

**MSP® 2011 Edition**  
**Advice for Advanced Practitioner Examination Candidates**

**1 INTRODUCTION**

The objective of the Advanced Practitioner examination is to enable candidates to demonstrate an advanced understanding of MSP, and the ability to adapt and apply the approach in an appropriate way to a set of circumstances described in a complex Case Study. In adapting and applying MSP, candidates may be required to explain how MSP could be tailored or scaled to suit the Case Study and any new circumstances described. They may be asked to make judgements and recommendations based on information given.

**2 STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER**

The examination paper consists of 2 or 3 mandatory questions each of which is broken down into a number of part-questions. One or more Exhibits provide additional information to supplement the Case Study.

The combination of the Case Study and each question, together with any additional information for that question, will provide the context within which the question is to be answered. The additional information provided for a question may change the situation described in the Case Study and require candidates to demonstrate how they would apply MSP in the changed circumstances. Additionally, different questions and Exhibits within the same examination paper may relate to different periods in time.

The total number of marks available for the paper is 75. 38 marks or more are required to pass the examination. Each question and part-question is allocated a number of marks. All questions and part-questions should be answered.

**3 MSP SYLLABUS AREAS ADDRESSED**

All areas of the syllabus are examinable. However, as the Advanced Practitioner examination is assessing an in-depth knowledge and understanding of MSP and its application, each question paper can only cover a limited range of MSP elements. Each question is therefore given a topic label to provide a focus for the answer. The questions require candidates to cross-relate different elements of MSP beyond that implied by the topic label, in order to demonstrate an understanding of how the different elements of MSP inter-relate.

**4 QUESTION DIFFICULTY**

Based on the APMG Learning Outcomes Assessment Model, the Advanced Practitioner examination covers the following learning levels:

1. Knowledge (information)
2. Comprehension (understanding)
3. Application (using)
4. Analysis (using)
5. Professional practice (creating and justifying)

It is important to note that Advanced Practitioner examination candidates are required to focus on and demonstrate competence at level 5 which is not assessed at either Foundation or Practitioner level. Candidates will have been assessed extensively at

Foundation level on knowledge and comprehension. At Practitioner level, candidates will have focused on application and analysis learning objectives. All of these should also be demonstrated within answers in this examination.

### **Knowledge**

This tests knowledge of the content of the MSP Guide and the Case Study.

### **Comprehension**

Comprehension is the ability to grasp the meaning of material and interpret information in one's own words. This is the demonstration of understanding of the different ways in which MSP concepts can be described. Typically this assesses the understanding, interpretation and use of wording which is different from the standard statements in the MSP Guide.

### **Application**

Application refers to the ability to apply MSP's principles, themes, processes and documents appropriately to a given complex programme situation as described in the Case Study and the circumstances introduced in the questions and Exhibits.

### **Analysis**

This is the competency to analyse use of the MSP approach. Typically this would test the ability to identify errors in the application of MSP or to identify aspects of MSP principles, themes or processes that could be of benefit in a given complex programme situation. Candidates must have a breadth and depth of understanding of MSP, understand how principles, themes or processes interact and cross-relate with each other, and the implications for a given complex programme situation.

### **Professional practice**

This is the ability to develop, evaluate and propose options for tailored approaches, designs or structures and justifying the value of those approaches. The practices are based on the use of MSP in a given complex programme situation. The professional practice competence builds on the analysis competence by requiring the candidate to explain and justify opinions or recommendations they have made.

## **5 TIME MANAGEMENT & REFERENCE MATERIAL**

The examination is 3 hours in duration. Candidates will need to manage their time carefully in order to allow time for all questions.

As a general guide, candidates may use the breakdown of marks per question and part-question as an estimate of the relative balance of time that should be spent on each question and part-question. This timing should allow for the reading of Exhibits and relevant sections of the Case Study as well as the time required to write the answer.

This is an open-book examination. Candidates may bring into the examination the 2011 edition of the MSP Guide and any other material they feel will be helpful and relevant, with the exclusion of any electronic aids. It is not expected that candidates will make extensive reference to the MSP Guide but candidates may wish to refer to it, for example, to trigger ideas for answers or to check on the cross-relating of MSP elements. Candidates should be aware of the time constraint upon them. Whilst the MSP Guide and other materials are there for support, as in real life, the time pressure of the examination means that candidates should be careful as to how much time they spend using their reference materials.

The examination is based on a complex Case Study which will have been issued prior to the examination and used during the training course or other preparation for this examination. The Case Study provides the background and context of the programme on which the questions are based. Where additional materials, such as reports, documents, formats and diagrams, are required to supplement a question this will be provided in one or more Exhibits to which the question or part-question will refer.

## **6 EXAMINATION TECHNIQUE**

### **Specialist knowledge**

The Case Study provided may focus on either or both of the public and private sectors. It will provide a programme context based on a specific business type or industry. Candidates are not expected to have specialist knowledge of that sector or industry beyond their own general business experience and that provided in the MSP Guide and examination materials.

### **Use of Case Study and Exhibits**

Before sitting the examination, candidates are advised to thoroughly familiarize themselves with the Case Study and it is expected that they will have engaged in wider discussion on the programme described and considered the implications of alternative current and future 'what-if' scenarios.

Candidates must base answers on the Case Study and the additional contextual and factual information provided in the Exhibits. They must support and justify their answers with direct references to, or examples derived from, the Case Study and Exhibits.

The Case Study and Exhibits do not always describe examples of good use of MSP. Candidates should expect, recognize and be able to respond to errors and ambiguities.

## Use of own experience

Candidates are expected to derive appropriate and justified MSP-based solutions from a combination of MSP guidance, the Case Study and Exhibits, and their own general business experience. They should be able to work with and build on the information provided and to use their own general business experience to develop and express informed opinions. Candidates should use their experiences and opinions to inform the answers they give, for example, to explain how they would do things in the circumstances described. This does not mean describing their own programmes and specific experiences. It means transferring and applying their knowledge and general management skills to a given set of circumstances. Candidates should **not** use their own experience to change the scope of the examination question.

Examiners are looking for credible answers that align with MSP. There is no single correct answer to any question, but some answers will be more credible than others. There may be several, potentially conflicting, answers to a question which, if appropriately explained and justified, could be deserving of equally high marks.

## Language and style

Candidates are **not** being examined in their good use of grammar and spelling. Answers do **not** need to be presented as essays or reports with introductions and conclusions. A paragraph structure with full sentences is **not** essential.

Some candidates prefer to write in essay style and others use bullet points. However, writing in essay style can result in unnecessary text and there may be a tendency to lose focus on the question asked. On the other hand, bullet points can be presented in an over-abbreviated form that is not understood by the examiner or is too brief and lacking in the detail required, since all answers need to be fully explained and justified. If tables are used, care should be taken to avoid the constraint of lack of space in boxes which do not allow for entries that are detailed enough.

A combination of essay style and bullet point statements might provide a compromise approach which avoids the pitfalls described above and which can help candidates to make best use of time.

Where appropriate to the question, a candidate may also choose to include diagram(s) in the answer.

Abbreviations can be used but they should be written in full on first use in the answer with the abbreviation given in brackets following it, e.g. Sponsoring Group (SG).

## Analyse the examination paper

Prior to answering any questions, candidates are advised to familiarize themselves with the overall structure of the examination paper, its questions and associated Exhibits.

For each question, candidates should:

- read the question carefully
- break down question sentences into component parts
- understand what the question is asking, for example:
  - read the title – what is the focus of the question?
  - is it asking:
    - who?
    - what?
    - where?
    - when?
    - why?
  - does it require descriptions of:
    - actions to be taken?
    - people to be involved?
    - changes to documents?
    - etc.
- read any accompanying Exhibits
- be clear about the role, if any, they are being asked to take
- identify appropriate MSP guidance, such as principles, themes, processes or documents, that should be referred to and cross-related in the answer
- consider their own experiences and opinions and how they might support the answer.

## Approach to answering a question

Candidates might find it helpful to:

- visualize themselves in the role and in the situation described
- imagine having a conversation with or being interviewed by the examiner
  - would they say things differently, or say more or less?
- think about what they have done in the past in their own career, or where they have observed colleagues in a similar situation, that might help with ideas for what to do in the circumstances described
- convince, persuade or justify by using relevant examples, as they would do in real life
- write the answer in the way they would talk about it.

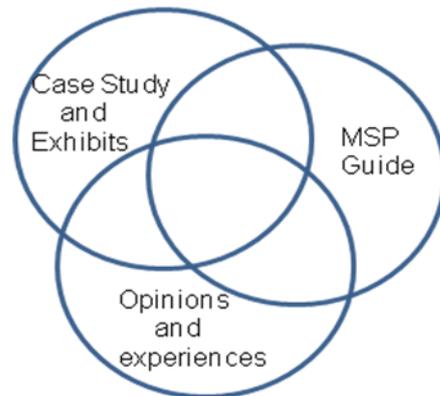
As an examiner can only award marks for what is written, candidates should ensure that they give full and complete justifications for the recommendations they make. Sometimes this may mean stating obvious facts in order to illustrate a point.

The examiner will assess each answer on its merits.

## Breakdown of question content

Unless stated otherwise it is expected that the answer to each question will contain an appropriate balance between:

- MSP guidance
- related links to the Case Study and relevant Exhibits, supported by
- justifications derived from the candidate's general business experience.



These three elements should be described in statements which together provide a credible and coherent explanation.

Overall the examination paper will require coverage of all 3 elements. This does not mean that there needs to be an equal focus on each element for each question. For example, there may be more than one Case Study example or justification related to any piece of MSP guidance. Candidates should use their judgment and not describe excessive Case Study examples against just one piece of MSP guidance or list many pieces of MSP guidance supported by only one Case Study example.

An answer for the whole question should reflect an appropriate balance of all 3 elements. There is no negative marking but the points distribution method will ensure that a candidate will not be considered eligible for maximum marks if all 3 elements are not addressed. It is unlikely that a candidate will achieve more than half the marks available for an answer if it does not include any one of these elements, e.g. does not include any valid justifications to support some MSP and Case Study statements.

Each question should be treated as a stand-alone question with its own allocation of marks, i.e. marks from Question 1 (Q1) cannot be transferred to Question 2 (Q2). Also, statements made in response to Q1 will not be assumed to be part of the answer to Q2, unless they are re-stated in answer to Q2. Where a question is structured in parts, e.g. a, b and c, and collectively they fit together; the examiner may allow a flexible allocation of marks across part-questions where the structure of the answer does not follow the structure of the question. However, candidates are advised to structure their answers by following the structure of the question, taking guidance on quantity of content from the breakdown of marks for questions and part-questions.

## **Characteristics of a good answer**

In summary, a good answer will:

- be structured using the question structure as a guide, with each question and part-question clearly identified
- if a role is given, be written from the point of view of that role
- be focused on and set in the context of the Case Study and Exhibits
- contain an appropriate mix of MSP theory, references and examples from the case Study and/or Exhibits and justifications derived from business experience
- address each part of each question without duplication
- give clear statements that demonstrate a practical understanding of MSP
- have sufficient detail to warrant the number of marks available
- provide answers which are concise, without unnecessary introductory text but providing sufficient explanations and justifications
- demonstrate an understanding of the importance of and interactions between relevant elements of MSP in a given situation
- contain responses to the question and related additional information, that are credible and align with MSP
- offer opinions and proposals accompanied by justifications.

## **Characteristics of a poor answer**

In summary, a poor answer will:

- fail to address the question asked
- introduce irrelevant topics
- include incorrect statements about MSP or the Case Study
- be too narrowly focused
- be too general and not related to the Case Study
- have insufficient detail for the marks available
- give too much detail when making a point
- contain insufficient information from the Case Study or Exhibits to explain or justify the answer
- make statements without justifications
- list information that can be found readily in the MSP Guide without applying it to the Case Study or providing justifications for the items in the list.

## **Please remember:**

- the examiner can only mark your paper if your writing is legible
- what is not written, cannot be marked.