

**THE BCS PROFESSIONAL EXAMINATION  
Professional Graduate Diploma**

**April 2001**

**EXAMINERS' REPORT**

**Computer Services Management**

A substantial number of candidates were well prepared for this module, many appear to have relevant working experience which they used to good effect to support their answers. The pass rate was maintained at the high standard achieved last year with some 85% obtaining a pass.

**QUESTION ONE**

**As the new manager responsible for an organisation's computer centre, you have been asked to investigate the users' satisfaction with the service provided. You have heard that within the user areas there is a belief that errors have to occur many times before remedial action is taken.**

- a) Design a form to include five issues which users are required to use in order to grade their satisfaction with the service. (10 marks)**
- b) Briefly explain why each issue has been included and the information you expect to gain. (5 marks)**
- c) Suggest five key items that should be contained within any Service Level Agreement between a computer centre and the end users of a service. Discuss the reasons for including each of your five items. (10 marks)**

Two thirds of candidates attempted this question and 80% obtained a pass.

**Answer Pointers**

There were some very good forms produced for the first part of the answer, but a large proportion of the candidates merely wrote down some points, making no attempt at a layout or an explanation.

- a) An example could have been:**

<b>FACTOR</b>	Degree of satisfaction (1 is low, 5 is high)				
	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Technical knowledge</b>					
<b>Overall systems reliability</b>					
<b>Network and system performance</b>					

<b>Level of co-operation</b>					
<b>Undertakings and promises kept</b>					

**b)** The second part of the question called for an explanation of the reason for selecting each factor and the information expected. Again, a number of candidates apparently forgot, or were unable to provide an explanation. The message here is clear: candidates must read the question and ensure they have attempted to answer ALL that is required.

**c)** The final part of the question called for items to be included in an SLA. This was generally well-answered although some candidates appeared able to recall items without being able to explain why such items should be included.

Five typical items are:

1. System response times
2. Service response times (according to category of call)
3. Hours of service availability
4. Problem escalation procedures
5. Software version control

### **Marks Breakdown**

- a)** Each reasonable factor (1 mark up to 5)  
Design of form including suitable layout (up to 5 marks)
- b)** Explanation (Up to 5 marks)
- c)** Each item (1 mark + 1 for a reason up to 10)

### **QUESTION TWO**

**You are the new IT Services Manager for a public sector organisation. The department you now lead has operated a Helpdesk service for some years - but you quickly realise that it has fallen into disrepute and is by-passed by many senior staff.**

**a) Produce a briefing document for the IT Management Group which explains why the successful operation of the Helpdesk is essential to the management of the IT service. (10 marks)**

**b) Describe three sets of actions you would take to get the Helpdesk service operating at an acceptable level.**

**Mention any key factors which would be essential to the success of each of your three actions. (15 marks)**

The most popular question with 72% selecting this question however the lowest pass rate of all questions was achieved with 72% passing.

The best answers to this question gave a positive series of proposals which offered clear benefits to the senior management of the organisation. In general, threats of draconian action against senior managers are best avoided in this type of situation.

### **Answer Pointers**

**a)** As a new IT Services Manager you are likely to have a window of opportunity for making changes to the way the structure is perceived by the customers. This period may be quite short - and when it has expired you may have to work much harder to make these important changes. The fact that senior staff are bypassing the system is important. They are obviously unhappy with the service, but they may be equally unhappy with someone who is attempting to remove their special mechanism for getting service. With this in mind, the briefing document needed to be clearly written and presented in a very positive light.

The briefing document might usefully have drawn on recognised best practice such as the ITIL methodology for service management. This would have helped to remove any suggestion that the changes are being made only for the sake of change - and to demonstrate that the aim is to move towards compliance with an industry standard. Equally importantly, the document should have given examples of how the current situation puts business processes and requirements at risk.

**b)** Here, the actions required to put the Helpdesk service back on track needed to be clear, achievable and easy to monitor. They might have included the following:

1. Bringing together representatives of customers, management and service providers to provide actual examples of how the service has failed to perform.
2. Undertaking a formal change management exercise to assess the staffing and resource implications of resolving the examples collected above.
3. With the sponsorship of a senior manager, relaunch the Helpdesk service with a strong statement (and buy-in) from management that the service will be used by all customers - with no exceptions.
4. Publish metrics on a regular basis to show how the relaunched service is performing relative to its previous state, and how the service will continue to adapt to changing demands.

### **Marks Breakdown**

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| <b>a)</b> Style and structure of the document               | (4 marks)     |
| Making the case of the Helpdesk a key part of the operation | (6 marks)     |
| <b>b)</b> Each of three sets of actions                     | (3 x 5 marks) |

## QUESTION THREE

With reference to computer services, describe what is meant by each of the following and give examples of how they could benefit an organisation:

1. Asset register
2. Escrow software agreement
3. Facilities management
4. Configuration management

(25 marks)

The least popular question with only 38% of candidates making an attempt to answer, of those 86% reached a pass standard.

### Answer Pointers

This was a fairly straightforward question however the Escrow Agreement provided the greatest difficulty, followed by Configuration Management. No doubt some candidates were unfamiliar with these terms and chose not to attempt the question.

A large proportion of candidates appeared to have little idea of configuration management. The examiner was seeking in-depth answers that demonstrated exactly what these terms meant. In addition to show an in-depth understanding, candidates were required to provide examples to show how they could benefit the organisation. Clearly those that gave good answers had practical experience to use. Similar definitions to the following were expected:

### Asset Register

The formal recording of all hardware and software assets, details to include date purchased, version, purchase cost, where used or located. Can be linked to help desk software to record further details of maintenance and failures. This can then be used to manager the assets and plan replacements.

### Escrow Software Agreement

A contractual agreement where the source code for business critical systems is deposited with another organisation for access only if the provider organisation ceased business or is otherwise unable to provide support for defined reasons. Computer Services staff should identify key items of software and place these under an Escrow, thereby protecting the business.

### Facilities Management

Placing hardware operations and support with a third party company to either improve service and/or reduce costs according to an agreed SLA. FM is part of the wider outsourcing definition.

### Configuration Management

The management of program versions and the cross-use of modules within systems, including the systematic release of software from one environment to another. Essential requirement to avoid the accidental release of old versions of programs, confusion over source and object code, and to clearly define responsibilities between the Computer Centre and the development staff.

### **Marks Breakdown**

Each point raised with example of benefit to organisation (6 marks)

### **QUESTION FOUR**

**“E-commerce is the future of this company, and we will not allow outdated traditional views to stand in the way of a leading edge development”.**

**This firmly stated view from the Chairman of the retail organisation for which you work is directed at the IT Director, who has expressed concern over the high speed of e-commerce development in the organisation.**

**a) Discuss three situations where you would either support or question the Chairman’s position (15 marks)**

**b) Produce a draft letter for the IT Director to send to the Chairman, taking into account the views you have discussed in a) above (10 marks)**

A little over half the candidates attempted this question and of those a high pass rate of 88% was obtained. However although most achieved a pass there were few good answers and the maximum mark obtained was a disappointing 16.

### **Answer Pointers**

In this question, the candidate had the opportunity to build a supporting case for the IT Director of the company. The Chairman has given a very clear direction to the organisation as to the way he sees future development. The aim of this question is to find a way of providing cautionary information to the Chairman without him losing confidence in the IT Director. The IT Director needs to be seen as supportive of the overall direction of business need, while at the same time ensuring that risk to the business is minimised.

**a)** The three points in part a) should reflect how the professional view of the candidate supports or conflicts with the view of the Chairman. The emphasis should have been on taking a positive view to the business requirement, while ensuring that the Chairman has a balanced understanding of the core IT issues.

b) A number of candidates were unable to obtain some marks because they did not employ the letter format that was asked for in part b).

### **Marks Breakdown**

- a) Each of 3 areas where you agree or disagree with Chairman (3 x 5 marks)
- b) Using letter format (2 marks)  
Style and content of letter (8 marks)

### **QUESTION FIVE**

**Your company has received a critical report from its external auditors. They are concerned that the current planning for Disaster Recovery throughout the organisation is fragmented and outdated. The Board of Directors has asked you, the IT Manager, to review and revise the Disaster Recovery plan before the next visit from the auditors in nine months' time.**

- a) Describe in detail five key elements which you would include in the overall Disaster Recovery plan (15 marks)
- b) Build a project plan for the Disaster Recovery review project which covers the period up to the next auditors' visit. You should indicate the actions which need to be undertaken at each stage, the collaborations needed and the project deliverables (10 marks)

Some 69% of candidates selected this question and of those 75% passed. The styles of answer to this question varied considerably. Most candidates demonstrated a basic understanding of the issues influencing DR in an IT environment - but only a few answers made reference to the requirements of the rest of the organisation.

An important element to note is that the question referred to the OVERALL disaster recovery plan. ("*DR throughout the organisation*") With this in mind, the candidate should have looked at the wider perspective of disaster recovery for the organisation, rather than the strictly IT elements.

In a modern networked corporate environment, it is likely to be very difficult to separate out the IT sections of the overall DR plan - even if that were desirable.

## Answer Pointers

Key elements might have included:

1. Risk assessment carried out by senior staff throughout the organisation to identify business critical activities and define the conditions under which these could continue of normal working was disrupted.
2. Contact plan for emergency response to a major incident - particularly the means of providing emergency communication with key staff, customers and support providers.
3. Identification of scenarios which would have particular impacts on the organisation - e.g. flooding of premises, fire, loss of core computing facility, loss of external communications.
4. Development of plan for an alternative site from which business continuity could be delivered - possibly on a bi-lateral basis with another organisation.
5. Assembly of a schedule of roles and responsibilities for all key staff - followed by walk through sessions to identify flaws in the planning.

The project plan gave the candidate the opportunity to show an understanding of the unusual logistics and testing required from a disaster recovery plan. This could have taken the form of a bullet list, a flow chart, a Gantt chart or any other convenient mechanism - so long as the intent and justification was clear.

## Marks Breakdown

- |   |               |
|---|---------------|
| a) Each of 3 key elements               | (3 x 5 marks) |
| b) Understanding of DR planning process | (5 marks)     |
| Content and execution of the plan       | (5 marks)     |