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IPMA Qualifications

Exam technique – Level B

Report

The Report should be based on the project(s), programme(s) and portfolio(s) that candidates used in the Executive Summary Report.

Reports are commonly used in the workplace and within the project management industry so level B candidates are highly likely to have experience in writing formal reports.

For each of the competency elements being assessed candidates must call upon personal experiences to evidence how they have met the competence element within the appropriate level of complexity.

The evidence must be applied to 80% of the competency elements being assessed and must demonstrate how at least 50% of the key competency indicators in the Individual Competence Baseline (ICR4) have been met.

Candidates should not use the words 'we' and 'the team' as evidence cannot be directly attributed to the candidate.

Whilst there are many ways in which to prepare and write a report the following process is one candidates might wish to consider.

Stage 1 Understand the requirement

- It is important for candidates to know the exact requirements of a report.
- This does not just apply to the report's content but how it should be presented in terms of number of pages, font size and type. Further information on the latter points can be found in the online *Candidate Guidance Notes*.
- Where there is any doubt about the requirement then candidates must contact your accredited training provider, as appropriate, for clarification before moving onto stage 2.

Stage 2 Research and information gathering

It is highly likely that candidates will gather information from several sources and will call upon several experiences to inform the content of a report. At all times candidates must consider whether the information and its source are appropriate to the level of complexity being assessed.

For level B the context must be complex.

Stage 3 Analysing the information

Once candidates have conducted your research and gathered information it is necessary to determine which information will be used and how this will be presented. It is likely that some information will be discarded but it is also just as likely that additional information will need to be gathered once the initial analysis has been completed.

Stage 4 Drafting the report

It is important to present information in a logical and structured way which will enable anyone whoever reads the report to fully understand what is being presented.

A report could be structured as follows.

Introduction

A brief outline of the purpose of the report, its focus and how the report is presented.

Background

This is where you must provide:

- a detailed description of the project/programme/portfolio role in context
- the project/programme/portfolio's key stakeholders
- the project/programme/portfolio's scope and objectives
- the resources which you are responsible for.

Description of management and leadership challenges

This is where candidates must provide:

- details of how these were acted upon and results achieved
- reflection on these results and lessons learnt.

Presentation of Information

To support a logical structure to the report and to enable candidates to focus their response on the requirement, it is recommended that the situation, task, action, result (STAR) approach is used when structuring detailed responses.

The following is an explanation of STAR.

Situation

What was the challenge? What was the context? What were the intended/expected outcome(s)?

Task

What were you required to achieve? What were the targets? What were the challenges?

Action

What options did you consider? What did you do? Why did you choose this option?

Result

What were the outcomes of your actions? To what extent were expectations/intended outcomes/targets met?
What did you learn from this experience? What would you do differently in a similar situation?

The STAR approach would be used for each of the challenges which candidates faced during their leadership of projects/programmes/portfolios.

Conclusion

The conclusion is used to draw the report to an end where candidates can present the significance of your leadership of different challenges. Candidates could focus on what they consider to be the key points, perhaps highlighting commonalities or trends which have become apparent using the STAR approach. However, no new evidence should be introduced in the conclusion.

Stage 5 Review and redraft

Professional presentation of a report will be expected by an assessor. This includes ensuring grammatical and typographical errors have been corrected. One possible approach is for someone who has no real knowledge of a subject to proofread a report. The proof reader can identify errors in structure in addition to answering the question 'does this read well?'

Once the report has been proofread then any necessary amendments must be done before submission. It would be prudent to have the report proofread at least one week before the submission deadline. This allows candidates time to make any adjustments.

Stage 6 Submit the report for assessment

You must submit the report no later than the agreed deadlines and follow the procedure issued by the APM.

Oral Examination

This is a 90 mins examination conducted by word of mouth. Unlike interviews, oral examinations have more structure to them and will be a series of questions and answers rather than a structured conversation between the assessors and candidate.

The oral exam will consist of 12 questions.

Candidates will be given a copy of the questions they will be asked during the interview at the start and will be given 25 mins to make notes and prepare their answers. Candidates will then have the remaining 65 mins to answer the questions. Candidates may refer to their notes when answering the questions. Please be aware of timings in the exam, candidates have 65 mins to answer 12 questions after the initial reading time, that is approx. 5 mins per question. It is the responsibility of the candidates, not the assessors, to ensure they do not spend too long on the early questions and potentially run out of time. In the same way, in a written exam, a candidate would be expected to manage their time.

Oral examinations provide candidates with the opportunity to talk about what they do in the real world, so it is important that, when responding to oral questions, candidates use their own experiences as the basis for their responses. Candidates can answer questions using their own experience drawing on their knowledge.

The assessment specification list which assessment criteria will be assessed using an oral examination. This means that prior preparation is possible. Candidates could practice responding to possible questions with others who have knowledge of the subject areas. If candidates are not a confident public speaker, then these skills can be practised before an oral examination to help combat any nerves.

Just as for SAQs the depth of response, dependent on a question's verb, is important so an understanding of the verbs shown on *Command word* document is recommended. It is important for an oral response to stay focused and rambling should be avoided at all times.

At all times during the oral examination candidates should be composed and provide considered responses to each question. Candidates should take a few seconds before answering a question to gather your thoughts before giving a response.

Each question is worth five marks. Candidates can provide five points, for one point each. Or four points for four marks etc. However, candidates can provide well developed points that will also score multiple marks. An example of a well-developed point is one that might include an example to back up the initial point made.

Extended Interview

Unlike an oral examination, an extended interview is a less structured conversation conducted by two assessors (the interviewers). Candidates (the interviewee) would be required to respond to each question in depth and with a focus on the exact requirements of a question.

The interview questions focus on specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria. See the assessment specification to see which specific assessment criteria are assessed by the interview.

Assessors might go back over some competence elements covered in the Report if they were not sufficiently evidenced at that assessment stage. Candidates must satisfy the assessors that they have met 80% of the competency elements and 50% of the key competency indicators which are being assessed via extended interview.

Questions will be asked to encourage candidates to use their own experiences, in addition to knowledge and understanding, to provide an acceptable response.

At each level candidates are required to provide an in-depth response to all questions. Candidates are to focus on the content of a question, ensuring the level of complexity in which the candidate operates is fully articulated to the assessor. If a response to a question is not placed in the appropriate level of complexity or focuses on the specifics of a question, there is a possibility that the competency will not be achieved.

The interview will include a final mandatory question each candidate will be asked "Is there anything else that you wish to add to support your application?"

The use of the STAR approach, when answering extended interview questions, is recommended. As with the report, responses should be located in the appropriate level of complexity and indicate how candidates have demonstrated leadership when dealing with challenges.

In preparation for the extended interview candidates are encouraged to develop their knowledge of interviews and interview techniques. Candidates could engage in 'mock' interviews wherever possible so candidates can rehearse their responses and receive constructive feedback from their 'interviewer(s)'.

For level B, the extended interview will last no longer than 120 minutes.