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IPMA Qualifications

Exam technique – Level D

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

MCQs test the lowest level of knowledge and will be presented in a uniform manner. For each MCQ there will be a short question followed by a choice of four possible answers. Candidates are required to use their knowledge to select the correct answer.

However, the questions will be written with key words clearly indicated through underlining. Candidates must use this indication to help them reach the correct answer. Example of key words which will be emboldened include:

- most appropriate – this is used when there is potentially more than one correct response, but candidates are required to select the most appropriate based on the context of the question.
- best – this is used when, out of all the options, only one is the best explanation/description based on the context of the question.

Each MCQ paper must be completed in one hour. In this hour candidates will be required to answer 60 questions, so time management is critical.

APM does not recommend one particular exam technique. There are several equally acceptable ways of approaching the MCQ exam. One technique which candidates could use is to read a question, try to think of an answer before looking at the options. Then look at the options to see if there is an option which is similar to that thought of and select that one. If the answer is not obvious, move on to the next question. When this technique has been used for all questions then the technique mentioned below could be used.

Another technique is to read the question then the options, discount the options which are viewed as definitely incorrect, then select an answer from the remaining options. Once this has been done for all questions then any remaining questions will need to be looked at in more detail.

Candidates must ensure they answer all questions. Candidates will be entirely wrong if an answer is not given for a question but there is a 25% chance of getting it correct by selecting the answer they think *might* be the answer.

Finally, it is recommended that candidates leave sufficient time at the end of an exam to read through each question, briefly, to confirm they are content with the chosen answer. As the exam is 60 mins and there are 60 questions, it is recommended candidates spend one minute per question.

Short Answer Questions (SAQs)

Each SAQ at level D is worth five marks. SAQs test a candidate's level of comprehension of a topic and will contain command verbs such as explain and describe. For each SAQ there will be a short question to which candidates must produce their own response.

If a question asks for two explanations/descriptions, then two must be given to achieve higher marks.

Often candidates confuse 'how' with 'why' and do not give an appropriate response. 'Why' refers to the cause of something, for example "Explain why a motivated project team performs effectively." In this example an appropriate response would focus on reasons such as to achieve key performance indicators or to deliver a quality service.

However, 'how' in contrast refers to what makes something happen. Consider the question "Explain how a motivated project team performs effectively." In this instance, an appropriate response would focus on topics such as performing effectively through proactive collaborative working or by reducing the number of quality errors.

When reading a question, it is important for candidates to understand its components. Candidates must recognise the command verb and what it means (see separate *Command words* document). A candidate must also recognise the broad topic area or context, and the specific aspect of a question.

Consider the question "Describe how motivation is used to improve the performance of a project team." In this question the verb is 'describe', the broad topic area or context is 'improve the performance of a project team', with the specific aspect being 'motivation'.

A response which focuses on motivation as a general concept would receive very few marks, but a response which places the use of motivation in the context of improving the performance of a project team has a greater chance of being awarded high marks.

The way in which candidates respond to a SAQ will influence the number of marks which are awarded for a response. If the response is not clear and/or the content of a response is disjointed, it will be difficult for an assessor to be confident that candidates have demonstrated secure knowledge.

Candidates must present a response through a logical and easy to understand structure which focuses on the exact requirement of the question. An assessor must be able to understand what it is the candidate is saying so that the assessor can determine if the candidate has provided a relevant response.

Each question has indicative content which assessors use to mark candidates' scripts. These are not model answers but marking guidance. It might be useful to know what assessors are looking for when marking exam scripts.

Level D SAQ indicative content often starts with:

"Indicative content"

- Identify the 'how' in relation to the question (1 mark)
- Substantive points developed by the candidate relating to their initial statement (4 marks)

Exam technique

Time management within a level D SAQ examination is very important if a candidate is to provide responses to all the questions.

The SAQ aspect of the level D examination is two hours in duration. This means that, having allowed time to read through the question paper and to review the responses, candidates have an average of two mins to read a question and eight minutes to answer each question.

One possible technique is to read through all the questions and make a note of those which candidates are more confident of answering effectively and those where they have less confidence. The RAG approach could be used here where;

R for Red indicates low confidence

A for Amber indicates medium confidence, and

G for Green indicates high confidence.

Candidates could, after the initial review, begin with G, followed by A, followed by R. This would give candidates the greatest chance of achieving the highest marks possible. It could also mean that less than eight minutes is spent on the G questions which would provide more time for the R questions.

However, there is a word of caution here. For Level D candidates have to answer 12 out of the 14 questions on the paper, scoring at least one mark for each question.