



CIMA Strategic Level Case Study Examination

By Clancy Peiris



A walkthrough of a real examination answer

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This exam answer walkthrough analyses two student answers from the August 2020 CIMA Strategic Case Study Examination. The Actual Student Answer – Passed demonstrates a comfortable passing standard; this answer earned a score of 108. The *Actual Student Answer – Failed* (score is around 60) demonstrates the common mistakes candidates make in CIMA Strategic Case Study examinations.

These transcribed answers were anonymized and annotated with observations and guidance. The answer with a passing score shows one of many ways a candidate can demonstrate sufficient knowledge, competence and application to earn a passing score. Note that it is not a perfect answer nor the only one that would earn a passing standard. However, this analysis provides a direct comparison of passing and failing answers side by side. It gives you an idea of what a strong answer looks like and some examples of where answers might fall short and need improvement. (Note: Both the failed and passed answers appearing in this walkthrough are exactly as produced by the candidates in their examinations; hence, they contain some spelling and grammar errors.)

Getting the most from this analysis

To get the full benefit of this learning resource, you should skim through the [pre-seen materials](#) for the May-August 2020 CIMA Strategic Case Study Examinations. Afterwards, read the test variant 4 that these candidates answered to get context for these answers. You could also review the [Examiner's Report](#), [the Marking Guide](#) and [Performance Descriptors](#), which might give you a greater appreciation of these answers.

To provide a comprehensive walkthrough with helpful guidance and a comparison from answers of a passing and unsuccessful student, we only focussed on Section (Task) 3. It is representative of the performance of the candidates across all the three tasks in the full examination.

An overview of May-August 2020 Strategic Case Study examination

The examinations were based on a pre-seen scenario that described *Runnabout*, the parent company of the *Runnabout* Group, a public company that operates micro mobility services in various locations in the form of electric 'hoverboards' that can be rented from a docking station and ridden on public pavements before returning them to any convenient docking station close to the user's final destination. *Roundabout* is based in *Geeland*, a large and prosperous [fictitious] country with a population of more than one billion people. Geeland's major cities have grown rapidly and many are struggling with the difficulties that traffic congestion and the resulting pollution cause.

There were six examination variants based on *Roundabout*; the focus of Variant 4 was Runnabout's IT security has been breached and customer data has been accessed. All variants were based on the [Strategic level examination blueprint](#) and covered all core activities in accordance with the weightings prescribed. A levels-based approach was used for marking candidate answers. For each sub-task, there was a detailed marking guide that split the total mark available into three levels: level 1, level 2 and level 3. It was also possible to achieve a score of zero for a trait if there was no rewardable material. For more information read the article 'How your answer is marked?' ['How your answer is marked?'](#)

TASK 3 (60 minutes | 33 marks)

'I need your advice on two matters:

- Firstly, I need you to evaluate the claim by Diamond Chip that it can prevent any further unauthorised access to Runnabout's system. (60%)
- Secondly, I need you to identify the currency risks that we will face as a result of this agreement and to provide your recommendation concerning the management of those risks. (40%)'

Note: Task 3 examines the below Core Activities from the [Strategic Level Examination Blueprint](#).

- Sub Task (a) tests *Core Activity D* – Evaluate and mitigate risk.
- Sub Task (b) tests *Core Activity B* – Evaluate business ecosystem and business environment

Candidates of the Strategic Case Study Examination are expected to simulate the role of a *Senior Finance Manager*. Risk management is a significant part of the overall responsibility, including cyber risks, as tested in this task. As an important element of this, the *Senior Finance Manager* is frequently involved in the evaluation of the control environment which is crucial given the increasing dangers arising from cyber risks.

A *Senior Finance Manager* usually advises the organisational leaders on matters that involve considerable judgement and that may have a significant effect on stakeholders. In this examination task, Geo Pataros, the Senior Finance Officer of *Roundabout*, is seeking advice from the *Senior Finance Manager* (the Strategic Case Study Examination candidate) hence it is required to maintain a 'tone of advice' throughout the answer.

3a

SECTION (Task) 3 – sub task (a):

'Firstly, I need you to evaluate the claim by Diamond Chip that it can prevent any further unauthorised access to Roundabout's system.' (60%)

QUESTION DEBRIEF A Level 3 answer to this sub-task should offer:

- (i) **What do you think of the offer from Diamond Chip?** i.e., a clear and full discussion of the consultant's interest in making such a claim; and
- (ii) **What are the evidences to support your thoughts?** i.e., good justification for all points using the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials – e.g., information in the letter (unseen materials) to present a full discussion of the claim, covering both positive and negative (7 to 9 marks)
- (iii) **Will the offer by Diamond Chip solve or prevent an occurrence of a similar risk again?** i.e., a clear and comprehensive discussion of the residual vulnerabilities and emerging threats; and
- (iv) **What are the evidences to support your advice?** i.e., good justification for all points the candidate raised using the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials. (9 to 12 marks)

Actual student answer – failed

Dear Geo,
Thanks for your visit and following are my response to your requirement

3.A. Evaluation of claim by diamond chip that it can prevent any further unauthorised access to R/T system

The evaluation of the two project should consider both financial and no financial factors.

Pros

Experts and Recruited from military and intelligence service

Annual review and updates in response to emerging threats is a very strong control

Penetration test is a prime control test

Cons

No sufficient grounds for this statement

Not seems objective in IT representatives statement

The 'failed' answer suffers from depth of discussion and justification of points provided using scenario information that is essential to address the specific sub-task requirement. (Please refer the below comment regarding the 'passed' answer.)

This candidate has paraphrased the sub-task requirement into a title which demonstrates the understanding of the expectation of Geo Pataros (in fact, the examiner!) who requested to 'evaluate the claim by Diamond Chip'. Though specific marks are not allocated for a title (and introductory paragraph), it would help for scene-setting at the outset to remain focussed during the rest of the answer.

This answer demonstrates some structure-planning of the answer through sub-headings and key points mentioned; however, the candidate seems to fail to content-plan that usually helps to produce a comprehensive answer, applying technical knowledge to the specifics of the scenario. Answer planning will allow time to think about all of the points that help to give the answer a clear format and logical flow (as in the 'passed' answer), importantly saving time.

Actual student answer – passed

a) Evaluate the claim by Diamond Chip that it can prevent any future unathourised access – is it true? it is likely?

Following the data breach, it is vital that we mitigate the risk of any future unauthorised access as far as possible so we are only left with an extremely small residueal risk of attack that is deemed acceptable for us. We will never be able eradicate this risk completely but we need to do everything in our power to mitigate it to keep our yusers safe and our reputation strong and Diamond Chip are claiming to be able to help us with this. I will evaluate their claim below.

Prevent ANY unauthorised future access unlikely, but can definitely mitigate.

The first thing to consider when evaluating their claim is their claim that they can prevent ANY unauthorised future access. As discussed above, we can mitigate as much as we possibly can with the tools available to us but unfortunately due to the ongoing knowledge and development of hackers and other criminals we can never fully guarantee that unathorised access can be prevented in the future.

It seems irresponsible and misleading to me that Diamond Chip offer to be able to stop any unauthorised access rather than the promise to reduce it and minimise it as much as they possible can with their systems. We need to evaluate their claims further to see their track record of preventing issues at their other customers'. I recommend we look extensively at their track record and see if their claim is true and if any of their other clients have suffered attacks whilst paying for their service.

I would also recommend we get a guarantee written into the contract that we will receive a refund for their services if a further breach occurs. This is transferring the risk and respinsibility onto them for being true to their claims and offering us the service they promise. This guarnatee would likely be complicated and require negotiation across our legal teams as part of the drawing up of an SLA.

Continued on next page

3a

SECTION (Task) 3 – sub task (a):

'Firstly, I need you to evaluate the claim by Diamond Chip that it can prevent any further unauthorised access to Roundabout's system.' (60%)

QUESTION DEBRIEF

A Level 3 answer to this sub-task should offer:

- (i) **What do you think of the offer from Diamond Chip?** i.e., a clear and full discussion of the consultant's interest in making such a claim; and
- (ii) **What are the evidences to support your thoughts?** i.e., good justification for all points using the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials – e.g., information in the letter (unseen materials) to present a full discussion of the claim, covering both positive and negative (7 to 9 marks)
- (iii) **Will the offer by Diamond Chip solve or prevent an occurrence of a similar risk again?** i.e., a clear and comprehensive discussion of the residual vulnerabilities and emerging threats; and
- (iv) **What are the evidences to support your advice?** i.e., good justification for all points the candidate raised using the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials. (9 to 12 marks)

Continued

This candidate demonstrates well the simulation of the role of Senior Finance Manager which is evidenced through the confident 'tone of voice' used throughout the answer to advise his/her line manager. Further, this candidate supplements his/her role simulation by building rational arguments, writing in the first person which is one simple way of demonstrating application skills. (e.g., 'we mitigate the risk of', 'we will never be able to', 'I will evaluate the claim' etc.)

The three points mentioned under the sub-heading 'Pros' are entirely a reproduction of information provided in the scenario! These are non-rewardable material as the candidate does not offer a thorough evaluation of the 'claims by Diamond Chip', according to the sub-task requirement

This answer demonstrates familiarity with the business that helps the application of knowledge to the scenario, as seen in the answer that evaluates the proposal to conduct penetration tests by the consultants of Diamond Chip. It also helps when thinking about the wider issues that affect the claims that the candidates were asked to comment on.

Actual student answer – passed (continued)

Annual review is useful but emerging threats need to be reviewed more than this.

The annual review offered by Diamond Chip will be useful in terms of a full reort of the vulnerabilites and findings. The upgrades will mean that they are mitigating against future risks by upgrading the system and fixing any weaknesses. The review they propose sounds like a thorough review and I am sure that they will be able to find any outstanding weaknesses present at the time as they have extensive experience in this area.

One thing to consider, however, is the constantly changing modern environment in which we operate. An annual review may just simply not be enough and we need to ensure that events are avoided not only for our success and profitability, but also due to the duty of care we have to our customers. New threats are constantly emerging and a review of the emerging threats annually will not be enough to mitigate all the risks that we face to CS.

The penetration testing is suggested monthly, but perhaps a monthly review of emerging threats would also be prudent and allow Diamond Chip to better meet their claim to reduce unathourised access. I think if we rearranged these terms with them, we stand a better chance of them preventing future unauthorised access. Utilising their expertise would help us achieve this but technology is ever changing in the modern environment and we risk being vulnerable should we not constantly review these threats.

Penetration tests

The monhtly penetration tests will be a huge advantage is our CS strategy and will help Diamon Chip meet their claim. Penetration testing would likely have meant that the breach we experienced before would have been avoided. The staff will be able to 'think like a hacker' and the relatively inexpensive, unsophisticated attack we fell foul to before would have likely been one of the first things on their list to check!

An outsider performing penetration tests on the business will help us spot these vulnerabilites that IT staff who are less independent and have knowledge of the system may not be able to spot due to self review and lack of objectivity. I think we should definitely pay Diamond Chip for these penetration tests as regular monhtly reviews of these weaknesses and the promise to fix these vulnerabilities will protect us massively.

Continued on next page

3a

SECTION (Task) 3 – sub task (a):

'Firstly, I need you to evaluate the claim by Diamond Chip that it can prevent any further unauthorised access to Roundabout's system.' (60%)

QUESTION DEBRIEF

A Level 3 answer to this sub-task should offer:

- (i) **What do you think of the offer from Diamond Chip?** i.e., a clear and full discussion of the consultant's interest in making such a claim; and
- (ii) **What are the evidences to support your thoughts?** i.e., good justification for all points using the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials – e.g., information in the letter (unseen materials) to present a full discussion of the claim, covering both positive and negative (7 to 9 marks)
- (iii) **Will the offer by Diamond Chip solve or prevent an occurrence of a similar risk again?** i.e., a clear and comprehensive discussion of the residual vulnerabilities and emerging threats; and
- (iv) **What are the evidences to support your advice?** i.e., good justification for all points candidate raised using the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials. (9 to 12 marks)

Continued

The candidate, having evaluated each claim by Diamond Chip, offers his/her overall opinion at the end of the answer under the sub-heading 'Will they be better than our staff?' This has enabled the candidate to simulate the role of a Senior Finance Manager by offering advice and recommendation that they think Roundabout should (or should not) do. Some Case Study answers are weaker because they seem to have been written with the intention of avoiding contradicting the examiner's suggested solution, which is not the case with this answer.

The candidate has expanded beyond a mere explanation and commits to an argument throughout the answer which is crucial for evaluation. This has been made possible through answer planning which is evidenced through the structure, presentation, and logical and coherent flow. Headings, sub-headings and paragraphing have made it easy to follow the answer and award marks.

Actual student answer – passed (continued)

Will they be better than our staff?

My biggest concern with Diamond Chip, however, is whether or not they will be better than our staff. I believe that the monthly penetration testing which is objective will be a great resource and is best done by an outsider but I'm not sure that their other claims will be a more effective solution than using our in house team.

We have extremely knowedgable IT staff and want to keep expanding the team in this area (potentially by the sponsorship of an applied IT degree) and I believe that our in house staff are the people who will have the best knowledge in order to release fixes in our system. It may take a lot of time for DC to understdsand our systems and understand the vulnerabilities we face. It is also risk to hand the fixes over to them as they do not have an extensive knowledge ofg our internal IT system.

I recommend that we hire them for the penetration testing and use them as a consultant to advise our IT team and give them another perspective but that the fixes should ultimately be performed in house. This will mean that we don't lose specialist CS knowledge in house as our current IT staff will learn from the consultation given by DC. This would also make the solution cheaper for us meaning we had more money to reinvest for growth or to distribute for shareholders.



SECTION (Task) 3 – sub task (b):

'Secondly, I need you to identify the currency risks that we will face as a result of this agreement and to provide your recommendation concerning the management of those risks.' (40%)

QUESTION DEBRIEF

A 3 answer to this sub-task should include:

- (i) **What are the risks?** i.e., a full discussion of the implications of the pattern of payments to the consultancy; and
- (ii) **Why you think that they are risks?** i.e., rational justification for all currency risks identified, making reference to the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials (6 to 8 marks)
- (iii) **What actions can be taken to manage those risks?** i.e., recommendations that include practical advice on how the risks could be managed, addressing the concerns of management of those risks.; and
- (iv) **Why do you recommend those actions?** i.e., rational justification for all recommendations made, referencing relevant information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials (4 marks)

Actual student answer – failed

3.B.1 Currency risk that we will face as a result of this agreement

Currency risk is the risk of change in value due to a change in the value of the currency. Currently Runnabout R/T is not exposed to much currency risks as its operations are in Geeland except for tyhe fact that we pay to our supplier Minnering Robotics.

The key currency risks are the following.

Transaction Risk

Transaction risk is the risk that the cost incurred for the goods or services will be more or less that expected. Here in the case our consultancy with Diamond chip security, the main risk we face is the transaction risk especially considering the facts that they would be invoicing in home currency and that their economy is very week. This risk need to be carefully managed by implementing the mechanisms as applicable mentioned in the later section of this email. There will be an exposure to the extent change in currency value of total total project value of 610 million E\$

Translation Risk

Translation risk is the risk due to change in value of Assets or liabilities between years when they are translated from one currency to other. As mentioned earlier, we would experience this only in case of any year end liabilities (payables towards the purchase of Hoverboards). In case of the current IT consultancy we will not be affected with translation risks.

Economic Risk

Economic risk is the risk that may crystallise on the revenue or demand of product and services with in an economy due the change in value of the currency.

3.B.2. Recommendation concerning the management of currency risk

Among various measures available to control currency risk. The below are the suitable options in the current scenario.

Foreign currency money market/using of derivatives since the credit period are as follows;

Initial design and installation – 400 million (600 m after three months)

Annual review 240 (160 after one month)

Penetration testing (75 m in one month arrears) interim

This candidate demonstrates some technical understanding of the nature and types of currency risks. However, the answer fails to address and remain focused on the exact requirements of the sub-task - a full discussion of the implications of the payments to Diamond Chip and provide practical advice on how the risks could be managed. This represents a missed opportunity for the candidate to simulate the role of a Senior Finance Manager.

The candidate demonstrates reasonable technical understanding of currency risks in the first part of the answer but failed to rationally justify all currency risks identified using the information provided in the scenario. For a Level 3 score, it is expected that candidates provide an in dept discussion of implications on Runnabout by the pattern of payments to Diamond Chip.

This answer demonstrates a good technical understanding of currency risk by providing a theoretical overview of the nature and types of currency risks in the first half of the answer. To achieve a Level 3, the examiner expects the candidates to demonstrate good technical understanding of the topic being tested through clear and comprehensive discussion.

Actual student answer – passed

- b) i) Identify currency risks faced as of agreement
- ii) Recommendation concerning management of risks.

Currency risk

Currency risk is the risk that short term changes in a foreign currency will have a detrimental impact to us as a business. The local economy for DC is quite weak meaning that their currency \$E is likely to decrease in value. The current exchange rate is E1.5 to one G dollar meaning that 1 G dollar buys 1.5 E dollars. The weak local economy means that it is likely that the amount of E\$ that one G\$ buys will rise due to purchase power parity theoey of currency markets.

It is the uncertainty of our cash flows that causes a risk too. There are different types of currency risk which I will discuss below:

Transaction risk

Transaction risk is the risk that due to the timings in which costs are recorded and payments are made are different, the exchange rate will move in this time meaning that the recorded rate and payment rate will be different. For example, if the rate fell from 1.5 to 1.3, we would pay more than is recorded for the services meaning we would have an FX loss. Translation risk is therefore the risk we will lose money due to these differences in rates.

Installation

The installation comes in at E600m which is currently G400m. This amount is payable in 3 months. The current rate is 1.5. The local economy for \$E is weak meaning that it is likely the rate will rise above 1.5. I will use 1.7 as an example. This would mean that we would record the liability at 400m, but, at time of payment the cost was 353m. This means that we would have a gain due to currency changes - this is what is known as an upside risk. As the amount is payable in 3 months, there is sufficient time for the exchange rate to change in the market.

Annual review

The annual review comes in at E240m which is currently G160m payable annually 1 month after completion. Similar to the above scenario, over time if the value of the \$E weakened, we would have an upside as we would record at less than we paid. Although this is a positive for us as it means we have a FX gail to the P&L, the uncertain cash flows means that we could have utilised that ash in a better way as part of our working capital cycle.

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SECTION (Task) 3 – sub task (b):

'Secondly, I need you to identify the currency risks that we will face as a result of this agreement and to provide your recommendation concerning the management of those risks.' (40%)

QUESTION DEBRIEF

A 3 answer to this sub-task should include:

- (i) **What are the risks?** i.e., a full discussion of the implications of the pattern of payments to the consultancy; and
- (ii) **Why you think that they are risks?** i.e., rational justification for all currency risks identified, making reference to the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials (6 to 8 marks)
- (iii) **What actions can be taken to manage those risks?** i.e., recommendations that include practical advice on how the risks could be managed, addressing the concerns of management of those risks.; and
- (iv) **Why do you recommend those actions?** i.e., rational justification for all recommendations made, referencing relevant information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials (4 marks)

Actual student answer – failed (continued)

R/T can manage the risks by going in for E\$ in the money market. Forward / future options are appropriatae

Delaying the payment until the exchange rate gets better

Asking them to pay in local currency at least partly

Invoicing in home currency by negotiatiating further local economy is quite weak

Please let me know in case you need any further assistance in this regard

Thanking you,
SM

Continued

In the second half of the answer, this candidate has produced a mere list of possible actions Runnabout might take to address the risks. However, Geo Pataros, the Senior Finance Officer of Roundabout, is seeking practical advice from the Senior Finance Manager (the candidate) on how the risks could be managed; hence a list of possible actions does not address the specific requirements of the sub-task. This represents a missed opportunity to demonstrate application skills which is critical in obtaining a passing score.

This candidate has appropriately drawn information from the pre-seen and unseen, and importantly provided his/her interpretation followed by in-depth discussion of currency risks. The candidate has been vigilant not to appear to be repeating the information given in the scenario but rather paraphrasing it, drawing on relevant information to support his/her point. This a clever way of demonstrating application skills.

The candidate demonstrates application skills through the ability to put his/her knowledge on currency risk to 'practical use'. For instance, under the sub-heading 'Transaction risk' the candidate provides an example ('if the rate fell from 1.5 to 1.3, we would pay more than is recorded for the services meaning we would have an FX loss') to illustrate the impact on Runnabout.

This candidate has been mindful to keep the answer tailored to strictly address the sub-task requirement. This has been made possible by reading the question requirement carefully and answer-planning which is demonstrated by the answer layout, and the logical and coherent flow of the answer.

Actual student answer – passed (continued)

Penetration

Translation risk is less likely to be an issue here as the time in between payment and recording is shorter at 1 month.

Translation risk

Translation risk is the risk that assets and liabilities are recorded at one rate and then have to be retranslated at a new rate when it comes to financial reporting. The annual review is the cost for 12 months and is paid for 1 month after the review is completed. This means that we would have to accrue for this cost to ensure the correct costs were in the P&L. This would mean that a portion of the costs each month would be accrued and 1/12 of the annual review cost would be recorded as a liability on the SoFP at the monthly rate.

Recommendation concerning management of risks

Currency risks can be managed using methods to mitigate changes in exchange rates that are available. There are different options that have different pros and cons as well as different time scales which will be key here as there are three different payment dates to consider. I will discuss the options below and make a recommendation.

Installation

I recommend that for the installation we hedge the cost using an exchange rate future. This will lock in a predetermined rate of exchange that we can access at a future date. The standard length for these is 3 months so it would tie in with the time frame we need and ensure we were matching the hedge to the cost. These are standardised amounts so we would need to ensure that the amount matched with the cost in order for it to be effective.

The positive to futures is that as they are traded on money markets, there is a low risk of default and also we can also sell the contract should we not need it. Seeing as the local economy is weak for \$E, it is likely that the rate we are offered will be worse than the actual rate at the date of payment as the \$E may continue to weaken in value. If we can trade the future, it means we are not tied into the worse rate.

Annual review

I recommend that we take a different approach for the annual review. The term of this is much longer and a rate we are offered by a bank for an OTC option is unlikely to be particularly accurate as it is such a long period. It would also be not preferable to use futures as discussed above as these are sold with a standard period of 3 months so we would need to arrange 4 contracts rather than just one.

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SECTION (Task) 3 – sub task (b):

'Secondly, I need you to identify the currency risks that we will face as a result of this agreement and to provide your recommendation concerning the management of those risks.' (40%)

QUESTION DEBRIEF

A 3 answer to this sub-task should include:

- (i) **What are the risks?** i.e., a full discussion of the implications of the pattern of payments to the consultancy; and
- (ii) **Why you think that they are risks?** i.e., rational justification for all currency risks identified, making reference to the information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials (6 to 8 marks)
- (iii) **What actions can be taken to manage those risks?** i.e., recommendations that include practical advice on how the risks could be managed, addressing the concerns of management of those risks.; and
- (iv) **Why do you recommend those actions?** i.e., rational justification for all recommendations made, referencing relevant information provided in the pre-seen and unseen materials (4 marks)

Continued

Actual student answer – passed (continued)

I recommend for the annual review we undertake a money market hedge. This is essentially using the money markets to hedge our currency risk as, if investing in the market for the year period, the hedge we create in the market will mean that if the rate impacts us one way with regards to the amount we are paying, the money market hedge will hedge the reverse due to the transaction being the other way round which will mitigate the risk.

This involves more experrise and cost but it is the best long term option as we are essentially using the markets to hedge our risk. Another option we could use for the annual review payment to mange the risk here is an option agreement with the bank. This would give us the right but not the ibility to use a specific rate at the future date. These can be OTC with the bank or exchange traded which are less risky.

However, the rate they are able to offer in a years time is unlikly to be particulary favoourable or accurate so it would need further consideration. It does mean that we would be able to take advantage of benficial exchange rate movements though.

Penetration

Monthly cost, harder to hedge against – short term deposits as a money market hedge maybe?

I recommend that for the monthly penetration costing we use short term hedges to deal with this. The impact of the currency risk is likely to be smaller here as the amounts are not as large ast he other amounts discussed and the movement in exchange rates is unlikely to be as significant over the short 1 month period.

A good optiobn would be to engage in a future contract. It is like a futures contract but gives us the option to use the rate and doesnt provide an oobligation. That allows us to hedge for the specific amount and a specific date but gives us the option to take advantage of favourable movements should they arise. This mitigates the risk as we know the amount and the date of the payment and can predict our cash flows with certainty by using this option hence mitigating risk.

What did the candidates do right or wrong?

At first glance, the answer with a passing score has paragraphs that are well structured and laid out, suggesting comprehensive coverage of each area of the task and subsequent requirements. In addition, at Strategic level, to achieve a higher passing score, you need to demonstrate strong technical knowledge of the topics being tested through a clear and comprehensive explanation and apply this technical understanding to the scenario. In the failed answer, the candidate seemed to have missed out on the marks primarily because of the poor technical understanding of the syllabus topic examined. Further, in the failed answer, the candidate has explained the issues too briefly and with a lack of clarity.

Regarding writing style, the candidate who produced the answer with a passing score has kept the replies professional with a good layout. They have used headings to clearly indicate which task they are addressing and to provide structure to the response. Each idea has a separate paragraph that makes it easy for the marker to follow the train of thought and award marks. You will notice that the candidate has not used bullet points in the answer with a passing score. It is clearer if you write short paragraphs with sub-headings.

One other area worthy of mention is candidates' ability to apply skills which is demonstrated well throughout the answer with a passing score. At the Strategic level many of the tasks require application. The candidate who produced the 'passed' answer has demonstrated a good technical understanding in the context of the scenario and the particulars of the issue being addressed, incorporating relevant information from the pre-seen and unseen. The primary difference between the 'failed' and the 'passed' answer is the candidates' ability to put theoretical concepts to practical use to demonstrate application skills in their answers consistently.

The candidates have made some spelling and grammar errors, but the examiners won't penalise this. The key element the examiner is looking for is the ability to address the requirements of the tasks and communicate them effectively within a time constrained environment. Therefore, you will not earn marks unless the examiner can understand what you are trying to say. If communication is not your natural strength, you need to start working on it as soon as possible. Ask friends or colleagues to read your answer for you and see if they can understand what you are trying to say.

Finally, remember three keys to producing a passing answer for the CIMA Management Case Study Examination:

- Ensure that your **knowledge base is complete**. The examiner emphasises that knowledge of all areas of the syllabus is very important; lack of technical knowledge in one or two areas, is one of the main reasons candidates fail to obtain the passing score. When there are knowledge gaps, application is not possible. You may use the 'Assessment Outcomes' in the [Strategic level examination blueprint](#) as a useful checklist.
- **Application is key**. Demonstrate technical understanding in the context of the scenario. Information given (both pre-seen and unseen) should be, as far as possible, incorporated into answers. In other words, technical understanding is important but simple regurgitated knowledge scores poorly – it needs to be applied. Read this article to learn [how to demonstrate application skills](#) in your answer.
- **Read the requirements carefully** and [do exactly what the examiner asks you to do](#). This is possible through [answer planning](#) and time management.

For more hints and tips from the examiner read the article '[Examiner's Advice on Common Mistakes in CIMA Case Study Examinations](#)'.

Also, watch the video '[How to Produce an Answer Examiners Love to See](#)'. (You can read the video transcript [here](#).)

You may also benefit from reading CIMA's published answer to the variant 1. This gives you an alternative approach to achieving a passing score from the same requirements. It is useful to understand how different approaches can earn marks and that the markers are not looking for a model answer.

It's recommended that you read other useful learning resources in the [CIMA Planner](#) to guide you in preparing well for your CIMA Case Study Examination and producing answers with a high passing score.



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