

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development

Advanced Level Qualification
**Human Resource Management in
Context**
Examiner Report

**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.

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.

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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.

This case study is about a hospice (Community Hospice) and looks at three groups of workers: The Board of Trustees; the administrative employees; and the voluntary workers. The Hospice was founded in 1979 thanks largely to the efforts of a small group from the local community who initiated public support for it. Public meetings were held all across the proposed catchment area and, as a result, volunteer support groups were established in local towns and villages to spread the message and help with fundraising efforts.

Community Hospice achieved charitable status, and expert help was brought in to oversee the establishment of appropriate governance arrangements and establish a Board of Trustees, which is comprised of a range of professionals. The Board is primarily concerned with direction, policy and strategy. The day-to-day management of the hospice is with the paid professional staff who report back to the Board - though this tends to be sporadic and subject to workloads associated with the continuing growth of Community Hospice.

There is no funding from central government and there is concern that local fundraising has reduced; yet some Trustees continue to support further expansion of the Hospice's work. There is concern amongst some of the staff that the Trustees' interest in 'growing the Hospice' is becoming detached from the local area it serves and from the operational issues that staff face.

When a trustee resigns they are replaced through a professional and personal network of colleagues. More recently, two new members of the Board have joined through a different route and have no connection with the history of the Community Hospice. They are more open-minded to new strategies and a re-evaluation of the direction of the Hospice and are concerned about the pace of expansion of the Hospice and the impact on its governance. They have urged others on the Board to evaluate its effectiveness, and, where appropriate, to co-opt specialist people to the Board to help them. These suggestions have been begrudgingly accepted by the rest of the Board.

In the early days of the Hospice there were around 15 Volunteer Support Groups (VSGs) each with around ten members. 40 years on the number of VSGs has declined, some merging and others closing, so that currently there are eight groups that are still active. The decline is partly attributed to the ageing of members, and very few young people coming through to replace those who leave. Currently the average age of the volunteers is 67 and an overall profile of their characteristics can be summarised as white, middle-class, predominantly female, retired professionals. VSGs see themselves as the 'public face' of the Hospice.

In addition to their fundraising a number of volunteers work (in their voluntary capacity) at the Hospice itself. In particular they carry out clerical and reception work. More importantly, they step in to administrative roles to cover for employee absence. This is a considerable shift from their early involvement which was limited to a 'meet and greet' service for new patients and visitors to the Hospice.

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The role of these voluntary workers now includes updating patient records and inputting data that is later used in reports to the Board of Trustees. The Board is grateful for their involvement as it has improved the efficiency and accuracy of reports. Consequently, the Trustees haven't looked at the strategic direction of managing people. They are content to rely upon the Hospice's long history of voluntary workers to fill any gaps left as a consequence of staff shortages.

Some days there may be as many as five voluntary workers in administration. At other times there may only be one. Employees are never sure of their number from week-to-week, and sometimes even from day-to-day.

The Head of Administrative staff reports to the Director of Communications and Income Generation, who is a member of the senior management team. Due to their voluntary status the reporting line of the voluntary workers has never been clarified.

The proportion of administrative staff at the Hospice has struggled to keep up with the growth of the Hospice. In particular the number of inpatients has tripled and Outpatients and Counselling have been added to the services it offers. From a core staff of 19 full and part-time administrators, eight work 'less social' hours between 7.30 a.m. – 3.00 p.m. (full-time) and all six part-timers work 2.30 p.m. – 7.00 p.m. This leaves a core of five administrators who work regular days.

As sickness absence and employee turnover is rising, the Hospice is becoming increasingly reliant upon its voluntary workers who provide flexibility in their working hours. Full-time employees resent the control that voluntary workers have over when they work.

When the Head of Administrative Staff recruits new employees, she relies on experienced voluntary workers to mentor them. For the most part she ignores any ethical issues that may arise from how and where she deploys voluntary workers. It relieves pressure on an increasingly stretched and demotivated group of employees and senior managers are happy with the current arrangement.

Over the last three years Health Authority funding has been cut, and it has become harder to justify replacing staff who leave. Staffing problems are projected to continue, partly as a consequence of changes to inward and outward migration of the area and this will affect staff at all levels. It will pose new challenges for the future supply of both employees and voluntary workers.

To bring a fresh approach to how the Hospice operates the Board of Trustees has appointed an HR Consultant with a remit to examine the governance of the Hospice, and also to work with the Head of Administrative staff to look at administrative arrangements. For both activities the Consultant is expected to bring forward recommendations that will be acceptable to the Board, including compliance with the Charity Governance Code (2017), for smaller charities - <https://www.charitygovernancecode.org/en/front-page>

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Assume the role of the HR consultant who is also a co-opted member of the Board of Trustees. The Board has asked you to look at two very specific aspects of the Hospice: The future of workforce planning and resourcing (reporting on both employees and volunteers) and the fitness for purpose of the Hospice governance.

1. Critically review the case study organisation through a SWOT analysis of its administrative employees. Make recommendations based upon the strengths and opportunities you have identified. Justify your recommendations.
2. Critically review the Hospice's deployment of voluntary workers. On the basis of this, recommend actions the Hospice should take to ensure it is not over-reliant upon voluntary workers whilst at the same time ensuring they remain committed to the Hospice. Justify your recommendations.
3. The Charity Governance Code (2017) published 'The Seven Principles of Good Governance' (for smaller charities) which the Board of Trustees is expected to follow. These are: organisational purpose; leadership; integrity; decision-making, risk and control; board effectiveness; diversity; openness and accountability. Critically review the work of the Board of Trustees against ANY THREE of these principles.
4. Provide the Board of Trustees with a set of proposals to ensure it engages with the strategic direction of the Hospice and improves its governance. Justify your proposals.

It is recommended that you spend an equal amount of your time on each of the four questions.

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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. Simms (2019) notes the need for a more multi-disciplinary approach to HR in the future. 'Most of the problems organisations face are big, hairy, complex and multidimensional, and HR people will have to collaborate with other disciplines, from artificial intelligence and data sciences to marketing and finance'.

- i. Identify ways in which the work of **up to two** of the disciplines can add value to the HR function.

AND

- ii. Discuss how the discipline(s) impact upon the HR function in your organisation.

OR

2. 'Big Data and algorithms allow companies to get information that previously resided in the HR department into the hands of the people – managers or employees – on the front line, obviating the need for high-touch management and even, some believe, an HR function at all. (Boudreau, 2019)'.

- i. Argue the case **both for and against** organisations moving to technology to replace the need for an HR department.

AND

- ii. Discuss the implications of moving your organisation to a wholly technological approach to HR for **either** line managers **or** employees.

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B

3. In a global age, the way in which economies are organised and managed is based on economic neoliberalism, which is derived from the 'new right' of the UK and America. Neoliberalism has been central to the economic models applied in a number of countries over the last 20 years, particularly in relation to free market economics, individualism, an agile workforce, minimum government intervention and an economy driven by private finance.

i. Select any **two** principles of neoliberal economics and critically evaluate the extent to which they have been applied to a country of your choice.

AND

ii. Outline the implications of neoliberalism for HR strategy.

OR

4. 'Current trends in pay policy favour systems that are compatible with developments in contemporary organisational forms' (Farnham, 2015). In recent years governments promoted market-driven pay; performance-related pay; profit sharing; flexible benefits; harmonisation and consolidation.

i. Select any **two** pay policies from the above and critically evaluate each in terms of its relevance and attraction to other contemporary issues in the workplace.

AND

ii. Outline the implication of **one** of your selected pay policies for HR strategy.

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- 5.** The United Nations has produced a set of goals, one of which is to achieve gender equality in employment and empower women and girls through education.
- i. Explain and justify why gender has been singled out.
 - ii. What role might HR managers play in helping to achieve these goals? Your answer must take an international perspective.

Include research and/or reading from professional and other reputable sources in your answer.

OR

- 6.** A fellow CIPD student says 'I don't understand why globalisation and international forces are included in the CIPD qualification learning outcomes, when most of us work in domestic organisations.' Explain and justify the counter argument to this. Include real case examples to justify your response, together with research and/or reading from professional and other reputable sources.

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7. In western countries the family is traditionally seen as a married, heterosexual couple with two children. This traditional family unit is increasingly changing.
- Explain why these changes are occurring and discuss their implications for human resource management (HRM).

OR

8. Using the STEEPLE model critically evaluate how technology is shaping the experience and expectations of work both positively and negatively from an **employee** perspective. Include research and/or reading from professional and other reputable sources in your answer.

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9. Sustainable development is now high on the agenda of economists, environmentalists, and the owners of business. In terms of businesses and employment it is argued that a shorter working week could make a significant contribution to 'sustainable social justice' in three respects: safeguarding the natural resources of the planet; social justice and well-being for all; a robust and prosperous economy.

i. Explain how **one** of the three factors above could contribute to more sustainable social justice.

AND

ii. How far could your organisation restructure its work to achieve a 30 hour week for everyone? Justify your answer, including research and/or reading from professional and other reputable sources.

OR

10.

i. Critically analyse an industry or sector of your choice to determine whether and in what ways, it is experiencing a trend toward an 'hour-glass' occupational structure - that is, a structure that comprises high skill and high pay at one end, and low skill with low pay at the other, and very little in-between these two extremes.

AND

ii. Drawing upon research, discuss the implications of this 'hour-glass' trend for the future shape of organisations, including your own.

END OF EXAMINATION

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Introduction

Fewer people sat the September paper; a total of 208, down compared with the May series. This is usual, as May tends to be the main examination period, coinciding with the end of the academic year. September is a popular re-sit time. The overall pass-rate of 72% for this recent examination is one per-cent above that for May. Of those in the outright fail category five candidates did not answer a question from all five parts of Section B. It may be worth reminding students that, no matter how well they perform in other questions, a failure to make a reasonable attempt at a question from each part of Section B will automatically lead to an overall fail.

September 2019		
Grade	Number	Percentage of total
Distinction	5	2
Merit	37	18
Pass	108	52
Marginal fail	30	14
Fail	28	14
Total	208	100

The examination case study was based on a third sector organisation. The focus was on three different types of worker: administration employees; voluntary workers; and Trustees of the Board. The paper was looking for an understanding of the different regulations and responsibilities that apply to each, and the implications for appropriate and effective performance from, and between them. As usual, Section B provided variety, with questions about different industries, sectors and organisations. The paper reflected recent trends in the external environment, particularly in technology, globalisation and different forms of working, where changes have been particularly notable.

The questions draw from the Generic Assessment Criteria (GAC) and are designed to test a range of issues requiring business orientation, application capability, presentation and persuasion and knowledge and understanding. Knowledge and understanding includes evidence of being able to use research and other reputable sources of publication and the requirement for this is sometimes an express requirement of an answer.

Overall, evidence of research and other reading tended to be under-developed in answers. Those candidates that do include some evidence of this where requested, will gain credit for it, and often do better overall than others. Where research and/or reputable published sources is a requirement, rather than a request, candidates are unlikely to be awarded anything beyond a pass mark if they do not include any. The reason I raise this here is that it tends to be an aspect of questions that candidates neglect. It may be worth reminding them that where research is expressed as a requirement, they will lose marks if they do not show any. Candidates should be aware that professional journals, authoritative web-sites (such as CIPD's) and newspapers such as the Financial Times are all acceptable.

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Section A

Learning Outcomes:

LO1 – Contemporary organisations and their principle environments.

LO3- How organisational and HR strategies are shaped by and developed in response to internal and external environmental factors.

General:

Candidates who received a pass, merit or distinction in this section showed a good balance of understanding across the types of workers presented in the company, and were able to clearly discuss them, not only in the context of the case study organisation, but also more widely in terms of hospices, and the voluntary sector generally. It is always apparent when candidates have researched the case study.

One piece of advice it may be worth reminding your students of, is the need to include more headings and signpost in a more detailed manner. This does not mean answering by bullet points; for, whilst they can be useful, at M level there should be a good level of argument and discussion as well.

Task 1:

The question asked for a SWOT and many candidates focussed on a general application of the tool rather than the application as demanded by the question. The requirement was to conduct a SWOT analysis of the Hospice's administrative employees whereas some candidates undertook a SWOT for the whole organisation. Where good points were raised credit was given if these could be related to the administration staff. Better answers focussed on these staff and were supported with references to research. A further distinction was the quality of the recommendations; the weaker answers lacked adequate depth and breadth and these candidates seemed to ignore the requirement to base recommendations on strengths and opportunities. This oversight however, was not penalised.

Task 2:

The responses to this question stood out based upon the quality of a critical review of the Hospice's deployment of voluntary workers. Most were able to comment on the use of voluntary workers; however the stronger candidates had researched and made reference to the NCVO and their guidelines to help support and justify their recommendations. Better answers provided credible recommendations which considered operational and costs aspects. Some of the answers ignored the goodwill aspect. The poorest answers consisted mainly of regurgitated evidence from the case. Candidates must understand that the case study is a working document, and its purpose is to provide a context within which they can be judged against the GAC and the specific learning outcomes.

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Task 3:

The Charity Governance Code was referred to in the pre seen case study (with a link to it provided) and candidates who had a good awareness of the content and purpose of the code were well placed to answer this question. Generally, the evaluation of these principles was satisfactory, using evidence from the case. Stronger answers showed good evidence of critical analysis, and it was clear that their research had gone beyond looking up the Code.

Task 4:

Question 4 proved to be the most challenging to candidates however good answers used a number of the seven principles of good governance when making recommendations and focussed on the strategic direction that the Hospice should follow. The strongest answers also considered the improvement of its governance. Additional credit was given to those who considered both and provided sound justification for the proposals. Many answers focussed more on HR strategy and this was given credit where it was done well. Others used it as a vehicle to write everything they knew about organisational strategy formulation and implementation theory, and again where this was applied to the question, credit was given.

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Section B

There was a reasonable balance of answers between each pair of questions. The most popular question was question 9 which asked about changing forms of 'family' Second favourite was the question about trends in pay (question 4). Accordingly, the least popular question was about the 'hour glass' economy, followed by the question about neo-liberal economics. However, popularity does not always equate with quality of answers. In some cases candidates made quite basic errors about the requirements of questions. Most frequent of these, as was noted in the introduction, was to ignore the requirement for 'research and/or reading from professional journals and other reputable sources' which was required of half the questions.

To continue further about question requirements: Application capability involving 'own organisation' was required for four of the ten questions and was always noted and dealt with reasonably well. A further two questions included asking about the relationship between the topic and HR strategy and the strategy element was not always well-recognised. Six questions included a section about application to either HRM, employees, or employers/managers. These were usually reasonably well-handled.

Overall, there was a wide range of quality of answers in section B. Many candidates chose to do the case study first and did not always manage their time sufficiently to allow for well-constructed answers to the part B questions. Time management is raised as an issue on a regular basis. Sometimes candidates don't think about how many marks they can achieve from those last couple of paragraphs that have eaten into Section B, compared with how many marks are available for each Section B question, if only they leave time to have 'a good go' at each of them.

Question A1

Learning Outcomes: LO2, the managerial and business environment within which HR professionals work.

Almost all candidates who answered this question passed, indicating a reasonable understanding of the role of organisational disciplines. Finance and Marketing were the two most popular disciplines discussed. Of these, Marketing produced the stronger answer. Finance tended to be answered briefly and without much evidence of depth of understanding. Few candidates appeared to fully understand the concept of adding value. The majority discussed how different disciplines support HR and the associated benefits. The impact of these disciplines upon HR, within their own organisation were all very similar in content and quality and tended to be at pass level.

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Question A2

Learning Outcomes: LO2, the managerial and business environment within which HR professionals work.

Whilst most candidates were good at citing some arguments for and against replacing HR with technology, on the whole, the arguments against were more convincing. Some unfortunately didn't directly answer the question and discussed the impact of technology in general on HR rather than the full replacement of HR. In the second part of the question some candidates misread the question and answered in relation to both line managers and employees. Overall, this question was well-answered.

Question B3

Learning outcome: LO7, government policy and legal regulation and how these shape and impact on organisational and HR strategies and HR practices.

Answers to this question tended to emphasize the downside and could have done with some positives. Good answers demonstrated a clear understanding of neoliberal economic principles, provided a sound critical evaluation and related these to implications for HR strategy. Weaker answers tend to describe two principles with little critical evaluation or an informed discussion of the implications for HR strategy. The implications for HR strategy were generally brief and lacking depth, with the main focus not getting beyond on flexible working, zero-hour contracts and the rise of the gig economy.

Question B4

Learning outcome: LO7, government policy and legal regulation and how these shape and impact on organisational and HR strategies and HR practices.

As noted earlier, this was the second-most popular question on the paper. Despite this there were a number of candidates that did not sufficiently grab the issues in the question. Overall, the majority of candidates merely explained two pay policies and did not consider any contemporary issues in the workplace against to critically evaluate these policies. This question, whilst not alone in having the second neglected or missed out, was particularly noted for this. Candidates may need to be reminded that the sections of each question are of equal importance. Those candidates that put time and work into the second section tended to do well, and were credited with understanding the relationship between pay policy and H strategy.

Question C5

Learning outcomes: LO5, globalisation and international forces and how they shape and impact on organisational and HR strategies and HR practices

This was the second least popular question and a number of candidates did not take an international perspective to the role that HR can take in working toward the UN goals.

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Candidates tended to discuss domestic employment practices and legislation, as though the employment and education issues experienced globally are those seen in the UK. Those that performed better were able to discuss the role of females within the workplace and their empowerment within education. One impression that came across from many of these scripts was that the candidates were anticipating a question on 'gender pay gap' and so it was included despite being of little relevance to the context of the question.

Question C6

Learning outcomes: LO5, globalisation and international forces and how they shape and impact on organisational and HR strategies and HR practices

One particular observation that applies right across the answer papers, not only here, but in previous years as well, is the very few occasions on which candidates draw upon CIPD materials to support and inform answers. What was particularly striking about a number of answers to this question ignored the CIPD context. Instead, they wrote about where and when globalisation impacted upon HR – not why it is in the CIPD syllabus. Now it might be argued that, by inference, they are discussing why CIPD includes it in the syllabus. But they needed to go that bit further and discuss the need for it to be studied, not just observed and/or experienced. Again, many answers ignored giving research and other written sources, which seemed particularly odd, given that this CIPD-related question can be answered substantially by drawing upon the vast amount of CIPD material on this topic.

Question D7

Learning Outcomes: LO6, demographic, social and technological trends and how they shape and impact on organisational and HR strategies and HR practices.

This was the most popular question and tended to be well-answered. There was a lack of statistical data to support many of the discussions. Where data was included these tended to be the all-round stronger answers, with a wider appreciation of the range of family forms that are emerging, and why this is so. Those that performed well in the first part were better placed to provide some valid implications in the later part. Better answers examined the need to review/revise policies that are based on 'the family'. Again, those that identified the many ways in which families are now constructed, were better able to discuss their implications for HR.

Question D8

Learning Outcomes: LO6, demographic, social and technological trends and how they shape and impact on organisational and HR strategies and HR practices.

This question was the least popular on the paper. A number of candidates struggled with using STEEPLE. However, those who focussed on the question as set found the use of the steeple structure more achievable. Some answers just tackled some of the elements of steeple and where these were robust and justified credit was given. Some candidates approached the question from an employer's perspective, hence misunderstanding what was asked. This may mean that candidates who could have answered the question, lose out

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on marks because they have taken a wrong direction. It underpins the reason why 'read the question' is some of the most valuable examination advice that you give your students.

Question E9

Learning Outcome: LO4, the market and competitive environments of organisations and how organisational leaders and the HR function respond to them.

Many answers Better answers were engaged in the discussion and clearly understood the nature of sustainable social justice and were able to support a coherent answer. Weaker answers were developed in very general terms and lacked supporting evidence. and appeared to be somewhat opinion-based, lacking substantiated evidence. There tended to be a fairly narrow approach to discussing the thirty-hour working week. Weaker answers were dismissive of the idea rather than opening up a discussion about 'how far' they could. The stronger answers were able to provide clear justified explanations as how their organisation could restructure its work to achieve a 30-hour week for everyone. This question required some quite radical re-thinking about how work is done. A number of candidates demonstrated this. Whilst not straying into the realms of unachievable, idealistic ideas they used evidence from a range of sources to inform their answers. Weaker candidates tended to produce basic answers calling for the status quo. Whilst others provided a more convincing argument against change.

Question E10

Learning Outcome: LO4, the market and competitive environments of organisations and how organisational leaders and the HR function respond to them.

The concept of the 'hour-glass' occupational structure has been around a long time. Good answers focussed on the concept and could explain clearly the nature of how the structure of jobs has changed in an identified industry. Weak answers failed to explore the concept of the hour glass with any robust analysis. Candidates who drew on organisational examples to discuss the future of this type of structure tended to produce all-round better answers and were better-placed to discuss the future for their own organisation. Whilst some candidates limited their discussion to skilled and unskilled employees, others recognised a greater application of the model, citing such changes as technology and changes in working practices. Amongst the strong answers, some considered what is happening in the middle of organisations and raised useful issues about the future of middle management and the role of the supervisor.

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Conclusion

Overall this cohort of candidates demonstrated many of the strengths and weaknesses that are discussed on a regular basis, and I will only briefly reiterate them here, as I'm sure tutors and programme managers are well aware of them. I'll start with the 'oldest chestnut' - read the paper carefully and answer the question that was set. The second particular point of note is that it is very apparent where a candidate has relied heavily upon the previous examination to inform the topics they will concentrate on – and a number of papers were like this. What they do is attempt to 'shoe-horn' the answer to the question they revised for into the actual question that has been set. Whilst this can sometimes be of sufficient relevance to give some credit, it isn't realistic of the candidate to expect that anything more than a few points awarded. The third point is to manage time effectively; running out of time to answer the fifth Section B question will lead to an automatic fail, unless they can at least demonstrate a serious attempt was made. The Fourth point to make is the need to get beyond describing things. It seems to be particularly tempting for some students to stick to description when they are talking about their own organisation. This may happen even though most questions are expecting either discussion about how to apply something, or to include critical evaluation.

At either end of the grading scale there is a significant drop in the percentage of candidates on Distinction and Fail. In terms of Distinctions the numbers being compared are too small to draw any clear conclusions. In terms of the reduction in outright fails to a significant extent this may account for the rise in marginal fails. So, you can take this as evidence of a student rise in performance. The challenge for these students is to make that one big push to get a firm grasp on what Level 7 requires and meet it. In some instances, and/or Centres it may be difficult to gain tutor support over the summer period. It may be worthwhile looking at the nature and extent of summer support, and to reflect upon who took advantage of such support before resitting. As tutors, you tend to know your students very well, and so will be well-equipped to understand what each, individually needs to do. I hope the content of this report will be helpful to you in that, and in your future work with students.

The content of this report is a collaborative effort between myself, as Chief Examiner, and the team of Examiners with whom I work. In the usual tradition we are providing feedback, reflecting those areas where students do well, and those where, for a variety of reasons, it is helpful to point out 'what went wrong'. Our aim is to equip you with some insight to how students are performing nationally, so that you can consider your Centre performance in relation to the bigger picture.