



Click



Click



REVIEW OF PAST EXAMS

I'm going to start this presentation with a review of the first three sittings of the P6 exam. In December 2008, the highest mark was 71 and in June 2008, the highest was 64. These good marks suggest that P6 was not all a very challenging and difficult paper.

June and December 2008 - the Singapore students' performance fell below the global pass rate
December 2007 - the Singapore students surpassed the global pass rate. However in all three papers, the rates were not significantly different.

Click



I'll look first at what was done well and then move on to those areas where there is room for improvement

Click

Knowledge Approach Structure

On reviewing the last three sittings, I am pleased to note that knowledge is quite strong in certain areas

Click

That the approach of candidates to the exam has improved

Click

And structure of the answers has also improved.

Click

Click



I do not need to emphasise the importance of knowledge.
Socrates said this more than 2,000 years ago.

Click

(Quote appears)

Click

KNOWLEDGE

Personal income tax

Recent tax changes

Concept of withholding tax

The areas of knowledge where performance is regarded good include:

Click

Personal income tax. For corporate tax, they generally did well in the computational aspects. For example Q1 of December 2008 which required the advice to be supported by tax computations.

Click

Recent tax changes such as exemption from tax on foreign sourced income remitted into Spore.

Click

Understood the circumstances under which withholding tax apply.

APPROACH

Answering four questions

Time spent

Order of attack

Candidates' approach to the exam has improved. In particular

Click

Candidates are now more likely to answer all 4 questions and spend a reasonable amount of time on each of them

In addition, some candidates have identified that, for them, the section B questions are more approachable and that it therefore makes sense for them to be answered before the more demanding Section A questions

Although the number of candidates having a proper attempt at 4 questions has improved, I will refer to the importance of time management, later, as there is room for further improvement here

Click

STRUCTURE

Section A questions:

Use of appropriate document

The Section A questions often require a particular type of document to be produced, for example, a report or memorandum

Click

The majority of candidates identify the style of document required and top and tail their script appropriately. However, the body of the document is not always in the appropriate style.

Click



Click

Knowledge Planning Tailoring

Click

Having said that candidates demonstrate sound knowledge in certain areas, there is plenty of room for improvement here.

Click

There is also evidence of a lack of planning by candidates

Click

And a failure to tailor answers to the number of marks available.

Click

KNOWLEDGE

Lack of precise knowledge

May have the knowledge but unable to apply to the specific facts of the case

Poor performance in respect of Goods & Services Tax (GST)

Knowledge is the key to success at paper P6. Without a solid foundation of the Singapore tax system, success will be very hard to achieve.

Click

Candidates' knowledge is often vague when it needs to be precise and crisp. There is also evidence that some candidates can only start at the beginning of a technical area and do not know when to end. This means that time is wasted carrying out tasks that do not score marks (for example, providing unnecessary technical details, not required in the questions)

Performance in respect of GST has been particularly weak

Click

PLANNING

Production of rote answers

Unnecessary calculations/details

Generalisations

Failure to solve problems

A failure to plan answers is indicated by, for example

Click

Regurgitation of knowledge and explaining the technical area in general terms rather than applying the technical rules to the facts. This wastes time and therefore restricts the ability of candidates to obtain sufficient marks

In Section A questions, candidates do not give themselves time to think about how a particular problem might be solved but rather prepare a series of comments or calculations in the hope that the solution will somehow materialise.

Click

TAILORING

Poor relationship of marks earned to work done

Production of disproportionately long answers

Click

Some answers appear to have been prepared with no reference to the number of marks on offer or the number of minutes that have gone by

There is a lack of link between each minute of time available and the number of marks they want to earn in the exam – this link should be present in their thinking right from the start

The length of answers are often not in proportion to the number of marks on offer.

Click



LESSONS LEARNED

Having reviewed candidates' performance in the exam, I now want to summarise the lessons learned by making some suggestions as to the issues to focus on and some ideas that you may find useful in order to improve performance in the future

Click



Click

Knowledge Requirement Time

You must emphasise the importance of a sound knowledge of the tax system to your students

Click

You must focus their attention on the need to satisfy the requirement

Click

Whilst carefully managing their time throughout the whole of the exam

Click

KNOWLEDGE

Sufficient and precise

Paper F6 as well as Paper P6

Know your stuff

Click

Knowledge should be sufficient and precise

Questions may be set wholly, or almost wholly, on Paper F6 technical areas as well as those which are new at Paper P6 – knowledge of the latter alone is unlikely to be sufficient to pass the exam. Knowledge and understanding of the technical content of F6 is vital.

Click

REQUIREMENT

Need to address all of it

Think about how to solve the problem

Command words

Stay focussed on it

The importance of the requirement needs to be emphasised to your students – this will include:

Click

The need to address all of it. The need to read the requirement carefully and if necessary read again. The requirement of each question is carefully worded to give guidance as regards style and content of answer.

Where there is a problem to be solved, candidates need to think about how they will go about solving it and not simply start writing and calculating in the hope that the solution will appear. There may be advice in the question on how to approach a particular part of the requirement; such advice is intended to be helpful and should be incorporated in their plan

The command words used within the requirement, for example, calculate, explain, support, etc. together with the number of marks on offer provide an indication to candidates of the amount of detail they should include and the approach they should take

Students should refer back to the requirement whilst answering the question to ensure that they are still addressing it and, therefore, still earning marks

Click

TIME

Micro management

Maintain pressure

Earn marks for everything

Finish four questions

Students should be looking to earn marks throughout the exam at a rate which will result in a total of more than 50

Click

This means they should always be conscious of the time available to carry out each task and the further tasks to be carried out in order to complete the requirement. This in turn means looking at the clock every couple of minutes to maintain a gentle pressure and to keep moving through the question

In order to become more efficient, students should be encouraged to think about earning a mark (or half a mark) for every point made – this should help them avoid writing unnecessary introductions or explanations.

Their final objective is, of course, to finish all 4 questions, each of them in the appropriate amount of time

Click



So, what can be done improve

Click

Knowledge Requirement Time

Knowledge

Click

Focus candidates' attention on the requirement

Click

and assist them to manage their time throughout the exam

Click

KNOWLEDGE

Question practice alone is not enough

Place the legislation in context

Debriefing questions

To help students improve their knowledge

Click

Besides the need to practise questions – rote learning and self-testing is required – this self testing can be written or verbal; the latter can also be done in class.

When teaching, emphasise the practical application of the tax rules, either by reference to your professional experiences or to past exam questions that the students have not yet seen

Finally, when debriefing questions, try to highlight the areas where you can add value, or where you know students will have had problems, rather than going over the whole of the answer. This will, of course, depend on the strength of your class

Click

REQUIREMENT

Analysis of requirements

Analysis of question approach

As well as emphasising the fundamental issues in respect of requirements that I have already mentioned, you can improve students' exam performance by

Click

Beginning a revision course by analysing a requirement; discussing the issues that a question might be looking for and the sort of information they might expect to find when they come to read the question

You could also discuss the amount of information that may be required by reference to the command words used and the number of marks available

For the first one or two questions on a revision course it may be useful to lead a discussion that breaks the problem set by the requirement into a series of steps

When debriefing questions, emphasise the elements of the requirement, the command words used, and the steps needed to satisfy it

Click

TIME

Analysis of requirement

Techniques

Review answers

You can encourage the careful management of the time available by:

Click

Emphasising the need to analyse the requirement, as already mentioned, so that students appreciate the benefit of determining what needs to be done and in what detail before they start

Showing them short cuts and techniques to solve problems, for example, use s19A instead of s19 if there is no difference to the recommendation or make use of earlier computations.

Reviewing students' answers and pointing out where time is being wasted on content that will not score marks

Click

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

How well did they perform?

Where do they need to improve?

The revision course should be all about gradual improvement so, after each question, encourage your students to evaluate:

Click

Where they lacked knowledge

How well they analysed and addressed the requirement

How well they managed their time

Any effort wasted on unnecessary calculations or explanations

This should enable them to improve their performance in subsequent questions

Click



FOCUS ON FUTURE EXAMS

As far as the exams in 2009 and further into the future are concerned

Click



We need to look first at what's new and then we'll look at what's going to change

Click

Rules Implications

Each Budget introduces new rules and makes changes to existing rules

Click

This inevitably affects the exam questions that will be written in the future

Click

Cut – off date

31 March 2009 for December 2009 and June 2010 exam

6- month rule changed to one year

Click

Changes confirmed by relevant authorities, e.g IRAS, MAS by 31 March will be tested in the next two exam. E.g. Changes as at 31 March 2009 will be tested in the December 2009 and June 2010 exams.

Click



Will things change?

Click



No

I'm delighted to say that there are no changes planned. Section A questions

Click

Click



Thank you

Click

