

The ACCA logo is a red square with the letters 'ACCA' in white, bold, sans-serif font. It is positioned in the top left corner of the page.

ACCA

A man in a dark blue suit and a black messenger bag is walking up a wide set of stone stairs. He is seen from behind, looking towards a bright, leafy area at the top of the stairs. The stairs are made of dark stone and lead up to the right. To the left of the stairs is a light-colored stone wall with a gold-colored handrail. The background is filled with green trees and bright sunlight, creating a bokeh effect.

INTRODUCING **PRE-SEEN**  
**INFORMATION** TO THE SBL

Think Ahead

## Overview

From September 2023, ACCA will introduce changes to the Strategic Business Leader (SBL) exam. These changes have been made to ensure that the SBL exam continues to remain relevant in the fast-changing world and fully meet the needs of its stakeholders.

Following extensive consultation, ACCA has decided to introduce pre-seen information that will be released two weeks in advance of the SBL exam session. The purpose of the pre-seen is to better reflect real business life, where appropriate advice and recommendations are offered in the workplace only after a broader understanding of the industry and the organisation has been established. Additionally, the pre-seen will help support those students who have English as a second language, or who have limited business experience, or who have had minimal exposure to the industry on which the SBL exam is based.

Since much of the background information will now be provided in advance, the SBL exam duration will be reduced from 4 hours to 3 hours and 15 minutes. In addition, the format of the exam will change to reflect the reduced time available.

## Three key changes

### 1 Pre-seen information

The primary aim of the pre-seen is to enable students to become familiar with the business activities of the case study organisation and the industry in which it operates. Familiarity with this important contextual information will help students to better understand and apply the further information that will be provided in the exhibits in the SBL exam. The pre-seen is designed to provide background and context only and will purposely not signal areas of the syllabus or tasks to be assessed in the exam.

Students will not be allowed to take into the exam their own annotated copy of the pre-seen, since SBL will remain a closed book exam. A copy of the pre-seen will be available to students for reference purposes during the exam.

### 2 Duration of the SBL exam

The SBL exam time has been reduced from 4 hours to 3 hours and 15 minutes to reflect the fact that students will already be familiar with the background information and the context of the case study through the pre-seen. The new exam length will bring SBL in line with other ACCA Strategic Professional exams.

### 3 Format of the SBL exam

The SBL exam will contain further new information in the form of exhibits, which students should focus on in answering the requirements. The total number of exhibits will be significantly reduced from the current format to reflect the introduction of the pre-seen information. The exhibits in the exam may take a variety of forms including memos, emails, briefing notes, interview extracts, web pages, financial reports etc.

The SBL exam will now have three compulsory tasks, with each task having a varying number of parts and total marks.

All five professional skills will continue to be tested and will still be worth 20 marks in total. However, due to the reduced number of tasks and exam time, each professional skill will be tested only once in every exam and will be worth four marks. There will no longer be two- and three-mark professional skills requirements.

The SBL exam will no longer be answered as a single requirement in one word processor document. Each task (or part of the task requirement, where appropriate) will be completed as a separate requirement in a separate response option or options. As a result, the exam workspace area will look slightly different in that only one task will be shown at a time, and it will no longer be possible to view all tasks together. Please see the separate guidance document 'Changes to the SBL exam - structure of tasks' to find out more about this change.

## What is NOT changing

The changes, detailed above, only affect the structure and format of the SBL exam. The quality, integrity and rigor of the exam remains the same. ACCA will continue to offer an exam that focuses on the application of knowledge and includes strategic thinking, business direction and problem solving to prepare students for the workplace.

The SBL exam will continue to be an integrated case study in which all requirements relate to a single case study scenario. Students will continue to be given a role or roles that they will assume as they carry out various tasks in the case study.

The content of the syllabus will largely remain the same. There will be small changes to the study guide to provide increased clarity to some individual learning outcomes.

The SBL exam will continue to be closed book.

The SBL exam will continue to have 80 technical marks and 20 professional skills marks.

## Access to, and usage of, the pre-seen

### 1 Pre-seen release date

The pre-seen is part of the SBL exam and therefore students should take note of its release date which will be two weeks before the exam session. ACCA will communicate the release date to students through appropriate communication channels.

The pre-seen will be a PDF and students will have access to it through myACCA. Students should plan in advance to access it as soon as it is released and set aside enough time to read and fully familiarise themselves with the content of the pre-seen.

### 2 Pre-seen format

There will be two parts to the pre-seen information: the industry information and information that relates to the organisation.

- **The industry information**

ACCA will continue to base the case study exam on an industry or sector of the economy. Students need to familiarise themselves with the information provided in the pre-seen, even if they are already familiar with the industry. This is because for the purpose of the SBL exam, certain facts about the industry may be simplified.

- **The organisation information**

The organisation in the pre-seen is fictitious and will not represent a real organisation. The pre-seen will contain information such as when, where and how the organisation was formed, its products/services, processes, suppliers and customers, its ownership and governance, selected financial data, the future outlook, risks and challenges, developments and strategies etc. The specific information provided will vary depending on what is appropriate for each SBL exam.

### 3 Using the pre-seen

Students should read the pre-seen to fully understand the activities of the industry and the organisation. Students will need to spend time familiarising themselves with the industry terms and activities including the products/services the industry provides, its type of customers and suppliers, the developments, risks etc. Students may do some research to better understand the terminologies and activities of the industry. However, there is no expectation that students undertake further research. It is important to emphasise that the SBL exam is based on a fictitious organisation and the exam tasks will relate to this organisation specifically and not to any general research that students may have undertaken independently.

Students should ensure that they are very familiar with the content of the pre-seen prior to the exam session. They should know where to find information within the pre-seen, since this will save time in the exam.

## What to avoid doing with the pre-seen

- Avoid extensive additional research into the industry
- Avoid speculating on areas of the syllabus that will be examined based on the pre-seen
- Avoid using the pre-seen as the main source of material for answering the requirements. The exhibits provided on the exam day must be used.
- Avoid reading the pre-seen for the first time just before the exam session
- Avoid spending too much time on the pre-seen at the expense of revising areas of the syllabus and completing practice mock exams
- Avoid question tipping and spotting.

## Conclusion

Students sitting the SBL exam from September 2023 onwards are encouraged to learn more about these changes by practicing the two specimen exams and reading ACCA learning resources, including examiner approach articles, and the guidance on the change to the structure of the tasks in the SBL exam.