

BCS Higher Education Qualification

Profession Graduate Diploma

March 2019

EXAMINERS' REPORT

Management Information Systems

General comments¹

A relatively smaller number of candidates attempted this paper (69) than in previous sessions. Unfortunately only a third of candidates attained a pass overall. Low attainment was found across all questions. Many candidates were ill-prepared to tackle the paper, their scripts exhibiting similar, and even more exaggerated, negative practices such as:

- **Question requirements ignored/unanswered.** Many candidates ignored aspects of a particular question or even a whole sub-question, thereby limiting the amount of marks available to them.
- **Minimal answers given.** Examiners expect answers to cover the question requirements in both depth and breadth, given the one hour allocated to complete each question. A few short paragraphs or a list of one-phrase bullet points are therefore insufficient to gain high marks.
- **Using canned answers.** Some candidates prepare answers in advance of seeing the paper. These answers invariably do not fit the question set on the paper, and candidates gain little or no marks for these. An example of where this occurred on the current paper was within answers to Question A2 (b).
- **Not answering the question.** Several candidates provide overviews of concepts/issues that are not tailored to the specific question set. On the other hand, sometimes a more general answer is required to that given (e.g., when defining management activity concepts such as planning in Question A3).

Question number: A1

Syllabus area:

2.6 The application of On-Line Analytical Processes (OLAP)/Data mining/Business intelligence (BI) tools in supporting management decision-making.

2.7 Data warehouses and data mining facilities: the relationship between data warehousing and other MIS facilities.

Total marks allocated: 25

Examiners' Guidance Notes

This was attempted by just under half of the candidates, and of those only 46% managed to achieve a pass level. The principal reasons for the disappointing pass rate are:

- Candidates not understanding more than a few aspects about one or two of the concepts (the remaining concept descriptions being either totally incorrect or omitted). Typically, ETL was the best attempted, most candidates being able to articulate a basic ETL process accurately. A very technical albeit reasonable description of Middleware was provided by several candidates. Meta data was rarely wholly understood: many candidates confused business meta data with the actual company data held in a data warehouse. A star schema was often incorrectly considered a method of connecting databases. A description for predictive model was often omitted.
- Candidates failing to attempt to rate the importance of the concepts to the provision of BI systems or providing very weak arguments to back up their stated position.

Overall, there were just one or two candidates that sufficiently explained the entire set of concepts and evaluated their relative importance for BI systems' provision to gain marks within either the excellent or outstanding category.

Question number: A2

Syllabus area:

3.5 The suitability of packages vs. bespoke systems development

4.1 Developments in hardware, software, internet and communications capabilities and their implications for MIS.

Total marks allocated: 25

Examiners' Guidance Notes

This was a popular question, attempted by 86% of the candidates. However, only 47% passed, and the average mark was 9 out of 25.

The answer to Part a) was generally disappointing, as many candidates simply explained a set of factors to take into account (some very simplistically described) rather than how the factors would be evaluated as part of the selection process. Many answers failed to distinguish between mandatory and desirable factors. Some candidates provided a list of factors with very little additional explanation as to why they were important to consider.

Some answers to Part b) were sound, with candidates contextualising their answers regarding the adoption of the open-source project management software to the specific scenario (i.e., a medium-sized software development – but not a project management software development – company). However, for others the question presented an opportunity for a canned answer on 'open-source versus in-house software development' or 'open-source versus outsourced development', neither of which were appropriate and therefore significantly restricted their mark attainment.

Question number: A3**Syllabus area:**

- 1.2 Management Planning and Control: how planning and control systems interrelate.
- 2.3 Group Decision Support Systems (GDSS)

Total marks allocated: 25**Examiners' Guidance Notes**

This question was also very popular, with 87% of candidates attempting it. However, again the pass rate was disappointing; 48% passed, with a low average mark of 8.9 out of 25 and no candidates managing to gain an excellent pass (i.e, 18 out of 25 or above).

It was particularly surprising how weak some of the answers were to Part (a): many candidates could not define planning or control as generic concepts. Some definitions essentially stated that planning is planning; not a useful definition. Other answers were written specific to a type of planning rather than couched in more general terms e.g., answered in relation to project planning. Control as a general concept was better attempted, but very few candidates were able to articulate an accurate view of positive deviation within control, and of what control via feedback entails. Many failed to attempt a definition of control via feedforward.

Most candidates offered some useful description of a GDSS in answer to Part b). Some answers confused GDSS with Individual DSS, giving a canned overview of the types of models that can be found within the latter systems. There were only a few candidates that attempted a discussion of the extent of support that GDSS can provide for organisational planning activities. Of those that did attempt this aspect, only one or two were able to string together a logical and complete justification for a suitable viewpoint.

Question number: B4**Syllabus area:**

- 2.8 The relationships of MIS to other enterprise applications, such as Transaction Processing Systems (TPS) and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) systems.
- 2.9 IS within functional areas such as Human Resources, Marketing & Sales, Production, Accounting & Finance, Customer Relationship Management, Product Supply Change Management systems.

Total marks allocated: 25**Examiners' Guidance Notes**

This was a popular question, attempted by over three quarters of candidates. The pass rate, at nearly 60%, shows that a good number of candidates were well prepared for a question of this content and format. Those who failed generally provided very poor material which failed to address the issues in the question appropriately. A number of candidates were clearly unprepared for the question.

Question number: B5**Syllabus area:**

- 2.9 IS within functional areas such as Human Resources, Marketing & Sales, Production, Accounting & Finance, Customer Relationship Management, Product Supply Change Management systems.

Total marks allocated: 25

Examiners' Guidance Notes

Fewer than 10% of candidates attempted this question, and none of them reached a pass mark. This is an unusual situation, and might be attributed to candidates using the question only as a "last resort".

The material falls well within the scope of the syllabus, and covers areas of extreme importance within the MIS community. It is of significant regret, therefore, that those who attempted the question were unable to furnish an appropriate and acceptable answer.