7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Championing better work and working lives

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Advanced Level Qualification

Human Resource Management in Context

May 2017

Date: Tuesday 23 May 2017 **Time: 09:50 – 13:00 hrs**

Time allowed – Three hours and ten minutes

(Including ten minutes' reading time)

Instructions

- Answer **all** of Section A.
- Answer **five** questions in Section B (**one** per subsection).
- Read each question carefully before answering.
- Write clearly and legibly.

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Information

- Questions may be answered in any order.
- Equal marks are allocated to each section of the paper.
- Within Section B equal marks are allocated to each question.
- If a question includes reference to 'your organisation', this may be interpreted as covering any organisation with which you are familiar.
- The case study is not based on an actual organisation. Any similarities to known organisations are coincidental.

You will fail the examination if:

- You fail to answer five questions in Section B (one per subsection)

  and/or
- You achieve less than 40% in either Section A or Section B

  and/or
- You achieve less than 50% overall.

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Section A – Case Study

Note: In your responses, you are allowed to improvise or add to the case study details provided below. However, the case study should not be changed or compromised in any way.

Located in a large UK northern city, Stockbridge University is beginning a review of its strategic options in response to the United Kingdom's (UK) European Union (EU) Referendum result in 2016. This supported a UK exit from the EU (known as Brexit). The Office of the Vice-Chancellor is including the following paper for discussion at the next meeting of the Senior Management Team (SMT).

'Our University has been very successful in recent years. This success has been supported by EU funding and international collaboration through pan-European projects. We have grown considerably in size and reputation during this time, culminating in awards which have enhanced us internationally. Some 15 per cent of our academic workforce and 20 per cent of our 20,000 students are from other EU countries. We are one of over 4,000 higher education institutions participating in the Erasmus Programme involving 28 EU and six non-EU countries.

The opportunities provided by the EU Single Market have enabled us do this. It is a market with no internal borders or other regulatory obstacles to the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital between Member States.

Our achievements and links with the EU include the following:

- Over the last three years, we have completed over 100 research contracts awarded by the European Commission, the majority of which have been multi-partner collaborations. These have involved every Faculty within the University. The research has included human trafficking, food safety, and materials engineering. We are co-ordinating a group of 20 partners from 10 countries to develop tools for measuring the efficiency of road transport across Europe, which will facilitate better quality transport networks.

- The University is a major player with European research partners to tackle international environmental issues. We are working to reduce the impact of engineering projects on vulnerable fish supplies, working with biologists and engineers around Europe to promote a positive impact on the eco-environment.

- We are collaborating with our many EU partners in cutting-edge research, resulting in advances in healthcare, new materials, and innovative products and services. Over half our research income comes from Europe. This funding contributes to the local economy and we are internationally recognised for it.

- EU funding has contributed to the University developing specialist courses with colleagues across Europe. We are committed to providing students with a formative education equipping them with the knowledge and skills needed after graduation. In the 21st century, this means looking beyond our geographic borders to understand the impacts of new knowledge and new skill-sets internationally.

- In the humanities and social sciences, many of our graduates go on to work in the caring professions such as teaching, counselling and working with children, young people and families. Increasingly these have an international dimension.

- We have taken part in teaching programmes with partners at European universities supporting women, children and young people who have been the victims of violence, exploitation and trafficking. Other teaching programmes include training youth workers to deal with street violence among young people in Europe. This ground-breaking work is informed by ongoing research to equip the next generation of social and community workers with competences for the changing political and cultural contexts facing them.

- EU funding has promoted local economic growth, access to higher education, and investment in campus buildings and facilities. EU membership has thus provided us with enormous benefits for the local economy and society. We have received nearly £90 million of project funding and these grants impact on our students, staff, local businesses, and further afield.

- European funding therefore has been an important element in the University's growth and support of the wider economy, where European Regional Development Funding helped establish our Technology Park. This has grown to a 25-acre site comprising 15 dedicated business facilities. All these businesses seek University links and we provide them with guidance supported by European Structural and Investment Funds.

- European support has also helped us participate in partnering with over 300 organisations across 13 countries in the EU. By working together, we've created new opportunities for jobs and growth by sharing best practice and developing new applications and services.

In summary, leaving the EU will mean cutting off our University from this unique financial support and European professional networks. It will weaken the UK as a global leader in research, teaching and educational opportunity. We need to respond to these challenges imaginatively to maintain our reputation, international contacts, and competitive advantage.'

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

As a member of the University SMT, you have been asked by the Vice-Chancellor to come to its next meeting with written responses to the following questions, drawing upon research and informed opinion.

You must base your responses on the assumption that, post-Brexit, the UK will no longer have unrestricted access to the EU Single Market and the so-called four freedoms within the EU: free movement of persons, goods, services and capital. Nor will EU Member States have unrestricted access to UK markets and the four freedoms of movement into the UK.

1. Provide a robust Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis of the University post-Brexit and critically review it. Justify your answer.

2. Analyse the likely impact on University revenues if EU financial support for research, collaborative courses and university facilities is withdrawn when Brexit takes place. How might the University respond to these financial shortfalls? Justify your answer.

3. Critically review the possible impacts of Brexit on (a) student recruitment and (b) exchanges between UK and EU students at the University. How might the University respond to these changes?

4. Critically review the possible impacts of Brexit on (a) academic staff recruitment and (b) academic staff retention in the University. How might the University respond to these changes?

It is recommended that you spend 25% of your time on each of Questions 1, 2, 3 and 4.

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Section B

Answer FIVE questions in this section, ONE per subsection A to E. You may include diagrams, flowcharts or bullet points to clarify and support your answers, so long as you provide an explanation of each.

A

1. Weber's (1947) interest in the nature of power and authority, and his preoccupation with modern trends of rationalisation, led him to study how large-scale enterprises are organised. For him, bureaucratic coordination of their activities is the distinctive mark of the modern era.

    i. Drawing on research, explain the main features of classical bureaucracy and some of its limitations.

    AND

    ii. To what extent is your organisation a bureaucratic one or not? Justify your answer.

OR

2. Aguinis (2011) defines corporate social responsibility (CSR) 'as context-specific organisational actions and policies that take into account stakeholders' expectations and the triple bottom line of economic, social, and environmental performance.'

    i. Drawing on current practice, critically assess why CSR has appeared on the management agenda in some organisations in recent years.

    AND

    ii. Explain why your organisation either has or has not got a CSR policy.

B

3. According to Witzel (2016), 'there are no universally agreed definitions of management [but] the term usually refers to the control and coordination of organisations in order to ensure that they meet their desired ends.'

   i. Drawing on research and current practice, provide a reasoned definition of modern management and discuss its major roles in contemporary organisations.

   AND

   ii. To what extent do you agree or disagree with the view that separating human resource management (HRM) into a distinct field of study and practice from 'management' has, in the views of some managers, absolved them from responsibility for managing people at work? Justify your answer.

OR

4. You have received an invitation to make a presentation to final year students at your local secondary school on 'The role of the marketing function in organisations and some critiques of it.'

   Drawing on research and current practice, draft what you will say. Justify your answer.

C

5. The phenomenon of contemporary globalisation has both supporters and critics. Supporters of globalisation argue it promotes employment opportunities around the world and commodities become cheaper. Critics, on the other hand, argue globalisation makes rich countries richer and poor countries poorer, as well as creating widening disparities in resource allocation among social groups.

   i. Drawing on research, analyse up to **THREE** advantages of globalisation to national economies and up to **THREE** disadvantages to national economies.

   AND

   ii. Consider the argument that the recent outcome of the referendum in the UK on membership of the European Union was partly influenced by the concerns of some voters with the adverse effects of globalisation on them and their families. Justify your answer.

OR

6. International organisations, with international memberships, scope, or presence, have grown in importance in recent years. There are two main types of international bodies: international non-governmental organisations (INGOs), such as the International Committee of the Red Cross, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the United Nations, that operate internationally.

   Select any **ONE** international organisation, explain what it does and critically evaluate its activities.

D

7. You have received the following email from a junior colleague.

   'Hello, there's been a lot of debate about the cases for and against migration into the UK (or in some other named country of your choice) recently. Please (a) give me UP TO ***THREE*** *benefits of migration into this named country and UP TO* ***THREE*** *disadvantages and (b) how has immigration affected or not affected our organisation in recent years?'*

   Draft a helpful reply to this request, using examples and drawing on research.

OR

8. You have received the following email from a colleague in the local management club.

   'Hello, I've just been asked to give a talk to a group of first-year university students on "The positive and negative impacts of current technology in the workplace." Given your expertise in this field, please advise me on what I might usefully include in my talk.'

   Drawing on research and current practice, draft a helpful reply to this request.

E

9. Neo-liberalism as an economic policy sees competition as the defining characteristic of human relations. It redefines citizens as consumers, whose democratic choices are best exercised by buying and selling goods and services, a process that rewards merit and punishes inefficiency. Neo-liberalism, in short, claims 'the market' delivers economic benefits that can never be achieved by government planning.

    i. Drawing on research and current practice, provide an informed critique of this definition of neo-liberalism.

    AND

    ii. How does neo-liberal economic policy affect (or not affect) your organisation?

OR

10. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) provides members with regular factsheets which outline the major changes made by the UK government to employment legislation. CIPD members can get more detailed information in the Employment Law at Work area of its website, including legal timetables, frequently asked questions, case law reports with the implications for employers, and a latest news page which is updated weekly.

    i. Explain why employment legislation has become such an important part of the HRM function in your organisation over recent decades.

    AND

    ii. Select any **ONE** piece of employment legislation which affects your organisation and summarise its impact on the managing of people.

END OF EXAMINATION

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Introduction

This report reviews the May 2017 sitting of the Human Resource Management in Context advanced level examination of the CIPD. This is a core module within the advanced level qualifications framework and draws upon the “Insights, Strategy and Solutions” professional area of the CIPD Profession Map.

On this occasion, 386 candidates sat the written examination. Of these, 287 achieved a pass standard or higher giving an overall pass rate of 74.4%. This is one of the highest pass rates in recent examinations. There were also increases in the proportions of candidates achieving merit and distinction level performances, as well as a fall in the proportion of candidates failing the examination. This was a pleasing set of results, suggesting that some centres are providing improved support to their students. The breakdown of grades is shown below.

Examination results of 7HRC, May 2017

May 2017		
Grade	**Number**	**Percentage of total** (to 1 decimal point)
Distinction	13	3.4
Merit	49	12.7
Pass	225	58.3
Marginal Fail	28	7.2
Fail	71	18.4
Total	**386**	**100.00**

The examination consists of two sections, a seen case study in Section A and ten short answer questions in Section B, where candidates must attempt five questions, which are divided into five sub-sections. All the learning outcomes of the unit were assessed on the examination paper.

In addition to demonstrating knowledge and understanding in this examination, successful candidates are expected to match the CIPD vision of the HR professional as a business partner and a thinking performer who can deliver day-to-day operational requirements and reflect on current procedures, systems and contexts, and contribute to continuous improvement and change initiatives.

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Candidates are expected to achieve M-level performance in the examination, drawing upon evidence-based argument, critical thinking and broad understanding of their field of study, not only within their own organisation and sector but across a reasonable spectrum of other organisations and sectors.

Section A

Learnng outcomes: 3 and 4

The case study featured an English university, faced by the business and HR consequences of the UK's exit (Brexit) from the European Union, where there is no longer free movement of persons, goods, services and capital between member states. The Vice-Chancellor has asked board members to respond to four questions relating to a SWOT analysis, University revenues post-Brexit, and student and staff recruitment and retention issues.

The case touched on a range of issues covered in the module's learning outcomes. But it was particularly intended to test in-depth knowledge and understanding of Learning Outcomes (LOs) 3 and 4.

In responses to the case study questions, candidates were expected to demonstrate M-level performance and the ability to develop logically structured and clearly focused responses to the questions put. They were also expected to show familiarity with recent research and current practice.

There are various ways in which this case could be approached but the practicality and depth of responses were more important than providing 'ideal' solutions to the Questions put. The following commentary illustrates the types of issues that could be examined and developed in answers.

Question 1

This question required candidates to provide a measured SWOT analysis of the University post-Brexit, taking account of the high level of uncertainty facing it when a Brexit deal has been agreed.

Based on the assumption that the UK will be excluded from the EU's single market, a SWOT analysis is justified on the grounds it provides a way of screening the University's strategic options and is useful in bringing together the contextual analysis of the university, its resources and competences, as well as its strategic capacity for dealing with them.

The strengths are the internal positives helping the University gain advantage to achieve its strategic objectives. These include: its solid reputation as a university; its record of success in teaching, research, international collaborations, and curriculum development; its overseas' networks; its standing in research and consultancy; its academic depth and breadth; its campus and facilities; and its staff including their entrepreneurial skills.

The weaknesses are the University's internal negative attributes that may result in it failing to achieve its strategic objectives. These include: the organisational challenges arising from the Brexit exercise; managing change and uncertainty in times of reduced resources; and retaining the best academic staff and researchers in conditions of competition and change.

Opportunities are the external factors helping the University achieve its strategic objectives. These include: the search for alternative markets for non-UK students; seeking alternative sources of revenue income; developing closer links with like-minded organisations; and institutional flexibility to market opportunities. Threats are the external factors resulting in the university failing to achieve its strategic objectives. These include: possible reductions in student numbers and the weakening of international networks; market uncertainty; greater institutional competition for students due to Brexit; problems recruiting the best European academic staff to the University; a fall in research income; the uncertain future of European student exchanges; and increased pressures on university resources.

In general, SWOT analyses were undertaken in an informed way and most candidates achieved their highest marks in Section A when answering this question. Generally, pre-examination preparation was evident and answers related well to the case study.

Most candidates noted that strengths and weaknesses were internally facing factors, whilst opportunities and threats assessed the external influences. There were a variety of approaches to this, with differences in the quality of answers reflecting the ways in which candidates presented their responses. Better answers explained their points fully, whilst weaker answers commonly provided brief, largely descriptive bullet point responses. Better answers also critically reviewed the points being made.

In summary, most candidates could identify some valid factors within a SWOT analysis of Stockbridge University. But weaker answers merely repeated most of the factors already provided in the case study. Better responses, in contrast, drew on some valid research to show a better appreciation of the context of the University. And stronger answers engaged with a better level of analysis, opposed to just making 'statements' in candidate responses.

7HRC – Human Resource Management in Context

EXAMINER'S REPORT

May 2017

Question 2

This question asked candidates to analyse the impact of Brexit on University revenues.

English universities, like Stockbridge, are in a market system and have been since ‘top-up’ fees were introduced for undergraduate courses for the first time in 1998. These fees have steadily risen since then and, for universities in England like Stockbridge, the annual fee is currently capped at £9000. Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have their own arrangements. Other revenues that universities draw upon are, to varying amounts, tuition fees for international students, research income from the UK and EU (where about £730 million from the EU is spent on research and development annually, mostly in universities), consultancy income, business development fees, endowments from alumni, and, amongst older richer institutions, investment income. Most universities therefore are overwhelmingly dependent on tuition fees to remain financially solvent.

Nevertheless, loss of research and other funding from the EU for institutions would result in a major gap in university finances which would have to be addressed. Basically, Stockbridge would need either to compensate for these losses by increasing revenue in their remaining financial streams or by cutting back on the services and opportunities provided to students. A mix of increasing other revenue streams and financial retrenchment is also possible. Any of these options has knock-on effects for the university. Increased competition is the name of the game. Candidates are expected to justify their preferred course(s) of action.

The main issues discussed here were a focus on lobbying government on fees for EU students and their inclusion in the statistics and restrictions on immigration status. Others stressed a broadening of student recruitment from international sources for whom fees could be raised or lowered to increase demand. Similarly, there could be the offer of more study places to UK students. There was also a focus on building relationships with UK enterprises by developing the business park, which might sponsor research in relevant areas. Less effective answers were either too brief or failed to demonstrate how their recommendations would produce alternative revenue streams.

Pleasingly, most scripts provided reasonable answers to this question by suggesting some alternative funding streams for the University to consider. Others were written at an even higher level, because candidates supported their answers with examples of initiatives adopted by other UK universities.

Question 3

This question asked candidates to review the impacts of Brexit on student recruitment and retention.

Brexit will result in EU students being classified as 'international students' and not as EU students. This means they will be charged higher tuition fees by English universities such as Stockbridge. They will also need student visas or permits for entry to and remaining in the UK, thus increasing the bureaucracy and legal requirements for 'overseas' students studying in England. Similarly, UK withdrawal from the EU is likely to impact negatively on exchanges between students from UK and the EU, and vice versa, as these too will need to have Visas for travelling into the UK.

All these factors are likely to impact negatively on the recruitment of students from EU countries into English universities and result in fewer of them attending English institutions, as well as increasing the costs involved. This trend is likely to result in a fall in tuition fee income, arising from the absence of EU students in English universities. Universities like Stockbridge will have to respond to this by recruiting more international students (some of whom may be EU nationals), more national students, cutback student recruitment, increase postgraduate recruitment, or use a mixture of these approaches. Intensive marketing and competition for a possible reduction in market demand by EU students is likely to intensify.

Better answers dedicated time and space to considering the effects of Brexit on student recruitment and student exchanges separately. But some answers didn't split the response into the two sub-questions and either ignored the second one entirely or referred to student exchanges only, such as loss of the Erasmus scheme. Consequently, these answers lost marks. Pleasingly, most responses showed that candidates understood the likely future landscape where EU students would be charged fees commensurate with international students and would require a student visa to study in the UK. Possible reactions to these changes included setting up campuses overseas, stronger competitiveness in international markets to attract international students in greater numbers, more focus on home/domestic students, and greater use of on line learning. All these approaches were considered valid, with better answers providing justification for the recommended pathway.

Question 4

This asked candidates to critically review the impacts of Brexit on academic staff recruitment and retention.

Stockbridge like so many other UK universities has a significant proportion of academic staff from the EU and other countries around the world working in higher education. These individual men and women bring their subject knowledge, research and teaching skills, and experience of learning and working in different cultural and institutional settings into universities. Collectively they enhance the academic community and the learning opportunities provided to students through their cross-national experience and global perspectives.

Following Brexit, new overseas applicants to the academic profession in the UK, including citizens from the EU, will need visas or work permits to live and work here. Unless this pressure on recruitment is offset by recruitment of national or non-EU citizens as teachers and researchers, this may limit the supply of those in some academic fields willing to work in the academy, thus weakening the intellectual capital of the university community. There will be increasing competition for these human resources. Further, if the post-Brexit university is followed by a fall in demand for undergraduate, postgraduate and professional education in English universities from EU candidates, which is not compensated for by rising demand by UK students, and some international courses come off the academic curriculum, this could result in redundancies and lay-offs in the university sector, as well as making an academic career in the UK less attractive to some new entrants. Again, competition for academic staff will be global.

This question posed problems for weaker candidates. Visas and work permits were considered by better candidates and many realised that corrective action is required to maintain the reputation of UK universities through research and teaching activities. More generally, proposals offered included promoting the strengths of the University and the calibre of research projects on a wider international basis, particularly in English speaking countries. There was also the suggestion of sponsoring, or at least assisting with visa applications. Again, lobbying government to make a special case for current and potential academic staff under the new immigration rules. An alternative suggestion was that the organisation should focus on developing home grown talent, particularly those doing doctorates and post-graduate work. A further suggestion was that the university should set up an advisory department for EU staff and report regularly to them on Brexit developments.

In terms of retention, initiatives such as reviewing reward systems and offering bonuses to EU staff, as well as introducing flexible and part-time working, were less plausible and unconvincing. Similarly, those relatively few answers which recommended incentives, benefits, salary uplifts and so on to attract staff from the EU countries did not seem to be aware that this would create inequities and unfairness in the reward system. This approach was somewhat naïve and demonstrated lack of basic HR knowledge and understanding.

In summary, according to the Examining Team, this was one of the better answered case studies by candidates. This might because of the nature of the topic area and context, which forced more candidates than normally to read and research the case study prior to the exam. On the other hand, there were still candidates who had not fully prepared for the case study and consequently couldn't appreciate the context of the case study organisation.

Section B

In this section, candidates had to choose one question out of two in each of five sub-sections that covered the remaining learning outcomes not examined in the Section A case study. Most questions consisted of more than one part and candidates were expected to attempt both parts in each question.

Question 1

Learning outcome: 1

This asked candidates to critically examine the main features of classical bureaucracy and discuss the extent to which their organisation was a bureaucratic one or not.

The main features of classical bureaucracy include: its central purpose is managerial control in organisations, linked to an ideology of progress rooted in knowledgeable, civilised societies; Weber distinguishes between three types of authority – traditional, charismatic, and rational-legal; this is authority based on rules and legally-binding procedures and hierarchy; rational choices are made on the basis of managerial leadership and technical expertise; and bureaucracies, because they seek efficiency, have no underpinning ethical principles. Weber also distinguishes between formal rational and substantive rationality.

Studies such as Crozier (1964), Dalton (1959) and Gouldner (1954) challenge the dysfunctions of bureaucracy. These include: the disjuncture between formal and informal organisation; what is done in organisations has both intended and unintended consequences; and human agency, unpredictability and goal displacement give rise to tensions between formal and informal organisation. In the last part of the question, candidates had to analyse whether their organisations are bureaucratic, and why.

Most candidates could produce a reasonable account of the features of classical bureaucracy, although the quality of the answers was variable. This was mainly due to the absence or at least very brief comments on its limitations. There was a minority of candidates who focused too narrowly on Taylorism, whilst some others outlined the work of the Human Relations approach, without really arguing why its absence is a limitation on bureaucracy.

Similarly, some candidates stated contemporary organisations prefer a neo-bureaucratic approach but failed to provide supportive reasons for this.

A further distinction was the difference in the ability of candidates to produce a justified explanation why their organisation was or was not bureaucratic. The application of models as requested to candidates' own organisation was a common weakness among candidates. But better answers drew on relevant research in the first part of the question to effectively explain the main features of classical bureaucracy and its limitations. Other candidates provided a reasoned justification in the second part of the question why their organisation was bureaucratic or not.

Question 2

Learning outcome: 1

This asked candidates to critically assess why corporate social responsibility (CSR) has risen on the management agenda in some organisations in recent years. They then had to explain why their organisation has (or has not) a CSR policy.

CSR builds on the stakeholder theory of organisations and arises from the growing perception of some members of the business community that sustainable business success and shareholder value cannot be achieved solely by maximising short-term profits. It requires a market orientation but responsible corporate behaviour to achieve business success. Some firms are becoming aware that they contribute to sustainable development by managing operations to enhance economic growth and promote social responsibility whilst increasing competitiveness. They also seek to take account of consumer interests and protecting the environment.

Factors influencing this include: promoting corporate behaviour over and above their legal requirements, trying to integrate the economic, social and environmental impacts of business operations, and CSR becoming not an 'optional' add-on to core business activities but seeing it as the ways businesses are managed ethically. Other factors include: globalisation has created new opportunities for CSR, image and reputation play an important part in the competitive business context because of consumer pressure, and international bodies, such as the EU, have promoted CSR. In the second part of the question, candidates had to examine CSR policies in their own organisations.

Most candidates attempting this question passed, suggesting CSR as a concept is well understood. The breadth of understanding of CSR activities varied though, distinguishing better students from weaker ones. Also, the reasons for it being on the management agenda were critically assessed in some scripts but not in others. Most candidates provided sound standards of answers, with some achieving a Merit or Distinction grade. Those that did not pass didn't provide any critical assessment of the reasons why CSR has appeared on the management agenda in recent years but just described CSR activities. This then tended to be the case in the second part of the question, where they did not focus on the reasons for having a CSR policy.

Question 3

Learning outcome 2

This asked candidates to draw on research and current practice to provide a reasoned definition of modern management and discuss its major roles in contemporary organisations. In the second part of the question, candidates had to discuss the hiving off 'human resource management' (HRM) into a separate field of study and practice from 'management' and whether this had absolved some managers from responsibility for managing people at work.

Management is a difficult term to define with precision because it is used in several different ways and contexts. Management also has a long pedigree of development and maturation. For Harbison and Myers, management is an economic resource, system of authority, and social elite. For Clegg et al, management is the process of communicating, co-ordinating and accomplishing actions in pursuit of organisational goals, and managing relations at work including employees and technology. For Hales, management is a complex process for planning, allocating, motivating, co-ordinating, and controlling work. He identifies three themes in the literature on management: separation, extension and dispersion. The major roles of management, in turn, may be analysed by the work managers do, the processes they are involved in, or the functions they lead and execute.

The functions of management, for example, are commonly analysed in terms of finance, operations, marketing, and HRM. But the HR role of management has always been a problematic one and there is some truth in the claim 'HRM' can detract from line management's responsibility for managing people. But this was also the case when historically the management of industrial relations was seen to be the role of the 'personnel' department, not the domain of the first-line supervisor. But probably the dominant orthodoxy in large firms today is that senior HR specialists need to work with top management to promote effective HR strategies and practices, leaving line managers responsible for day-to-day HR work and related activities, calling on HR expertise when they need it. Appropriate policies and training are needed to facilitate this.

Some answers focused on traditional management theory, with very few examining modern management theory. The second part of the question was generally better answered by other candidates, where appropriate theory considered and used to structure these answers.

There was a lot of variation in the quality of answers, which gave a lot of latitude in marking the scripts. Some better answers suggested that modern management had moved into performance management, risk management, quality management and so on, and it wasn't just about managing, organising, planning, controlling. Fayol, Mintzberg were often cited. Some candidates discussed managerial roles and managers of people versus managers of tasks. Other scripts focused on functional management, marketing, HR, production, and finance in terms of their roles.

There were some muddled answers to the second part of the question, as well as some clear, articulate ones which demonstrated how to formulate and support an argument. Most scripts concluded that HR function is there to support line managers but this does not absolve line management responsibility for people management at work.

Question 4

Learning outcome 2

This required candidates to draft a presentation to final-year students at their local secondary school on 'The role of the marketing function in organisations and some critiques of it.'

Basically, the marketing function provides the interface between organisations and their customers, with the underpinning aim of assisting buying and selling between them. As a management function, marketing management incorporates market planning, product pricing, promotion of goods or services, and distribution. Marketing techniques are increasingly being used by organisations with welfare, community or budgetary goals. Current views of marketing emphasise its goal of achieving corporate objectives by meeting or exceeding customer needs better than those of its competitors. A key marketing task is to understand customer needs and develop competitive advantage through marketing mix decisions. Based on an understanding of its customers, an organisation's marketing mix consists of four major elements: product, price, promotion and place.

Common critiques of marketing include: the cost and overheads involved; problems understanding the processes involved; it encourages people to buy what they don't want; exaggerating the benefits of products/services; it contributes to environmental waste; marketing discriminates in customer selection; and it encroaches on customer privacy.

There were many attempts at this question and overall, the answers to it were rather weak. Better candidates, following a brief opening identifying the role as the interface between organisation and customer, discussed appropriately and accurately the marketing mix. A few added that marketing can make use of Porter's five forces to assess the nature and intensity of competition or the BCG matrix to evaluate the position of the organisation's current offerings in marketing. But unfortunately, there weren't many answers of this quality.

Weaker answers were predominantly focused on advertising and promotions. A further weakness for most of these responses was either the absence or limited attempt at critiques of the function. At best, these referred to the function as being overly expensive, added little value and failed to cooperate with other departments. A few others referred to promotions being potentially misleading and false in their claims. Otherwise, this part of the question was commonly poorly answered.

Most candidates really struggled to explain the role of the marketing function by focusing on advertising only. With this evident lack of knowledge and understanding, it was then difficult for them to critique the role. Further, there was a noticeable focus on for-profit organisations and on products almost entirely to the exclusion of services. It was as if services aren't marketed and charities, public services, and third-sector organisations in general have no need for marketing functions. It was concerning to observe this.

Question 5

Learning outcome: 5

This asked candidates to analyse up to three advantages of globalisation to national economies and up to three disadvantages to national economies. In the second part to this question, candidates had to consider the argument that the recent outcome of the referendum in UK on membership of the European Union was partly influenced by the concerns of some voters with the adverse consequences of globalisation for them and their families and to justify their answer.

The claimed advantages of globalisation to national economies include: global companies can invest in new countries creating jobs, work, and business opportunities; trade has become more competitive leading to the production of higher quality products; products are cheaper in real terms because of market competition; mobility of people is promoted through economic growth. But there are also claimed some disadvantages of globalisation. These include: MNCs do not care for the environment; MNCs create ecological damage and the mis-management of natural resources; globalisation reduces state regulatory policy by creating a 'race to the bottom' in wages and conditions of employment; social policy is subordinated to the needs of structural competitiveness; and nation states are unable to pursue ambitious monetary, fiscal and incomes policies.

Justification for the argument that the EU referendum resulted in a 'Brexit' decision is that some voters were instinctively showing their lack of respect for established politicians and party politics. This arose because their incomes and living standards were falling, they had fears and concerns about mass migration, and faced issues such as rising housing costs, job insecurity, and pressures on public service provision.

This was a popular question, as a question on globalisation in one form or another appeared to have been anticipated by most candidates. But disappointingly, this question was generally not well answered and justification of the arguments presented was not evident in many responses.

The content of the first part to the question presented few issues to candidates, who were generally able to cite up to three advantages and up to three disadvantages. Higher marks were given where these were explicitly oriented to national economies, as the question asked, rather than related to consumers, communities or organisations. Some candidates understood where the second part of the question was heading and they unpicked the argument well, whilst others seemed confused and didn't or couldn't link Brexit and globalisation adeptly at all. There was a need for students to link concerns with migration to globalisation and tie the threads of the argument together. Overall, most candidates could provide a reasonable argument in the second part of the question, and those answers able to cite research generally achieved the higher marks.

Answers to the first part of the question were generally knowledgeable and relevant. The most common benefits were identified as the bridging of the skills gap, contributing to tax revenues, reducing unemployment and cheaper but higher quality products. On the negative side, common issues included ecological damage, unethical employment practices, the driving down of wage rates, and overcrowding in some areas.

Weaker answers referred to issues relating more to MNCs and not national economies, such as being able to obtain labour and other resources more cheaply. In many answers to the second part of the question, candidates were floundering. Some argued, many voters had been swayed by sensationalised comments on social issues in the media. And they had probably disregarded the economic factors. Also, the vote to leave was skewed toward areas that were heavily affected by immigration. Other valid responses in answers referred to the ineffectiveness and efficiency of EU institutions and dilution of a UK identity and culture.

Question 6

Learning outcome: 5

This asked candidates to select any one international organisation, explain what it does and critically evaluate its activities.

Any one international organisation could be selected and analysed by candidates. These include, but they are neither exclusive nor exhaustive: UN, OECD, ILO, IMF, World Bank, WTO and others. Most of these organisations facilitate global trade and the liberalisation of world trade. Most support globalisation, the removal of trade barriers, and versions of national liberal democracy politically. Some description of the chosen organisation's objectives, functions and activities was expected, as well as some critical evaluation of its effectiveness and its impact on the international areas and the global contexts where it is active. Supporters of these bodies defend their roles in challenging economic protectionism, freeing international trade, and spreading economic development globally. Opponents argue against the unregulated political power of large MNCs and the powers they exercise through trade agreements and deregulated financial and labour markets.

Most candidates identified a suitable international organisation. However, generally little description of the organisation's objectives, functions and activities was evident from the answers provided and therefore little critical examination followed. The answers provided were largely descriptive and attempts at a critical evaluation of the organisation's activities were either absent or very brief. Notably, those who failed this question performed poorly throughout the examination paper. Given the range of organisations that could be examined, it seems this area of the learning outcomes needs closer consideration by most centres. In the main, stronger candidates could confidently discuss some aspects of the organisations they had selected, such as the World Bank or IMF. In some cases, the question was misunderstood and these candidates wrote about international retail organisations or MNCs. Overall, this was a disappointing set of answers to the question put and centres need to help develop and improve candidate knowledge and understanding of this subject area.

Question 7

Learning outcome: 6

This asked candidates to provide up to three benefits of migration into a named country of their choice and up to three disadvantages. They then had to analyse how has immigration affected or not affected their organisation in recent years.

The case for migration includes: it is a response to high labour demand in the national economy; it supports the wider economic policy objectives of economic growth and increased productivity; it enables the importation of high-skilled workers into the national economy where there is a national shortfall; these workers pay taxes to the national government and locally; it promotes a flexible labour market; it compensates for an ageing national population; and it contributes to funding the ‘pensions gap’. The case against migration into a national economy includes: loss on control of national borders; it places strains on the provision of healthcare and housing; it creates problems of inter-group integration; it fails to distinguish between ‘economic’ migrants and ‘refugee’ migrants; it adversely affects quality of life; and it is difficult to manage.

Most answers provided a suitable list of advantages and disadvantages of migration and considered the effect of immigration on their organisations appropriately. Stronger answers referred to pertinent issues and this area, it seems, is one that appears to be covered comprehensively by most centres. The main differentiator between qualities of answers was breadth and depth of responses. It was either absence of or a limited application of the issue of immigration to the candidates’ own organisation which was noticeable in weaker scripts.

Interestingly, there were some very good responses from those working in NHS trusts, who evaluated how dependent they are on the recruitment of the much needed expertise of migrant workers. A few scripts mentioned their organisation’s dependency on unskilled labour, how the migrants they employed work hard, and how they are commonly prepared to accept low wages. Some additional comment on the negative aspects of this reliance would have strengthened these responses.

Question 8

Learning outcome: 6

This asked candidates to reply to an email on the positive and negative impacts of current technology in the workplace.

Various forms of technology are impacting on work in the workplace. The positive impacts include: efficiency and increased productivity, where the expectations of clients and co-workers has changed and there is increased interaction and collaboration between workers; teamwork is much more engaged; cost management is improved where employees are encouraged to optimise their time management; and there are heightened levels of internal security, with technology helping ensure that information is accessible only to those legitimately needing it.

On the other hand, the march of technology has some adverse impacts in the workplace including: the elimination of some jobs, where businesses reduce overheads by downsizing their workforce; individuals whose skill sets are obsolete have limited options for employment; with email, smart phones and pagers, the length of the average workday has increased along with accessibility by employers to workers and clients to workers; surveillance equipment, key cards, and the increased monitoring of phone and Internet use in the workplace continue to raise issues of employee privacy; any electronic platform is subject to the threat of computer viruses and hacking thus weakening security; email has also diminished some of the trust and rapport that previously evolved from face-to-face meetings and phone conversations; and technology has further increased impatience to get immediate results.

There were some disappointing answers to this question, given it provided plenty of scope for considering the impact of technology in the workplace. Many candidates described the technology used, without considering the positive and negative aspects of this use. Research was generally lacking but most candidates could confidently discuss the impact of technology in the workplace from a practical standpoint. But answers tended to be descriptive and were generally better on the advantages as opposed to the negative impacts of technology.

Some scripts referred to broader issues such as the efficiencies arising from computerised employee record keeping and absence monitoring and automation achieving cost reductions in production, but with the adverse effect of redundancies. The more common technologies discussed were those of communication systems including the benefits of Skype, mobiles and iPads. Some answers could have been strengthened by adding some commentary on the negative effects of these systems, such as the dilution of personal contact in the workplace. There was some reference to stress caused by being contactable for 24 hours a day, each day of the week, and perceptions of ‘presenteeism’. Other issues raised were remote and flexible working, reduced travel costs, and so on.

Weaker answers often contained outlines of types of technology in bullet point format, with little or no reference to the workplace. These answers and the answers to questions 9 and 10 seem to indicate that candidates were struggling to get something on to paper in the limited time remaining. It might be that too much time had been spent answering the case study tasks at the expense of these final questions. The issue of poor time management is one frequently mentioned in Chief Examiner reports.

Question 9

Learning outcome: 7

This asked candidates to provide an informed critique of neo-liberalism and assess how neo-liberal economic policy affects (or does not affect) their organisation.

Neo-liberalism is now the dominant economic orthodoxy around the world. It derives from the 'new right' politics in the UK and US in the 1980s and the ideas of a series of economic theorists, such as Hayek, Friedman and the so-called Chicago School. Its basic tenet is that free markets and market competition are the best means of promoting economic growth and political freedoms. Basically, it is argued, individual rights should be protected by promoting market economic policies and limiting the powers of governments, thus maximising freedom of choice in the market place. This set of beliefs rejects Keynesian economic theory in favour of classical economics. It favours competitive labour and product markets, low public spending, low income taxes, and reducing the size of the 'social' or 'welfare' state.

Supporters of neo-liberalism have sought to extend the principles, values and practice of the market to other fields – through privatisation, market de-regulation, and management and accounting techniques imported from the private sector. HRM and TQM are elements in the broader neo-liberal project. Some of the consequences include: the expansion and collapse of de-regulated financial markets, a growth in material inequality, growing insecurity in employment, and the emergence of a high-net worth business elite. The liberal political state is replaced by a neo-liberal economy. The last part of this answer related to the impact of neo-liberalism on candidates' organisations.

This was not a popular question but, for those attempting it, the notion of neo-liberalism appeared to have been well understood by most of doing this question. But few scripts undertook a sound critique of the definition provided. Application of the policy to employing organisations was better answered.

Generally, a sound understanding of the nature and facets of neo-liberalism was demonstrated by the candidates attempting it. However, there were variations in the extent to which a critique was provided. Some candidates concentrated on the damage that can be done by unscrupulous businesses exploiting customers such as in the banking crisis of 2008. Others mentioned free markets tend to favour the 'haves' in society and operates against the 'have-nots'. Similarly, there was reference to the notion that certain necessities produced for the common good and for which a price and profit is difficult to measure are better provided by the public sector.

There were variations in the quality of the answers provided to the second part of the question. Better answers came from those working in the public sector. They have first-hand experience of austerity measures and the increasing imposition of private-sector competitive practices and styles of management. For these candidates, the question was a good option.

Question 10

Learning outcome: 7

This asked candidates to explain why employment legislation has become such an important part of the HRM function in their organisation over recent decades. They then had to select any single piece of employment legislation, which affects their organisation, and summarise its impact on the managing of people within it.

Employment legislation has increased in scope, importance and influence for over 30 years because successive governments have wanted to increase productivity in the private sector, where unions were originally seen as barriers to economic performance. These laws reduced union bargaining power and the ability to pursue lawful industrial action. But they also provided a basic floor of individual legal rights for individual workers. HR managers had to deal with these and related issues.

There is also the impact of UK membership of the EU at that time. This increased the amount of employment legislation originating in Brussels, again providing legal protections for poorly organised workers. Lastly, with the decline in collective bargaining and trade union membership in the UK for over 30 years, employment legislation has filled in the gaps – such as a legally-binding national living wage – where workers, terms and conditions were no longer protected by voluntary collective bargaining and worker self-regulation and the HR function had to manage these legal challenges.

The second part of the question required candidates to select any one piece of employment legislation and summarise its effects on their own organisation.

Again, this was a question on employment legislation that appeared to be anticipated but perhaps not in the form presented. A lot of candidates attempted this question and many achieved good marks. The importance of legislation to the HRM function was not as well answered as the second part of the question, which required consideration of one piece of legislation that affects their own organisation.

This was a popular question, but was not always well addressed. The first part of the question created some issues in the sense that not all candidates picked up on the HR function element and so crafted more general answers. Others read the question more carefully and acted on it correctly, suggesting HR needed to view employment law as an important part of the function as there was lot of it, they needed to inform/guide their business, keep up with case law, steer a path to keep the organisation clear of reputational damage/employment tribunal claims, and so on. More general answers citing the demise of collective bargaining, membership of the EU and so on were looked on as legitimate but these answers didn't do this so directly. In the second part of candidates tended to choose either the Equality Act, TUPE or the National Living Wage. Most responses were competent here but sometimes they could have done with being more focused on the impact on the managing of people.

Conclusion

The pass rate in this examination diet was 74.3%. This represented a good set of results with solid increases in the proportion of merits and distinctions. The examining team believes this paper provided a good test of all the learning outcomes and the indicative content of this unit and it was a fair test of candidate knowledge and the application of knowledge within the module. The examining team noted the following general points in examination performance.

1. To repeat a point made in other Chief Examiner reports, this is an M-level examination, where candidates are expected to provide evidence-based answers to the questions set, drawing upon relevant research and good practice of HRM in its contexts. This means candidates are expected to read around the subject matter of the module and provide informed, justified answers to the questions set. Candidates need to supplement their studies through wider reading. These sources include academic journals, professional periodicals, and the quality press, as indicated on many occasions by the Chief Examiner.

2. In the Section A case study, most candidates appeared to have prepared well by considering the case study material in advance of the examination and critically assessing it. For many candidates, their performance in the case study was better than in Section B.

3. Many candidates appeared to have grasped the issues facing Stockbridge, the fictional university, post-Brexit. The competency of many of the answers may have been due to commentaries in the media about the effects of Brexit on all types of organisations, universities included, and the currency of the debates could well have assisted candidates in approaching the questions set on the paper on this occasion.

4. Other reasons why the case was approached so effectively by many candidates might have been because their tutors, being in the education sector, are very familiar with the problems facing the sector. The major difference between higher or lower marks was the breadth and depth of answers and plausible courses of

action. A common feature of some scripts was that the answer to question 1 was often a lot longer than the other three. It was acceptable in answers 2 to 4 to outline the damage to the university resulting from EU withdrawal, but these were often at the expense of discussion on courses of action.

5. On the other hand, there are still some candidates who do not fully prepare for the case study and consequently struggle to draw on any research evidence or show an appreciation of the overall context of the case organisation. Those who had clearly prepared in advance did well in the case examination. But there are some candidates and/or centres that are still not preparing sufficiently in advance of the examination to demonstrate the level of understanding of the case organisation expected by the examiners. There is a marked difference between candidates, who have prepared well and have researched the sector and similar organisations and other candidates. Those who are prepared are generally able to justify their responses with evidence-based answers.

6. Section B was not always as well answered as Section A. However, most candidates attempted five questions and most demonstrated a good appreciation of the range of topics examined. Most candidates failing the paper overall failed both Section A and Section B of the examination.

7. Generally, Section B caused fewer difficulties for most candidates. However, style of writing and presentation (‘Persuasion and Presentation’ within the generic assessment criteria) can play a key part in the coherence of answers and the ability to convey points clearly. Given the time pressures in Section B, and the breadth of coverage expected across five questions, candidates who are well organised and can make their key points quickly and concisely, with a strong focus on the question set, tend to do better in Section B questions.

8. It is the view of the examination team the examination paper was fair and sufficiently challenging to candidates and the demands required of them, including the second part of Section B questions, which provided means for differentiating between able and less able candidates. There were suitable choices in each sub-section of Section B and this gave better candidates the opportunity to do well in their responses. A further factor was variation in levels of competence in applying examination techniques. Time management is a persistent weakness with some candidates, despite the instructions given in the paper. But overall, this examination provided a generally pleasing and encouraging set of Section B answers.

9. Again, in the view of the examination team, this was a topical and relevant examination which tested the assessment criteria of this module in an interesting and engaging manner. However, it did expose those who fail to keep abreast of the current business environment, since they commonly struggled to discuss or evaluate contemporary issues in the business environment.

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10. Finally, a few candidates still appear to be sitting the examination with a low level of knowledge of the subject areas being tested and do not fully appreciate what is required within an M level paper. These candidates struggle with what is meant by a critical review/evaluation and commonly provide descriptive answers. The importance of attempting past questions in preparation for Section B of the examination paper needs to be re-emphasised once again.

To conclude, I'd like to acknowledge and thank my team of examiners for once again contributing to the speed and quality of the assessment process in the relatively short time-scale available. The examiners on this occasion were: Alan Peacock, Amanda Thompson, Chris Evans, Dee McGhee, Derek Adam-Smith, Helen Bessant, and John Ashcroft.

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