

GUIDANCE FOR ISEB MANAGEMENT CERTIFICATE CANDIDATES

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The number of students sitting the ISEB/EXIN qualifications is increasing, but in the last year or two pass rates have declined. In part, this is thought to be linked to the experience levels of the students coming forward to sit the examinations, though the format and pass marks have changed and this has certainly been a significant factor.

As chief examiner for the ISEB, I have been asked to produce some guidance notes for candidates, and prospective candidates, to enable them to be better prepared for the examination. I hope that you will find these useful.

Experience Level

You must already hold the ISEB/EXIN Foundation Certificate in IT Service Management (or the ISEB Network Service Management Certificate which gives exemption) to be eligible to sit this examination.

This is a management level examination, and you should not under-estimate the level of difficulty involved – you will need the necessary experience and good preparation to do well in the examination. It is a much stiffer test than the Foundation Certificate examination, but like everything else in life, anything worth having is worth striving for.

The ISEB guidelines stipulate that you should have had a minimum of 5 years IT experience, two of which should have been in the area of IT Service Management in a supervisory or managerial role. If you are concerned about whether your experience is sufficient, please discuss this with your training provider prior to attending a course. They will be able to offer advice and guidance.

Preparation

Your course provider will issue course notes, and you may already have a copy of the ITIL pocket guide – but do not underestimate the importance of reading the full ITIL books. Only in this way will you have access to the full information required by the syllabus. During your course, your course provider should provide adequate opportunities for you to sit mock examinations – and these should be marked realistically!

Sitting the Examinations

Ensure you are at the examination location in plenty of time – there is nothing worse than arriving at the very last minute (or late!) and in a lather and completely the wrong frame of mind. You should plan your journey in advance, and allow plenty of spare time – particularly if sitting the examination in London.

It might be worth considering an overnight stay near the examination location between the exams, to ensure you are on hand and do not have to battle with traffic/tube, etc. before your morning exam.

Each examination paper consists of five mandatory questions. You have three hours in which to answer these questions and you should split your time accordingly - i.e. approximately 30-35 minutes per question, plus some time to read the questions initially and a little time at the end to review your answers and ensure you have covered all your main points. The mock examinations during your courses will give you a good opportunity to practice this.

Be aware that approximately 60% of the questions will be based upon the case study, with the remainder being more generic. Each question should make it clear whether it is looking for a case-related answer or not. Make sure you have understood which questions are looking for a case-based answer and which are not – before you start.

Questions may focus on a single subject, but this is not always the case – others may cover multiple topics (e.g. “Describe the interfaces between Problem Management and the other Service Support functions”).

Examination Techniques

Here are a few pointers for use during the examination itself:

- Don't panic – by the time you get to the examination you will have had the best possible preparation. You do need a bit of adrenaline but try to keep calm and focused on the job in hand.
- Read, and be sure to follow, the notes for candidates on the front of the examination paper.
- Read the questions very carefully, at least twice, before attempting to answer – and keep referring back to the question to ensure you are not going off at a tangent.
- Read all 5 questions before starting the first – your sub-conscious mind can then be working on all questions simultaneously (this really works!).
- The order in which you answer the questions is up to you – you may wish to tackle the ones you are most comfortable with first to get you going and build your confidence.
- Answer the questions asked – not the ones you may have hoped and prepared for – you will not get anything for a good answer to the wrong question!

- If you are unclear about any parts of a question and you need to make assumptions, then state what these are so the examiner can follow your thinking – if your assumption is sensible you may well get credit for the answer you give, even if it does not exactly match what was being sought.
- If you find it helps you structure your answers, make brief notes before you start – but be careful not to spend too much time on notes leaving you insufficient time to get your answer down.
- If a good point occurs to you whilst you are in full flow on another point or question, just make a brief note as a reminder so that you do not forget it altogether.
- Be sure to spend your time roughly evenly between the questions, and do not significantly overrun on any one question – you can always come back to a question if time allows.
- Use the marking scheme shown on the paper as a further guide to how you should spend your time (e.g. if part *a* is allocated 5 marks and part *b* 15 marks, be sure to devote the greater part of your time to part *b* as this is where most marks can be earned).
- Watch out for hidden multiple parts to the questions (e.g. a question may read “Describe the *whatever*, and give realistic timeframes” Some of the marks will be reserved for the timeframes bit and you will not be awarded them unless you answer the latter part of the question as well as the former.
- There may be further instructions within the questions, which you should try and follow (e.g. If the question says “produce a report outlining ... *whatever*” try and ensure that your answer looks like a report; if the question asks for a diagram to illustrate your answer – please give one; if the question says “compare and contrast” then give such a comparison and say where the contrast exists).
- Leave plenty of space in your answers, so that if you think of other good points to make, perhaps whilst answering a later question, you can come back and insert your material without it looking too cramped or messy.
- Try and allow a little time at the end of the three hours for a quick final read - through of your answers to ensure that you have answered the questions fully – some additional points may occur to you that you can add.
- Do not leave early – if you finish early, use the time to quietly read through the questions and your answers – an additional point or two may occur to you that may make all the difference!