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PROJECT PASS NOTES RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS PROJECT

We outline some important skills that a student has to demonstrate to pass the Research and Analysis Project

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A key aspect of both the Research and Analysis Project (RAP) and the Key Skills Statement (KSS) is self-reflection. Although this is not explicitly assessed in the RAP, it is important for you to recognise that there may be constraints that affect your choice of project and how you undertake it. You need to ask yourself some questions: Which project is most suitable for me? Where will I get my information? Who will be a good project mentor? Thinking about your own strengths and weaknesses will help you approach the RAP in the most appropriate way.

PROJECT GUIDANCE

An appropriate choice of project is critical to passing the RAP. If you choose a project that is too wide ranging, too specialist, or too general, then you may be throwing away your chances of passing. My advice is to first build on your learning from the ACCA exams and then choose a single organisation to focus on. Remember, you have a maximum of 5,000 words available for the RAP.

Keep a diary to record important events that happen during your time working on your RAP. In particular, record what happens at the meetings with your project mentor and how these meetings support the skills development you need to show in the KSS.

The assessment criteria for the RAP are published in the Project Guidelines and you should read these before starting your RAP. Two essential academic and professional skills are those of communication and analysis. In your RAP, your communication skills are partly demonstrated by producing 'a coherent and structured report focused on the stated objectives and written in a lucid style' – this includes four important requirements. The RAP must have 'objectives' – what the RAP is about and what you hope to learn from undertaking the RAP. The objectives must be the 'focus' for the RAP, in that all the work you undertake must address these objectives. Although this sounds obvious, many RAPs state objectives for the project work, and then ignore them throughout the rest of the report. Such projects do not pass.

If you do not focus on the objectives, it is likely that you will not produce a 'coherent' report – one that is logical and orderly. You will also not produce a 'structured' report since there will be no relationship between the different parts of the project report. You should read the Project Guidelines to understand the Oxford Brookes recommended format for your project report. This will help you produce a RAP that is focused, coherent, and structured.

Many students find it useful to think of undertaking the project as telling a story. What do I want to find out? (introduction). What information will I need to find? (information gathering). How will I evaluate this information? (analysis). And what will my analysis tell me about my objectives? (conclusions). In your RAP, you need to clearly link these different components together.

ACADEMIC SKILLS

You must demonstrate certain academic skills in your RAP. In particular, you must reference properly any sources of information that you have taken from other authors. This has two purposes – so that it can be easily established what is your own work, and so the quality of the other sources of information used to prepare the project can be evaluated. You must use the Harvard Referencing System, which is explained in the Project Guidelines.

In addition to good communication skills, you must also demonstrate first-rate analytical skills in order to pass the RAP. For example, a popular RAP topic is 'An analysis of the financial situation of xxx organisation'. Most students include the calculation of some financial ratios in such a project. However,

the calculation of financial ratios and identifying the numerical changes in financial ratios is only the starting point for analysis. Calculations of financial ratios, by themselves, are not sufficient to pass the project.

A company's financial statements do not exist in isolation; they represent the company's business activity for a certain period. To understand any changes in, or derived from, the financial statements you need to understand any changes in business activity. Therefore you must look outside the financial statements, and the annual report, to the company's marketplace and perhaps to wider economic factors.

There are many possible factors that may have an impact on a company's business activity. These include the company's own strategy and investment activity, the actions of competitors, changes in oil prices and/or interest rates, levels of company or personal taxation, and so on. You have to demonstrate that you have identified some possible reasons which explain why your chosen financial ratios have changed over time.

Calculation is not sufficient. You must explain any changes you observe, and to explain you must explore the company's wider business environment. A good RAP puts the findings of your analysis in a broader organisational context, which makes it more valuable to a reader.

Consider this article carefully when thinking about your RAP so that you fully demonstrate your graduate-level skills and pass your RAP first time. Then celebrate becoming a graduate of this important learning partnership between ACCA and Oxford Brookes University.

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