REPORT

Service Management

The overall pass rate for this year is very disappointing having fallen from 73% last year to 52% this year. It would appear from the answers given that many candidates have not taken the time to study the full syllabus for this module. Many candidates who failed overall managed to pass one or sometimes two questions, however their answers to the remaining questions were very weak. Many candidates did not answer the question being attempted, but merely provided any facts they could remember which were loosely connected to the phrases or words mentioned in the question.

Candidates are advised to review the past papers available on the BCS web site and to ensure they have covered the full syllabus prior to taking the examination. It would appear that time management for some candidates is poor and they need to seek advice on examination technique.

QUESTION ONE

On several occasions, computer-based projects in your company have been criticised for a lack of co-ordination, late delivery and running over budget.

Produce a set of FIVE guidelines which will substantially reduce the likelihood of this happening in the future. (25 marks)

Around 76% of candidates attempted this question, of whom 77% obtained a pass. The aim of this question was to allow candidates to demonstrate a range of understanding and experience in the area of project management and control.

While no methodology was specified in the question, it was anticipated that many candidates would have some experience of one or more project management systems. Little credit was given for merely recording the methods – it was expected that candidates would interpret and present them in a manner appropriate to the scenario. A number of candidates presented their answer in report format, which generally proved an effective layout.

Candidates who did not express experience of a formal methodology were not penalised – providing the ideas presented were consistent with current industry best practice. These candidates provided the vast majority of the answers – with only a few describing specific methodologies.

Answer Pointers

The range of guidelines presented was large – and the examples below are merely indicative:

1. Establishing a project team with the appropriate skills and resources to take overall responsibility for the project.
2. Nomination by senior management of a “Champion” for the project (outside the IS/IT teams) who will act in a “Godfather” role and be able to have immediate access to high level decision making.
3. Building of a project plan which covers timescales, resources, deliverables, critical path elements and dependencies.
4. Regular reporting upwards within teams to indicate milestones met, missed or modified.
5. Encourage staff to contribute information relating to the project performance freely and without blame.
6. Effective liaison with customers and contractors to ensure that the deliverables remain appropriate and consistent with the overall requirement.
7. Establish a culture which promotes and rewards effective communication at all levels.

Marks Breakdown

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|------------------------------------|-----------|
| Style of response and presentation | (5 marks) |
| Each of 5 guidelines | (4 marks) |

QUESTION TWO

“IT outsourcing is a broad definition of Facilities Management to cover the contracting out of specified services to a third party within a controlled flexible relationship”.

- a) Discuss the perceived benefits and problems associated with outsourcing (15 marks)**
- b) Discuss any changes in attitudes to outsourcing which are currently taking place within the outsourcing market (10 marks)**

Around 67% of candidates attempted this question and surprisingly for a question on outsourcing only 51% obtained a pass. In general this was because candidates had not read widely enough to answer part b).

For many, part a) was answered quite well with some acceptable ideas on the benefits and problems to be derived from outsourcing i.e. “allowing company to concentrate on core areas of business”; “outsourcing can be an option in Disaster Recovery Plan”; “health and safety issues may be different in outsource company”.

For those able to answer part b), candidates produced some useful ideas covering competitiveness of outsource companies – cheaper costs in some countries. Use of Application Service Providers – selecting areas to outsource. Some candidates showed an almost complete lack of knowledge or outsourcing.

Answer Pointers

The examiners expected the following points to be discussed:

c) Benefits:

1. Cost savings (H/W, Development, Operation, Accommodation)
2. Improved quality of IT systems
3. Head count reduction
4. Flexible resourcing

Problems:

1. Dependent on supplier
2. Cost escalation
3. Lack of control
4. Staff morale

Marks Breakdown

- a) Each valid point made, containing discussion on benefit or problem (5 marks)
- d) Marks available for any valid point made which demonstrated candidates understanding of outsourcing as it operate in the market

QUESTION THREE

Your organisation, a medium sized company operating on ten sites, intends to adopt electronic mail as the sole means of routine communication between Head Office and individual staff members.

- a) Produce a briefing document for the Board of Directors outlining the key requirements which, you believe, are important for the success of this project (15 marks)**
- b) Give FIVE examples where the introduction of this policy could be potentially problematic. (10 marks)**

This question was attempted by 71% of candidates and some 69% obtained a pass. This question centred on the role of the IS/IT professional in the development of a business led change to the service.

Answer Pointers

The candidate should have considered the technical, organisation and business aspects of the proposed project. It is important to note that, in a 'real-life' situation the nature of the response by the IS/IT professional to such a proposal would be very important.

The candidate needed to indicate a degree of business awareness and good judgement in the way he/she balanced the potential technical problems with the expressed need of the organisation. The report is unlikely to be well received by management if it is overly critical of the concept – and will benefit from a constructive point of view on how the project can be made to work.

The answer to part a) should have been, as far as possible, a non-technical briefing. The Board would be looking for well-judged, clearly presented arguments, which they could understand and accept with confidence. The style of the briefing was an important component of the answer – but many candidates did not effectively deal with that issue.

Part b) was intended to draw out a series of potential problem areas which needed to be addressed and resolved at an early stage of the project. Examples of this could be:

1. Staff who do not have frequent access to networked desktop equipment – how do they get information in a timely way?
2. On what basis should acknowledgement of receipt be enabled? Should this be automatic or with the intervention of the recipient?
3. What guidelines should be developed regarding the use of the email service? Who has ownership of the acceptable use policy and what should it include?
4. How do you pass information when any part of the network service is not available?
5. How will lists of staff, and therefore mail recipients, be managed? Who establishes new accounts at the start of employment and who authorises the removal of accounts at the end?
6. Should access to global lists of staff email addresses within, and between sites be restricted? If so, what policy should be applied?

Marks Breakdown

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|---|-------------------|
| a) Style and layout of the report | (5 marks) |
| Technical understanding of project implications | (5 marks) |
| Understanding of organisational culture | (5 marks) |
| b) Each example based on cultural and technical understanding | (up to two marks) |

QUESTION FOUR

“End user developed information systems can be created much more rapidly and informally than traditional systems and so help to meet the information needs of an organisation”.

a) Discuss the benefits and evaluate the risks an organisation should consider before supporting such developments (15 marks)

b) Identify and justify the controls that management may place on development by end users in order to avoid the risks (10 marks)

This was the least popular question with only 46% of the candidates selecting the question. Of those, only 42% managed to produce sufficient relevant material to gain a pass. There were, however, some good responses to part a) e.g. Empowerment of user; Reduced backlog in IT department; shorter time between “request and delivery” of system by traditional development method.

Candidates identified such risks as: level of standards and controls; proliferation of “private” information systems; reliance on staff members who developed the system; tendency to leave “core” jobs to look after IS.

Answer Pointers

a) Points that could have been made include:

Benefits:

1. Improved requirements determination
2. User involvement – satisfaction
3. Control of system, development by user
4. Reduced application backlog

Risks:

1. Insufficient review and analysis
2. Lack of Q.A standards and control
3. Uncontrolled data
4. Proliferation of private information systems

b) A few candidates demonstrated reasonable understanding of the need for controls for the implementation, testing, documentation phases. However, for some reason, such controls tended to centre on security issues with back-up being predominant. There was also some confusion over the identity of the end-user e.g. “Interview end-user”; “system may not meet end-user’s needs”; “system not involving end-user in development”.

Marks Breakdown

a) Each valid point (1 mark)

Further marks available for a discussion on the benefit and evaluation of the risk associated with each point made.

b) Each valid point (1 mark)

Further marks available for justifying the point.

QUESTION FIVE

With the almost daily improvement in personal computer specifications, your Company Finance Director has asked whether the organisation should buy or lease its desktop computer equipment.

Produce a document reviewing the advantages and disadvantages to the company of adopting each policy (25 marks)

Around 67% of candidates attempted this question with some 67% reaching pass standard.

Answer Pointers

The answer to this question was determined to some extent, by the assumptions made about the nature of the company and its business. It obviously benefited candidates to make clear what these assumption were and the impact they were likely to have on their judgement.

Candidates were expected to discuss the potential benefits of:

1. Easy access to additional hardware through the leasing arrangement.
2. Consistent hardware specification throughout the organisation.
3. Ability to roll out new hardware across the business without major capital investment.
4. Potential to add hardware and software support activities to the leasing contract.
5. Avoidance of “pirate” systems being introduced to networks.
6. Effective change management and audit built into contract.

This should have been balance by discussion of:

1. Business critical systems potentially being outside the direct management of the organisation.
2. Security of data and software on ex-lease equipment removed from site.
3. Potential for being “locked-in” to a long term contract in an area where pricing is very volatile

4. Risk of failure of an external company impacting directly on the core IT function
Many candidates gave too technical an appraisal of what new hardware they would be buying – which was inappropriate and did not benefit them. Those candidates who scored best gave clear and reasoned arguments laid out in a clear format.

Marks Breakdown

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|-------------------------------|------------|
| Layout and style of document | (5 marks) |
| Treatment of positive aspects | (10 marks) |
| Treatment of negative aspects | (10 marks) |

QUESTION SIX

Discuss FIVE reasons why it is essential for a modern business organisation to have an IT strategy.

Provide examples which may assist your discussion (25 marks)

A rather disappointing response to this question. The majority of candidates, 70% selected the question, presumably because they felt able to answer the question. However of those, only 10% reached a pass standard.

The question was posed to reflect elements of the syllabus relating to strategic use of information technology and the need for planning and control of Information Systems. There were some attempts at the question however it was clear that most candidates did not understand the term strategy and certainly not “IT Strategy”.

Many candidates gave a general discussion of IT/IS or business strategy; few identified any need for an IT Strategy to be linked to the business needs and strategy.

Candidates discussed the reasons for having IT, or discussed the role of IT departments some giving quite detailed descriptions. Such answers rarely contained points relevant to the question and did not generally receive credit.

The lack of knowledge resulted in responses such as, “IT Strategy is a system that provides better products”. There were however, some elements, which showed knowledge, the need for strategy in development, communication, use of IS/IT, to plan future development and set standards. These points obtained marks.

Answer Pointers

Candidates were expected to cover some of the following points:

1. Business objectives
2. Competitive advantage
3. Control of IT expenditure
4. Setting IT standards
5. Training to use IT systems
6. Provision of information
7. Affects all levels of management
8. External parties expect IT

Marks Breakdown

Each valid point (1 mark)

Further marks for the use of examples or discussion which indicated knowledge.