

# *ICAEW's Level 4 Apprenticeship, Portfolio & Reflective Statement Examiners' Report – February 2020*



## **SUMMARY**

### **General Observations**

317 candidates have now produced and submitted a Portfolio & Reflective Statement since the ICAEW exam was launched in 2017, over eight sessions. This short report sets out some observations from the team who marked the February 2020 cohort.

As we have reported previously, the vast majority of candidates continue to pass the exam comfortably – which is gratifying. It is clear that the requirements of the exam are readily understood and candidates are very capable of addressing them. Therefore, future candidates should be confident that if they apply themselves properly, they will pass the exam comfortably.

Candidates again performed well with the average mark increasing to 84% at this session (compared with 81% at the previous session). The highest and lowest marks were 98% and 61% respectively.

Future candidates are reminded that passing this exam requires thorough preparation and close attention to the requirements – passing should not be considered a formality. As can be seen from this session, the difference between the highest and lowest mark was 37% – this clearly shows that marks can readily be dropped.

### **Observations on Part 1 (Portfolio)**

To date, candidates have done particularly well on this part of the exam, and have attained better marks than for Part 2. At this session the average percentage of available marks achieved for Part 1 was 91% compared with 80% for Part 2.

Most candidates were able to write their answers to this part of the exam concisely. One or two well written sentences should be sufficient to pass each part of the 17 requirements.

A few candidates provided generic descriptions of situations at this session, which is not how the exam should be addressed. For example:

“Whilst on-site some questions and work need to be prioritised, due to certain circumstances”; and

“Auditing involves going out as a team, with each team member having set roles and work to do”.

Situations should be specific and drawn from candidates actual recent work experience.

### **Observations on Part 2 (the Reflective Statement)**

Candidates once again generally performed well on this section. However, there were a few instances of ‘generic’ descriptions of situations – as was the case in Part 1. Generic situations will result in low marks.

Candidates are reminded to clearly describe what they did in each situation. This exam is seeking evidence of what each candidate has done – not what “their firm”, “their team” or “their colleague” did. Lack of evidence of the personal involvement of candidates will result in low marks.

In addition, candidates are reminded to provide the right evidence in the appropriate part of the template. There is no cross-marking in this exam. Therefore, if a candidate provides evidence in the wrong part of the template they will not be given credit for it.

Candidates are again advised to use different situations for each of their answers, so as to provide examiners with strong evidence of their experience.

Candidates can choose which of the twelve skills or behaviours to provide answers for in Part 2 of the exam. Whilst this may seem obvious, candidates are strongly encouraged to select the four skills or behaviours that they are able to answer the best.

### **Situation**

The descriptions of the situations are often a little too brief – an extra sentence is likely to greatly enhance some answers. Candidates should use just one situation for each answer. Using more than one situation to answer a particular question is likely to provide insufficient depth of evidence to score good marks.

In selecting a situation to use, candidates are reminded that it should be one that relates closely to the skill or behaviour that they have chosen to answer. For example, if a candidate chooses to answer the communications question, they should select a situation that relates to this.

### **Skill or Behaviour**

Answers could, sometimes, be better tailored to the specific skill or behaviour that is being examined. Candidates should describe a specific situation that they experienced, as opposed to a generic approach that tends to be applied at work. For example, discussing the firm's general approach to ethics will not score as highly as describing the application of an ethical approach to a specific situation that they were involved in.

### **What was learnt / would do differently**

Some of the lessons learnt were also too general. Answers should be written in a way that is specific and clearly related to the situation. A good way to identify useful learnings from a particular situation could be to ask for feedback from a colleague, and to describe this feedback in the answers.

Candidates are reminded that as well as discussing what could have gone better, it is also appropriate to note what went well.