New PRINCE2 Practitioner Exam

The PRINCE2 Practitioner examination is designed to measure whether a candidate would be able to apply PRINCE2 to the running and managing of a project. This exam used to be a three-hour closed book test, requiring essay-type answers to three questions from five set about a particular project scenario.

The exam has recently been totally revamped and a new style exam, based on Objective Testing, was introduced in September 2007. The examination papers given to candidates now consist of a Scenario Booklet (providing information on the exam scenario), a Questions Booklet and an Answer Booklet.

The questions in the new exam consist of nine different sets of multiple choice questions to be completed in three hours, where each set of questions relates to one of the 11 syllabus subject areas, i.e. questions are not asked on two of the syllabus areas, which are omitted at random from the exam. The 11 syllabus areas are as follows:

1. Plans
2. Management of Risk
3. Controls
4. Product Based Planning
5. Configuration Management
6. Change Control
7. Processes
8. Business Case
9. Quality in a Project Environment
10. Quality Review
11. Organisation

The questions follow one of six different formats. These questions have been designed to fully test the candidate’s knowledge of how to apply PRINCE2 to a set scenario. The six formats of questions are:

- Simple ‘Yes / No’ – requiring an assessment of whether a statement is true or not.
- Classic Multiple Choice – e.g. choose one from a list of possible answers.
- Multiple Response Multiple Choice – e.g. choose a number of options from a list of possible answers (where the number of answers is either specified or unspecified).
- Matching – linking items in one list to items in another.
- Sequencing – where events need to be positioned in the most logical sequence.
- Assertion / Reason – complex question consisting of two statements - an assertion and a reason. The candidate must first decide if both the
assertion and reasons are true or false, then they must decide whether and how they are linked.

Each set of questions gives a possible 40 marks. There are thus 360 marks available in total, from the 9 areas. Candidates must get 180 marks or more to pass. To make things really interesting, the candidate is penalised for getting the answer wrong to certain specific questions: get the question right and you get a mark, get it wrong and you lose a mark! A candidate could thus end up with a zero score for a question. Also, not all questions have the same number of marks assigned. Therefore, time management and question selection becomes important considerations during the exam. So far, although it is very early days for the new exam, the pass rate is similar to the old essay-type, with about ⅔ of candidates passing the exam.

The exam has, however, been changed to ‘open-book’ in that you are allowed to use the official PRINCE2 manual during the exam. This gives the exam a more pragmatic real-life feel and for a number of questions it can prove to be really useful as there is the ability to confirm/identify the correct answers using the manual. Interestingly, you are allowed to flag the manual to aid navigation (by use of sticky labels) and you are allowed to annotate the text and diagrams – but you are not allowed to attach additional material.

All of this sounds complex, but in reality I found the new exam format easy to understand and follow, and I feel it gives a much better test of the candidate’s knowledge on applying PRINCE2 to a practical project scenario. Having experienced both the old and new practitioner exam, I am now a convert to the new format exam.

Ian White

Ian White is Assistant Informatics Director at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and has managed NHS IT programmes and projects for over 20 years. Ian re-took the PRINCE2 Practitioner course in December 2007 and he is happy to provide NHS colleagues with advice on taking the new format exam. Contact Ian via e-mail: ian.white@sth.nhs.uk.

Further information on the new exam is available from the APM Group website: http://www.pm4success.com/web/site/BestPracticeinPPRM/BestPracticeMethods&Approaches/PRINCE2/PRINCE2NewExams.asp