

ICMAP Pathway Exam (IPE)

December 2023 Examiner's report

General comments

In this report, the examining team share observations from the marking process, highlighting the strengths and weaknesses of candidates who attempted the questions in the December 2023 ICMAP Pathway Exam. Unsuccessful candidates can use this examiner's report as part of their preparation towards future exam attempts, alongside attempting question practice from the specimen questions provided.

Format of the exam

The examination consisted of a 4-hour exam with a single compulsory section comprising of two questions, each consisting of a variety of main tasks. Question 1 consisted of a 50 mark case study focused on Millican AI Solutions, a company specialising in developing artificial intelligence solutions. The candidate's role was as an external consultant approached by one of the company's founders. Question 2 consisted of a 50 mark case study focused on Tingle Automotive, an established manufacturing company which produces components for combustion engines. The candidate's role was as an external consultant and qualified accountant, advising the company's CEO.

The marking scheme included 80 technical marks for the correct use and application of technical knowledge. For every element of technical content, answers needed to be applied to the case; repetition of rote learned knowledge attracted minimal marks.

In addition, the marking scheme included 20 marks for Professional skills and competencies. The skill being examined in the requirement should have been evident in how candidates answered the task, although candidates may have drawn on other skills as well when answering. When awarding Professional skills marks, the marker looked primarily at the professional skill being tested in the task requirement, but also looked at the general professionalism that candidates demonstrated (which includes consideration of logical, well presented answers, which avoid unnecessary repetition and answer the question set). The marker also looked for answers to be presented in an appropriate tone for the recipient.

Exam performance

Overall, the standard of candidates' answers was poor, and lower than seen in previous sittings of the exam. Candidates appeared to struggle with both theoretical technical knowledge and the application of their knowledge to the case studies, and demonstrated a generally weak exam technique across the examination.

Performance was consistently poor across both questions of the examination, and on the whole there did not appear to be evidence that candidates struggled to complete the exam within the given time or failed to understand the required tasks.

In previous sittings of the examination, the main reason that unsuccessful candidates did not pass was predominantly linked to a lack of application in their answers, but in this sitting there was also more evidence of a general lack of theoretical and technical knowledge.

In previous sittings, the two main recommendations from the examining team have been:

1. Spending more time on the practice questions provided, both those within the learning materials and past examination resources available online, with particular focus on attempting these under exam conditions.
2. Accessing and utilizing the available tuition where possible.

Whilst these remain as key recommendations, the examining team also stress the importance of individuals preparing to sit the ICMAP Pathway Exam dedicating sufficient time to fully cover and become comfortable with the technical topics across the whole syllabus, as well as the application of these to real business scenarios. The IPE examination sits at a post-graduate level and the available past papers, examining team reports and debriefs should provide a clear guide as to the level of answer required to successfully pass the exam.

The examining team have highlighted the following requirements for specific comment:

Requirement 1b) asked candidates to prepare a report discussing the advantages and disadvantages for the company of adopting a matrix organisational structure to support the new phase of its strategy development.

Many candidates did not appear to understand what a matrix structure was, and therefore struggled to provide a clear discussion on its suitability for the company. Others appeared to understand what a matrix structure looked like, but did not provide an answer specific to the company and case study, providing only generic statements which were insufficient to pass this part of the exam.

Requirement 2a) asked candidates to advise on possible leadership styles that the company could consider when managing the changes involved in their transition plan. Candidates then were asked to evaluate the power and interest of three of the company's stakeholder groups in relation to the transition plan and advise on how the company should engage with each of them.

In the first part of the question, many candidates appeared not to recognise different leadership styles, or focused on leadership traits which are different. Questions on leadership styles are common and there are many examples in the learning materials which would have helped candidates to prepare for this requirement.

For the second part of the question there was a natural framework which could have been used in candidates' answers; considering the power for each stakeholder, the interest of that stakeholder, and then a recommendation on how TH should engage with them. Although candidates appeared to be familiar with the Mendelow matrix, very few candidates used this clear framework in answering this question, but instead provided a rather vague discussion on stakeholders generally and with limited application to the TA scenario.

Requirement 2b) required candidates to advise on the content for a new integrated report, with reference to a sample report which had been provided in the form of an exhibit within the exam. The sample report included four elements of an integrated report: intellectual, human, social and natural. Therefore, candidates should have used this framework and applied it to TA by including possible content for a TA integrated report. However, in practise, many candidates failed to include the framework provided in the exhibit and instead provided a very generic answer with possible subject areas for an integrated report. This answer did not satisfy the requirement.

Requirement 2c) asked candidates to consider the proposed depreciation treatment of a new factory, covering both the financial reporting and ethical implications. Candidates generally recognised that there were issues with the proposed treatment but did not score many of the available marks. The main reasons for this included not providing any numbers or calculations within their answer in relation to the financial reporting implications, and failing to describe the ethical issues in any detail beyond saying that the proposed treatment was not appropriate.