



CHARTERED ACCOUNTANTS IRELAND STUDENT SOCIETIES

FAE Interim Assessment: Elective
21 April 2018

[Advanced Auditing and Assurance, Advanced Taxation NI & ROI, Advanced Performance Management]

Executive Summary

Overall the examination feedback for this sitting was that the papers were difficult but fair and in line with what students expected at FAE, with the exception of APM which will be discussed in further detail below. Across all papers timing has been highlighted as the common challenge, with the requirements being reasonable but difficult in the time given.

199 Responses were collected across the country with the highest volume of responses from Dublin (59%) followed by 20% from Belfast, and Cork and Galway at 8%. Of the respondents, 91% are following the training contract route.

Students indicated largely that they were satisfied with the provision of support and materials for FAE and that communication provided in relation to FAE was satisfactory. The main issues from this survey are in relation to the APM interim assessment paper with students being overwhelmingly unhappy with the format and requirements of the paper in the time given.

Venue

Across all responses the venues received positive feedback as being accessible to all students, spacious and with good desk size. 87% of students who responded indicated they were satisfied or very satisfied with the venue, with a similar response (93%) in relation to the invigilation during the exam.

Reasonable Accommodations: Of those who completed the survey, 6% required accommodation; no issues have been raised in relation to this support.

Examination communications

Students indicated that they were satisfied with the level of communication received in relation to the Interim assessment (examination, venue and other queries) (80% satisfaction of those who responded.)

In relation to responses to exam queries, the majority of students indicated that they received responses within 8 hours of making their enquiry. In particular students commented that they received responses 'almost instantly from the FAE team'.

Lectures and materials

Of the materials provided to students in relation to the Interim assessment, the Competency Statement and Past/Sample papers were ranked highest in respect to the use in preparation for the exam (88% and 83% respectively). The common concern across the student body in relation to the materials is the limited amount of past and sample papers available, though they acknowledge that the Interim Assessment is a new examination. Almost all respondents commented that they would have liked additional sample papers to prepare for the exam; specifically to cover areas examinable which have only appeared once in the past papers.

A large proportion of respondents raised issues with the navigation of the new website, indicating that they found it difficult to locate materials and past papers.

In addition, almost all student have indicated that they would like more 'real world examples' in their lectures alongside the texts/lecture slides to assist them in understanding and preparing for the exam. A large number of respondents indicated that the topics are 'quite dry' when taught by going through the text book and can prove difficult to concentrate after a week of work, with suggestions that more practical question based classes would be more effective.

Positive comments on the delivery of APM, ATE(NI) lectures and the ISQ1 online lecture were frequently given by students indicating that these assisted them greatly in their preparation.

Electives sat by respondents; a total of 199 students completed the survey in its entirety.

AAE: 36% (71 students)

ATE: 22% (43 students)

APM:42% (85 students)

Advanced Auditing and Assurance

From the responses given, students indicated that issue 2 was the most challenging, however overwhelmingly (71%) they felt the exam was reasonable and in line with their expectations. The key issue coming from all the AAE responses is that of timing. Students who responded felt that although the indicators were fair, they required a lot of time to document appropriately and thus students ran out of time when completing the risk and responses indicators.

Issue 1

This requirement raised no significant issues beyond that of timing. Almost all students commented that the agenda proved to be very difficult to time appropriately given the amount of information required in an agenda. Students felt, however, that they were prepared adequately for this requirement and it was reasonable in its level of difficulty.

Issue 2&3

As above, students largely felt these requirements were fair but extremely challenging due to timing constraints, caused largely by the first indicator. Respondents commented that there were a large number of risks to identify, and that it was too much to ask students to calculate impairment in this time.

Advanced Taxation

This elective was considered overall to be difficult (55%), with only 32% feeling it was a reasonable paper. Issue 1 was considered the most challenging for respondents. In general the comments from students focused on the wording/phrasing of the paper, with a high proportion of students feeling the wording was unclear as to the split of indicators which caused some confusion over how to approach the layout of the answer. Again students felt the requirement was reasonable but were unclear as to what exactly was being asked for in each indicator and felt that timing was a considerable issue in completing the requirement.

Issue 1

The majority of respondents highlighted timing as an issue in this indicator, commenting that it required 'too much information for one single indicator.' Given the amount of information in this indicator, students commented that they were unclear as to what exactly was required of them in this indicator as it seemed to overlap with other indicators. A handful of students queried if all indicators are weighted equally as the first indicator in this paper appeared to represent the majority of the marks.

Issue 2

Respondents commented that this issue overlapped with issue 1, a number of students were comfortable with this but for a large number the overlap caused some confusion. Again, as with issue 1, students commented that the wording of the requirement was unclear.

Issue 3

No significant issues were highlighted in relation to this indicator. The majority of responses commented that the indicator was clear, straightforward to identify and the only issue was the time constraints.

Advanced Performance Management

Students overwhelmingly indicated that this assessment was Very Difficult (60%) or Difficult (31%). Issue 1 has been ranked the most challenging (89% of respondents). This elective received the most negative feedback from students, all students who responded commented that the exam was unlike any previous paper. Timing again was commented on as a serious issue for all students, specifying that the case was 'very long and difficult to understand.'

The Executive wishes to advise that the APM paper, including the Investment Appraisal indicator was very much in line with previous APM Assessments and sample papers. The paper was moderated for timing and is in line with previous assessments. The Executive also wish to point out that the March Digital Accountancy Ireland Extra article specifically called out APM and highlighted that there was new material introduced in the year which is highly examinable.

Issue 1

All respondents commented that the NPV was difficult as the information was provided in a format different to those they had experienced previously. Students commented that this layout was unfair given the large volume of text to read alongside. Students commented that it was not clear how to perform some of the calculations, which wasted time which students did not have. Overall the issue was described as 'vague', 'ambiguous' and 'unclear.' One student commented that 'little things like this can make a big impact in a time pressured exam' which sums up a large number of the

comments provided by students; that although they appreciate they must be prepared for changes to how a question is asked and that in large part they felt the actual calculations were not difficult, given the time pressure it was unfair to present it in such a way.

The lease issue was raised by a number of students as a key area of difficulty in deciphering what was required. The use of EBITDA was also highlighted by the majority of students as being a 'curve ball' in the exam which most students did not feel comfortable with or prepared for.

Students commented that they understand that questions must be asked in different ways, but if the format is changing so dramatically from previous papers the indicator should be made clearer. The type of NPV (such as for a single entity or multiple) and length of time (5 or 10 years) were a common area of concern across all respondents, noting that the consideration of which to use took up considerable time that could have been spent completing the question.

A number of students commented repeatedly that they had prepared for the exam and felt confident going in, but that the requirements and time pressure have knocked their confidence considerably ahead of their final exam.

All students who responded to the survey were extremely critical of the APM paper, specifically issue one due, in summary, to the volume and layout of information provided, the ambiguity in the requirement and the impact this indicator had on the timing of the entire paper.

Issue 2

Students commented that information on this type of business is not easily available, and it a unique and uncommon industry to be tested on. A number of respondents (8 of the 57 who provided comments for this question) queried where this indicator mapped to the competency statement. The feedback from each student who provided a response was that the time required for issue 1 had a detrimental effect on their ability to produce a coherent and detailed answer to the rest of the paper.

Issue 3

This issue received the most positive comments of the 3; most candidates felt this was reasonable however, as with the other issues, timing was a significant issue. As with issue 2, candidates highlighted that this issue required industry knowledge they did not have, and tested this industry knowledge more so than technical knowledge from the competency statement.

The Executive wishes to advise candidates that time management is essential for all electives going forward and be prepared to adapt your plan and exam approach in the final sittings in August.