

# Preparing for and sitting the APEAS Part 3 Practice Paper

## 1. Introduction

Sitting examinations is not a new experience for you. During your school and university studies you would have sat numerous examinations. These examinations would mostly have been closed-book, lasting no more than 3 hours in a hall with invigilators present to ensure no malpractice took place.

The APEAS Part 3 Practice Paper is a very different type of examination from the ones you have sat previously. Its key features are as follows:

- It is 48 hours long and is sat in the candidate's office
- It is an open-book examination where a candidate can consult appointment documents, contracts, codes, textbooks and any other relevant documents
- Candidates are allowed to seek information and advice from construction professionals within and outside the office, but not with their fellow candidates

The following note has been written to provide APEAS Part 3 Examination candidates with information and advice about preparing for and sitting the 48 hour, in office, Practice Paper.

## 2. Preparing to sit the Practice Paper

You will know from sitting examinations previously that preparation for exams is all important. Many APEAS candidates choose to be part of a study group, preparing, discussing and debating answers to previous years APEAS Practice Paper questions. To facilitate this process APEAS hosts all its previous years Scenarios to the Practice Examination and Questions for Candidates on its website <http://apeas.org.uk/past-papers/>. The APEAS Examination Committee is happy for candidates to work in study groups believing that the discussion and debate that occurs in such groups replicates much of what happens in practice.

If you are having difficulties finding a study group you are advised to contact your PSA who may be able to let you know which study groups are running for candidates from his/her school of architecture.

APEAS hosts a copy of the Scenario to the Practice Examination (plus a Guidance Note and Declaration) a week before hosting the examination paper (Questions for Candidates) on its website. The reason for hosting the Scenario a week in advance of the Questions for Candidates is to allow candidates time to prepare appropriately to sit the 48 hour examination. The Scenario contains important, up to date information about a hypothetical architectural practice, GFY Architects, on which the examination questions are based. The information relates to practice finances, staffing and resources together with details about projects currently in hand. Under the Specific Background to Questions section of the Scenario, some information is provided specific to individual questions such as RIBA stage, appointment, fee, contract, project value etc. Making this information available in advance of the 48 hour examination allows candidates to gather together documentation specific to questions plus other documents that will help candidates to answer questions.

In the past some candidates have not taken full advantage of the week when they had access to the Scenario which left them less than well prepared to sit the 48 hour examination. It is important that you take the necessary time during this week to study the Scenario carefully and gather all necessary documents for the Examination.

Prior to sitting the Practice Paper it is worth giving consideration to the physical conditions under which you are sitting the Paper. You may wish to ask yourself the following questions (the list is not intended to be exhaustive):

- Do I have access to a reliable computer with extra memory facilities for backing up documents?
- Have I got a good, reliable Internet connection on my pc?
- Do I have easy access to a telephone?
- Do I have enough desk space to work at?
- Do I have a comfortable chair to sit in while taking the examination?
- Is there sufficient light at all times in the area I will be working?
- Have I easy access to the resources I am likely to use as part of the examination?
- Do I have easy access to water/refreshments?
- Do I have access to a quiet room if needed

In addition, have I checked the availability of directors/principals and other members of staff in the office to be able to consult with during the 48 hours the examination is taking place? Will my mentor be available to answer questions?

The examination may include questions that invite you to write letters/emails on behalf of GFY Architects. It would be advisable to create templates for these ahead of the examination so that no time is wasted on this exercise during the critical exam period.

Frequently there is a question relating to fee calculations and resource schedules. It may be worth considering developing a generic spreadsheet that can be adapted for these purposes ahead of the examination.

### **3. Sitting the Practice Paper**

You may find it helpful to consider the points on the following pages before sitting the Practice Paper.

#### **3.1 At the start of the Examination**

It is recommended that as soon as the Scenario to the Practice Examination, Guidance Notes and Declaration and Questions for Candidates appear on the APEAS website that you save them on your PC. You might also want to print off a hard copy of the examination materials.

At the beginning of the 48 hours of the examination it is suggested that you read all the questions in the Questions for Candidates carefully, perhaps several times, to ensure that you understand what you are being asked to do. Once you have read the questions it may be worthwhile making an estimate of the time you think you will need to spend on each question. Doing this may help you to decide in which order you are going to attempt the questions. Providing yourself with a time estimate for each question will help you to manage the process of producing answers for all ten questions. It will also provide you with a 'warning bell' if you are spending too much time on a question. If you do find yourself spending more time on a question than you estimated it might be worthwhile stopping work on the question and answering another question. You can always come back to it at a later time.

#### **3.2 The order in which you answer questions**

With regard to the order in which you answer the questions this is very much a matter of personal choice. You do not need to attempt the questions in the order they are presented in the Questions for Candidates although your final answers should be presented in that order. You may choose to answer first the questions which you think you can answer relatively quickly so you have them 'under your belt' so to speak. Alternatively, you may take the opposite approach by starting with answering those questions which you think will take you longer to answer so that when you come towards the end of the examination you will be answering questions that you can answer more quickly.

It is worth noting that you might not be able to complete an answer to a question until you have spoken to a construction professional(s) in, or outwith, the office. Alternatively, you may find that once you have spoken to the construction professional(s) that you may have to amend the answer you have given to a question in light of the information and/or views provided by the construction professional(s).

### 3.3 **Reviewing progress**

At around the mid-point in the 48 hours of the examination you might find it helpful to take stock of where you are in answering questions. Are you on schedule? Have you fallen behind schedule? If this is the case what are you going to do to make up for 'lost time'? Are you ahead of schedule? Does this mean you will have time to go back and review the answers you have given to some questions?

### 3.4 **Writing answers to questions**

It is important to note that many of the questions in the Practice Paper are scenario based, and are open to a number of different interpretations. It is important that you state clearly any assumptions you have made in answering such questions. It is also important to note that questions that can be answered several different ways leaves open scope for examiners, at Oral Examination, to ask the 'what if this happened' type question to assess your deeper understanding of the issues surrounding the question.

When writing an answer to each question focus clearly on answering the question. Avoid going 'off-topic' or 'waffling'. To help you avoid either of these you may find it helpful to jot down some headings for your answer so you have a structure to frame your answer against.

Resist quoting large 'chunks' of texts from publications. Only quote text that is directly relevant to your answer and remember to cite the source. It is probably a good idea to minimise the amount of text you quote. Remember your examiners are keen to read your critical analysis of the problem together with any conclusions and recommendations you may wish to make.

### 3.5 **Writing letters**

With the widespread use of email nowadays, it has become less common to write a formal or business letter. However, you should note that examiners continue to place great importance on the quality of letters candidates write as part of the APEAS Part 3 Examination.

Writing a good formal or professional letter is not necessarily an easy task and it can take considerable practice before you produce the desired result. There are a number of points you may wish to note when writing a formal or business letter. These are as follows:

- Ensure the letter is in the correct format
- Ensure that the letter is well presented
- Keep the letter short and to the point (avoid waffling or going off subject)
- Ensure the letter does not have spelling or grammatical mistakes
- Be polite even when delivering a tough message (remember you will probably have to work with the client, contractor etc. in the future)

Guidance on letter writing is given on the following websites:

<http://library.bcu.ac.uk/learner/writingguides/1.06.htm> and

[http://www.nvtc.ee/e-oppe/Varkki/layout/rules\\_for\\_writing\\_formal\\_letters.html](http://www.nvtc.ee/e-oppe/Varkki/layout/rules_for_writing_formal_letters.html)

### 3.6 **Keeping mentally alert**

As you will be sitting a 48-hour examination it is particularly important to remember the following points:

- Get a good night's sleep the night before the examination and on the two nights during which the examination is taking place

- Don't forget to eat breakfast, lunch, dinner
- Drink water at regular intervals during the examination
- Take a short break at appropriate intervals (e.g. every 2 to 3 hours)

The importance of eating at regular intervals cannot be over emphasised. Your brain and body need to be well fuelled if you are going to perform at your peak during the examination. Tempting as it may be you are probably best to avoid eating too much junk food as it is low in nutritional value. Sugary foods may be quick and convenient to consume, but tend to give you only short bursts of energy. It is better to eat foods that give you a slow release of energy throughout the examination.

Drinking water at regular intervals during the examination will help keep you hydrated. There is some evidence that 'consuming water may have a physiological effect on thinking functions that leads to improved exam performance.' Drinking water may also 'alleviate anxiety.'

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-17741653>

#### **4. After you have submitted the Practice Paper**

It is probably unwise to spend too much time directly after the examination analysing with your fellow candidates the answers you have given to questions. There will be time to do this later when, for example, you meet in your study group. Give yourself some time to recover from sitting the Practice Paper, but do remember to thoroughly review your entire documentary submission prior to your oral examination.