ICAEW's Level 7 Apprenticeship Project Report – November 2019

SUMMARY

There have now been two assessment sessions of the ICAEW's Project Report. The first cohort comprised only 85 submissions. However, numbers increased to 493 applications at this session. It is anticipated that applications will increase further from 2020 onwards.

Candidates were again well prepared and generally addressed the requirements of the exam very well. Consequently, candidates scored high marks with the average mark being 85%. There was, however, quite a range of marks with the highest being 100% and the lowest 52%. This range of marks demonstrates that answers can vary significantly in their quality. This clearly shows why candidates should not take passing this exam as a formality. Passing requires thorough preparation and close attention to the exam requirements. Candidates that do not address the exam's requirements properly will score much lower marks than those that do!

It is hoped that candidates will find this exam good practice for the evaluation of their work that will be expected throughout their career.

General Observations

Candidates answered the requirements very well. Pass rates and average marks reflect this. It is assumed that candidates are benefiting from professional tutoring on how best to complete the exam.

Candidates were almost universally good at writing their answers in a way that made it clear what their personal involvement was in each situation, which is a necessary requirement to pass. It is, however, worth re-emphasising the importance of this. If a candidate is not crystal clear what they did in each situation, they will not score very high marks.

There was generally a good standard of English and grammar used. Candidates are, however, advised to have their submissions independently proof read before they are submitted for assessment.

The examiners are not generally expecting unusual or complex situations, but instead everyday situations. There is no need for candidates to over emphasize what they did in answering the questions.

In addition, candidates continue to be strongly advised to:

- Make full use of the guidance that can be found at icaew.com/level7.

- Make sure they use the appropriate template for the session of the exam that they are submitting – noting that some of the questions vary at each session!

- Anonymise their submissions so as to respect client or colleague confidentiality.

- Use different situations for each of their answers, so as to provide examiners with strong evidence of their experience of each of the skills and behaviours being assessed.

- Use the most appropriate examples that they can from their experience. These should be examples drawn from their work experience and should not be trivial in nature.

- Make sure they answer the right question (noting that some questions will vary at each session).

- Be clear which of the ethics or professional scepticism questions they are answering, given that candidates should answer just one of these.

- Write about a specific situation as opposed to a general or theoretical one.

- Use sub-headings to structure their answers. This also aids the marker's assessment.

- Get someone to review their answers before submitting them for assessment.

- Make sure they talk about what they did, throughout their answers.

- Avoid using too much jargon or textbook material.

- Not feel that they need to try and demonstrate their technical prowess, this not being a technical exam.

- Spell check their submissions.

- Make sure they don't simply 'cut and paste' text from their training records. It is very likely that they will need to tailor the information to the specific requirements of each question.

- Put the right information under each sub-heading of their answers.

- Make sure they anonymise their answers i.e. do not refer to client's or individual's names.

- Read the 'top tips' at icaew.com/level7 and apply them!

Structuring answers

There is quite a lot of supporting information available to candidates at icaew.com/level7 which candidates are strongly encouraged to read. This includes a webinar from the lead examiner, which suggests that candidates structure their answers around the components of each question using sub-headings. This approach should make it easier to cover each of the requirements and also makes it easier for the markers to assess candidates' answers.

Possible subheadings could be (for Question 1a 'Continuous Improvement'):

Description of the situation
How I demonstrated Continuous Improvement
Evaluation of my effectiveness
Description of the lessons that I learnt

If candidates do use subheadings to structure their answers they are advised to make sure that each subsection of their answers do properly relate to the subheadings. At this session there were several answers which included subheadings but where the text of the answers did not correlate well to the subheadings. This detracted from the quality of these answers and in some instances led to lower marks being awarded.

How submissions are marked

Markers will assess each candidate's submission against five sub-requirements, namely:

1. How well candidates have described what they did in the situation (referred to as **personal involvement**);

2. How well candidates have described a specific situation (referred to as the **situation**);

3. How well candidates have described what they did to evidence competence in the specific skill or behaviour (referred to as the **competence**);

4. How well candidates have described how they evaluated the outcome of their work in the specific situation (referred to as the **evaluation**);

5. How well candidates have described what lessons they have learnt (referred to as **lessons learnt**).

If candidates structure their answers to address each of these 'sub-requirements', it should help create an answer that addresses each of the requirements. A good way to do this is by the use of sub-headings. The first sub-requirement, however, pervades everything that a candidate writes so it is not recommended that a separate section of an answer is submitted for this.

Based on how each of these five sub-requirements are individually scored, a final mark is derived for each question using a sophisticated rules-based system.

Candidates should be aware that the first two 'sub-requirements' are of such importance that poor scores on these will limit their ability to score well overall, irrespective of how good the rest of their answer addresses the other requirements of the question.

Specific observations about the separate parts of each question

Situation

The descriptions of the situations were often a little too brief. Whilst examiners do not want long descriptions, an extra sentence would often have been helpful to properly understand the scenarios.

This sub-requirement refers to "action". This should be interpreted as "what did you do which demonstrated the skill/behaviour?".

Situations should be of an appropriate level for a newly qualifying accountant. At this session there were a few situations that we trivial (e.g. having a coffee with a client).

Candidates should make sure that they 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.

Skill or Behaviour

It is important that answers are specific to a situation as opposed to being written in a general way. Candidates should describe a specific situation that they experienced, as opposed to a generic approach that tends to be applied at work.

Evaluation

Candidates are reminded that as well as discussing what could have gone better, it is also appropriate to note what went well. Noting what went well, and could therefore be repeated in a similar situation, could very well be a valid thing for a candidate to write about.

Furthermore, the evaluation should not just describe what happened, but should be a description of the candidate 'stepping back' to consider what went well and what could have gone better.

Lessons Learnt

Some of the lessons learnt were too general. It would often have been better if they had been written in a way that was more specific and more related to the situation. A good way to identify useful learnings from a situation could be for candidates to ask for feedback from a colleague.

Even if things went mainly well, candidates should be able to identify something to apply in a similar situation in the future. For example, "things went so well that I shared my experience with colleagues by way of a report so that they could also benefit from my experience".