



STRATEGIC BUSINESS LEADER (SBL)

# Syllabus and study guide

SEPTEMBER 2024 TO JUNE 2025

Designed to help with planning study and to  
provide detailed information on what could be  
assessed in any examination session



## Contents

1. Introduction to the syllabus.....	3
2. Main capabilities .....	5
3. Intellectual levels.....	6
4. The syllabus.....	7
5. Detailed study guide.....	8
6. Summary of changes to Strategic Business Leader (SBL) .....	16
7. Approach to examining the syllabus.....	16
8. Relational diagram linking Strategic Business Leader (SBL) with other exams .....	18
9. Guide to ACCA examination structure and delivery mode .....	18
10. The structure of ACCA qualification .....	20
11. Guide to ACCA examination assessment.....	20
12. Learning hours and education recognition.....	21

# 1. Introduction to the syllabus

The aim of the syllabus is to demonstrate organisational leadership and senior consultancy or advisory capabilities and relevant professional skills, through the context of an integrated case study.

The syllabus for *Strategic Business Leader* acts as the key leadership syllabus at the Strategic Professional level and is a substantial integrated examination. The examination requires candidates to demonstrate a range of professional skills demanded by effective leaders or in advising or supporting senior management in directing organisations. The syllabus therefore combines the main functions of organisations in the context of leadership capability.

The main capabilities of the Strategic Business Leader syllabus assume essential technical skills and knowledge have been acquired in the Applied Knowledge and Applied Skills examinations where some of the core capabilities of *Strategic Business Leader* will have been introduced in a subject-specific context, such as governance, internal audit, control, risk, finance, and management. The examination also draws upon a range of ethical and professional skills acquired in the Ethics and Professional Skills module, which should be completed before attempting any of the Strategic Professional examinations.

The *Strategic Business Leader* syllabus is covered in ten main sections with leadership, professionalism and ethics and corporate governance used as the initial focus for the rest of the syllabus.

Excellent leadership involves having a team of capable and responsible directors, setting an appropriate 'tone from the top' and embedding appropriate corporate and cultural values within the organisation.

This is supported by a sound governance structure and effective management structures. The syllabus begins by examining leadership and having in place responsible and ethical leaders, having an awareness of who they are responsible to. This section also covers personal and professional ethics, ethical frameworks – and professional values – as applied to a senior manager or adviser's role and as a guide to appropriate behaviour and conduct in a variety of situations.

Clearly linked to organisational leadership is the existence of an effective governance structure within organisations in the broad context of the agency relationship. This aspect of the syllabus focuses on the respective roles and responsibilities of directors, the relevant committee structures and the effective scrutiny of the performance of senior management, demonstrating their accountability by reporting more widely and holistically to stakeholders under an integrated reporting <IR> framework.

It is only after the fundamental organisational leadership and governance structures and values are in place that strategy can be determined and the strategic position of the organisation can be assessed and strategic options evaluated and implemented.

Evaluating strategic options, making strategic choices and implementing strategy requires the organisation's leaders, or their advisers, to fully understand the risks involved so the syllabus then examines the identification, assessment, and control of risk as a key aspect of responsible leadership and management.

The syllabus also includes a section relating to and applying IT and security controls at all levels of the organisation from strategic considerations including big data, machine learning, e-business, cloud computing and smart technology through to using IT in the management

of information, controlling organisations, and in financial and organisational operations. This section also focuses on the growing importance of 'cyber security'.

To support the management of risk the syllabus also addresses organisational control in its wider context, including internal audit, review, internal control, and appropriate reporting to implement and support effective governance, including compliance issues related to the safeguard of assets including data security, and decision-support functions.

The syllabus includes financial aspects of managing an organisation, including evaluating available sources of finance and key financial and management accounting techniques to analyse performance and to support decision-making. Candidates need to be aware of legal issues and of the financial reporting and taxation implications of strategic and investment decisions.

The syllabus then focuses on enabling success and change management. The syllabus includes organisational changes, talent management, performance excellence, IT solutions and project management, including the role of new and disruptive technologies in transforming the nature of business analysis and transactions.

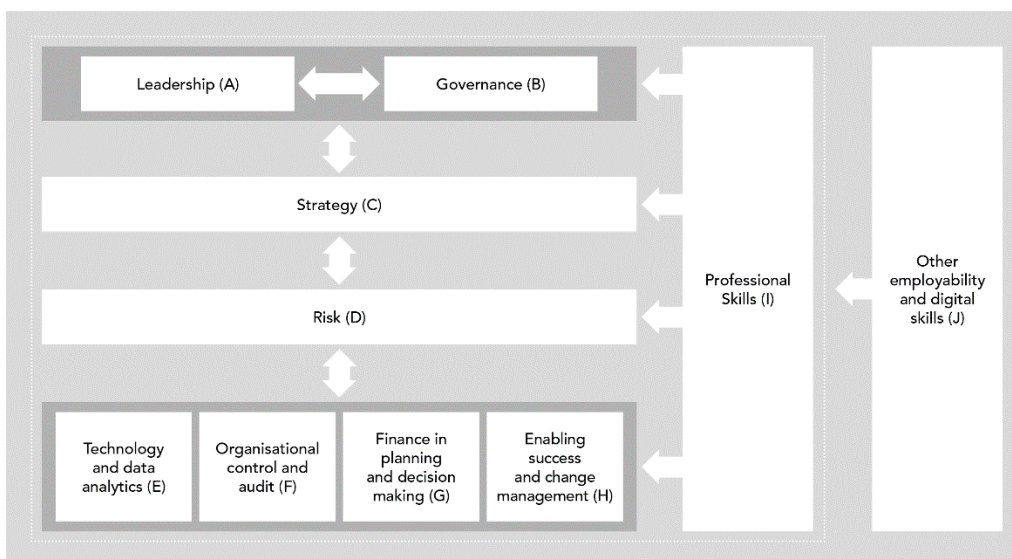
The professional skills section of the syllabus links to all others and provides a range of professional skills that the candidate must demonstrate in the exam which will make them more employable, or if already in work, will enhance their opportunities for advancement.

The last section, which closely links to the professional skills section, is the demonstration of appropriate digital and employability skills in preparing for and taking the examination. This includes being able to use computer functionality and technology to access information and present responses in a professional manner during live examinations.

## 2. Main capabilities

On successful completion of this exam, candidates should be able to:

- A Apply excellent leadership and ethical skills to set the ‘tone from the top’ and promote a positive culture within the organisation, adopting a whole organisation perspective in managing performance and value creation.
- B Evaluate the effectiveness of the governance and agency system of an organisation and recognise the responsibility of the board or other agents towards their stakeholders, including the organisation’s social responsibilities and the reporting implications.
- C Evaluate the strategic position of the organisation against the external environment and the availability of internal resources, to identify feasible strategic options.
- D Analyse the risk profile of the organisation and of any strategic options identified, within a culture of responsible risk management.
- E Select and apply appropriate information technologies and data analytics, to analyse factors affecting the organisation’s value chain to identify strategic opportunities and implement strategic options within a framework of robust IT security controls.
- F Evaluate management reporting and internal control and audit systems to ensure compliance and the achievement of organisation’s objectives and the safeguarding of organisational assets
- G Apply high level financial techniques from the Applied Skills exams in the planning, implementation and evaluation of strategic options and actions.
- H Enable success through innovative thinking, applying best in class strategies and disruptive technologies in the management of change; initiating, leading and organising projects, while effectively managing talent and other business resources.
- I Apply a range of professional skills in addressing requirements within the Strategic Business Leader examination and in preparation for, or to support, current work experience.
- J Demonstrate other employability and digital skills in preparing for and taking the Strategic Business Leader examination.



This diagram illustrates the flows and links between the main capabilities of the syllabus and should be used as an aid to planning teaching and learning in a structured way.

### 3. Intellectual levels

The syllabus is designed to progressively broaden and deepen the knowledge, skills and professional values demonstrated by the student on their way through the qualification.

The specific capabilities within the detailed syllabuses and study guides are assessed at one of three intellectual or cognitive levels:

Level 1:	Knowledge and comprehension
Level 2:	Application and analysis
Level 3:	Synthesis and evaluation

Very broadly, these intellectual levels relate to the three cognitive levels at which the Applied Knowledge, the Applied Skills and the Strategic Professional exams are assessed.

Each subject area in the detailed study guide included in this document is given a 1, 2, or 3 superscript, denoting intellectual level, marked at the end of each relevant learning outcome. This gives an indication of the intellectual depth at which an area could be assessed within the examination. However, while level 1 broadly equates with Applied Knowledge, level 2 equates to Applied Skills and level 3 to Strategic Professional, some lower-level skills can continue to be assessed as the student progresses through each level. This reflects that at each stage of study there will be a requirement to broaden, as well as deepen capabilities. It is also possible that occasionally some higher-level capabilities may be assessed at lower levels.

## 4. The syllabus

### A Leadership

1. Qualities of leadership
2. Leadership and organisational culture
3. Professionalism, ethical codes and the public interest

### B Governance

1. Agency
2. Stakeholder analysis and organisational social responsibility
3. Governance scope and approaches
4. Reporting to stakeholders
5. The board of directors
6. Public sector governance

### C Strategy

1. Concepts of strategy
2. Environmental issues
3. Competitive forces
4. The internal resources, capabilities and competences of an organisation
5. Strategic choices

### D Risk

1. Identification, assessment and measurement of risk
2. Managing, monitoring and mitigating risk

### E Technology and data analytics

1. Cloud, mobile and smart technology
2. Big data and data analytics
3. Machine learning, AI and robotics
4. E- business: value chain
5. IT systems security and control

### F Organisational control and audit

1. Management and internal control systems
2. Audit and compliance
3. Internal control and management reporting

### G Finance in planning and decision-making

1. Finance transformation
2. Financial analysis and decision- making techniques
3. Cost and management accounting

### H Enabling success and change management

1. Enabling success: organising
2. Enabling success: disruptive technologies
3. Enabling success: talent management
4. Enabling success: performance excellence
5. Managing strategic change
6. Leading and managing projects

### I Professional skills

1. Communication
2. Commercial acumen
3. Analysis
4. Scepticism
5. Evaluation

### J Other employability and digital skills

1. Use computer technology to efficiently access and manipulate relevant information.
2. Work on relevant response options, using available functions and technology, as would be required in the workplace.
3. Navigate windows and computer screens to create and amend responses to exam requirements, using appropriate tools.
4. Present data and information effectively, using the appropriate tools.

## 5. Detailed study guide

### A Leadership

#### 1. Qualities of leadership

- a) Explain the role of effective leadership and identify the key leadership traits effective in the successful formulation and implementation of strategy and change management.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Apply the concepts of entrepreneurship and 'intrapreneurship' to exploit strategic opportunities and to innovate successfully.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Apply, in the context of organisation governance and leadership qualities, the key ethical and professional values underpinning governance.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 2. Leadership and organisational culture

- a) Discuss the importance of leadership in defining and managing organisational culture.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Advise on the style of leadership appropriate to manage strategic change.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Analyse the culture of an organisation, to recommend suitable changes, using appropriate models such as the cultural web.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Assess the impact of culture on organisational purpose and strategy. <sup>[3]</sup>

#### 3. Professionalism, ethical codes and the public interest

- a) Critically evaluate the concept of responsible leadership and the creation of public value by acting in the public interest.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess management behaviour against the codes of ethics relevant to accounting professionals including the IESBA (IFAC) or professional body codes.<sup>[3]</sup>

- c) Analyse the reasons for conflicts of interest and ethical conflicts in organisations and recommend resolutions.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Assess the nature and impact of different ethical threats and recommend appropriate safeguards to prevent or mitigate such threats.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Recommend best practice for reducing and combating fraud, bribery and corruption to increase public confidence and trust in organisations.<sup>[3]</sup>

### B Governance

#### 1. Agency

- a) Discuss the nature of the principal-agent relationship in the context of governance.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Analyse the issues connected with the separation of ownership of an organisation from control over its activities.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 2. Stakeholder analysis and social responsibility

- a) Discuss, and critically assess, the concept of stakeholder power and interest using the Mendelow model and apply this to strategy and governance.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Evaluate the stakeholders' roles, claims and interests in an organisation and how they may conflict and be resolved.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Explain social responsibility and viewing the organisation as a 'corporate citizen' in the context of governance and sustainability.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### 3. Governance scope and approaches

- a) Analyse and discuss the role and influence of institutional investors in governance systems and structures.<sup>[2]</sup>



- b) Compare rules versus principles-based approaches to governance and advise when they may each be appropriate.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Discuss different models of organisational ownership that influence different governance regimes (family firms versus joint stock company-based models) and explain how they work in practice.<sup>[2]</sup>
- d) Apply the general principles of the International Corporate Governance Network (ICGN)'s Global Governance Principles to organisations' corporate governance.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### 4. Reporting to stakeholders

- a) Discuss the factors that determine organisational policies on reporting to stakeholders, including stakeholder power and interests.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess the role and value of integrated reporting <IR> and evaluate the issues concerning accounting for sustainability.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Advise on the guiding principles, the typical content elements and the six capitals of an integrated report <IR>, and discuss the usefulness of this information to stakeholders.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Describe and assess the social and environmental impacts that economic activity can have (in terms of social and environmental 'footprints' and environmental reporting).<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Describe the main features of internal management systems for underpinning environmental and sustainability accounting such as EMAS and ISO 14000.<sup>[2]</sup>
- f) Examine how the audit of integrated reports <IR> can provide adequate assurance of the relevance and reliability of <IR> to stakeholders.<sup>[2]</sup>

#### 5. The board of directors

- a) Assess the duties and roles of directors and functions of the board (including setting a responsible 'tone' from the top and being accountable for the performance and impact of the organisation).<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Evaluate the case for and against unitary and two-tier board structures.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Describe and assess the purposes, responsibilities and performance of Non-Executive Directors (NEDs).<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Describe and assess the importance of induction, performance appraisal and the continuing professional development of directors on the board.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Explain the meaning of 'diversity' and critically evaluate issues relating to diversity on the board of directors.<sup>[3]</sup>
- f) Assess the importance, roles, purposes and accountabilities of the main board committees in respect of effective governance.<sup>[3]</sup>
- g) Describe and assess the general principles of remunerating directors and modifying directors' behaviour to align with stakeholder interests.<sup>[3]</sup>
- h) Explain and analyse the regulatory, strategic and labour market issues associated with determining directors' remuneration.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 6. Public sector governance

- a) Discuss public sector, private sector, charitable status and non-governmental (NGO and quasi-NGOs) forms of organisation, including agency relationships, stakeholders' objectives and performance criteria.<sup>[2]</sup>
- b) Assess and evaluate the strategic objectives, leadership and governance arrangements that are specific to public sector organisations as contrasted with the private sector.<sup>[3]</sup>

- c) Explain democratic control, political influence and policy implementation in public sector organisations.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Discuss obligations of public sector organisations to meet the economy, effectiveness and efficiency (the 3 E's) criteria and promote public value.<sup>[3]</sup>

## C Strategy

### 1. Concepts of strategy

- a) Explain the fundamental importance of strategy and strategic decisions within different organisational contexts.<sup>[2]</sup>
- b) Apply the Johnson, Scholes and Whittington model of strategic management –strategic analysis, strategic choices and strategic implementation.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2. Environmental issues

- a) Assess the macro-environment of an organisation using appropriate models such as PESTEL.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess the implications of strategic drift.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Evaluate the external key drivers of change likely to affect the structure of a sector or market.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Apply Porter's Diamond to explore the influence of national competitiveness on the strategic position of an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Assess scenarios reflecting different assumptions about the future environment of an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. Competitive forces

- a) Evaluate the sources of competition in an industry or sector using Porter's Five Forces framework.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Analyse customers and markets including market segmentation.<sup>[2]</sup>

- c) Apply Porter's value chain to assist organisations to identify value adding activities in order to create and sustain competitive advantage.<sup>[2]</sup>
- d) Advise on the role and influence of value networks.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Evaluate the opportunities and threats posed by the competitive environment of an organisation.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 4. The internal resources, capabilities and competences of an organisation

- a) Identify and evaluate an organisation's strategic capability, its threshold resources, threshold competences, unique resources and core competences.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Discuss the capabilities required to sustain competitive advantage.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Discuss the contribution of organisational knowledge to the strategic capability of an organisation.<sup>[2]</sup>
- d) Identify and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of an organisation and formulate an appropriate SWOT analysis.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 5. Strategic choices

- a) Assess and advise on the different strategic options available to an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess the opportunities and potential problems of pursuing different strategies of product/market diversification from a national, multinational and global perspective.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Advise on how the 7 P's, price-based strategies, differentiation and lock-in can help an organisation sustain its competitive advantage.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Apply the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) and public sector portfolio matrix models to assist organisations in managing their portfolios.<sup>[3]</sup>

- e) Recommend generic development directions using the Ansoff growth vector matrix.<sup>[2]</sup>
- f) Assess how internal development, business combinations, strategic alliances and partnering can be used to achieve business growth.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Evaluate a risk register and use heat maps when identifying or monitoring risk.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Evaluate the concept of embedding risk in an organisation's culture and values.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Explain and analyse the concepts of spreading and diversifying risk and when this would be appropriate.<sup>[2]</sup>

## D Risk

### 1. Identification, assessment and measurement of risk

- a) Discuss the relationship between organisational strategy and risk management strategy.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Apply the enterprise risk management (ERM) approach to risk management and for establishing risk management systems.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Identify and evaluate key risks, including environmental and climate related risks, and their impact on organisations and projects.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Distinguish between strategic and operational risks.<sup>[2]</sup>
- e) Assess attitudes towards risk and risk appetite and how this can affect risk policy.<sup>[2]</sup>
- f) Discuss the dynamic nature of risk and the ways in which risk varies in relation to the size, structure, industry, sector and development of an organisation.<sup>[2]</sup>
- g) Assess the severity and probability of risk events.<sup>[2]</sup>
- i) Explain and evaluate the concepts of related and correlated risk factors.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2. Managing, monitoring and mitigating risk

- a) Explain and assess the role of a risk manager.<sup>[3]</sup>

- e) Advise on risk management strategies, including the use of the TARA model.<sup>[3]</sup>
- f) Explain and assess the benefits of incurring or accepting some risk as part of competitively managing an organisation referring to the 'as low as reasonably practical' (ALARP) principle.<sup>[3]</sup>
- g) Apply the concept of assurance mapping to modern risk management using the 'four lines of defence' <sup>[3]</sup>

## E Technology and data analytics

### 1. Cloud, mobile and smart technology

- a) Discuss, from a strategic perspective, the need to explore opportunities for adopting new technologies such as cloud, mobile and smart technology within an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Discuss key benefits and risks of cloud, mobile and smart technology.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Assess and advise on using the cloud as an alternative to owned hardware and software technology to support organisation information system needs.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2. Big data and data analytics

- a) Discuss how information technology and data analysis can effectively be used to inform and implement organisational strategy.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Describe big data and discuss the opportunities and threats big data presents to organisations.<sup>[2]</sup>

- c) Identify and analyse relevant data for strategic decisions on new product developments, marketing and pricing.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. Machine learning, AI and robotics

- a) Explain the potential benefits of using artificial intelligence (AI), robotics and other forms of machine learning to support strategic decisions and the pursuit of corporate objectives.<sup>[2]</sup>
- b) Assess the risk, control and ethical implications of using AI, robotics and other forms of machine learning.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 4. E- business: value chain

- a) Assess the organisation's approach to delivering e-business.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess and advise on the potential application of information technology to support e- business.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Explore the characteristics of e-marketing using the 6 I's of interactivity, intelligence, individualisation, integration, industry structure and independence of location.<sup>[2]</sup>
- d) Assess the importance of online branding in e-marketing and compare it with traditional branding.<sup>[2]</sup>
- e) Explore different methods of acquiring and managing suppliers and customers through exploiting e-business technologies.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 5. IT systems security and control

- a) Discuss, from a strategic perspective, the continuing need for effective information systems control within an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess and advise on the adequacy of information technology and systems security controls for an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Evaluate and recommend ways to promote cyber security.<sup>[3]</sup>

- d) Evaluate and recommend improvements or changes to controls over the safeguard of information technology assets, to ensure the organisation meets its business objectives.<sup>[3]</sup>

## F Organisational control and audit

### 1. Management and internal control systems

- a) Evaluate the key features of effective internal control systems such as those included in the COSO framework.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess whether information flows to management are adequate for the purpose of managing internal control and risk.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Evaluate the effectiveness and potential weaknesses of internal control systems.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Discuss and advise on the importance of sound internal control and legal and regulatory compliance and the consequences to an organisation of poor control and non-compliance.<sup>[2]</sup>
- e) Recommend new internal control systems or changes to the components of existing systems to help prevent fraud, error, waste or harmful environmental impacts.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 2. Audit and compliance

- a) Examine the need for an internal audit function in the light of regulatory and organisational requirements.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Justify the importance of auditor independence in all client-auditor situations (including internal audit) and the role of internal audit in compliance.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Justify the importance of having an effective internal audit committee overseeing the internal audit function.<sup>[2]</sup>
- d) Assess the appropriate responses to auditors' recommendations.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. Internal control and management reporting

- a) Justify the need for reports on internal controls to shareholders.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Discuss the typical contents of a report on internal control and internal audit including environmental and sustainability audits.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Assess how internal controls underpin and provide information for reliable financial and sustainable reporting.<sup>[3]</sup>

## G Finance in planning and decision-making

### 1. Finance transformation

- a) Discuss how advances in technology are transforming the finance sector and the role and structure of the finance function within organisations.<sup>[2]</sup>
- b) Evaluate alternative structures for the finance function using business partnering, outsourcing and shared or global business services.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2. Financial analysis and decision-making techniques

- a) Determine the overall investment requirements of the organisation.<sup>[2]</sup>
- b) Assess and advise on alternative sources of short and long-term finance available to the organisation to support strategy and operations.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) Review and justify decisions to select or abandon competing investments. applying suitable investment appraisal techniques.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Justify strategic and operational decisions taking into account risk and uncertainty.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Assess the broad financial reporting and tax implications of taking alternative strategic or investment decisions.<sup>[2]</sup>

- f) Assess organisational performance and position using appropriate performance management techniques, key performance indicators (KPIs) and ratios.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. Cost and management accounting

- a) Discuss, from a strategic perspective, the continuing need for effective cost management and control systems within organisations.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Evaluate methods of forecasting, budgeting, standard costing and variance analysis in support of strategic planning and decision making.<sup>[3]</sup>

## H Enabling success and change management

### 1. Enabling success: organising

- a) Advise on how organisational structure and internal relationships can be re-organised to deliver a selected strategy.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Advise on the implications of collaborative working and partnering, including franchising, process outsourcing, shared services and global business services.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2. Enabling success: disruptive technology

- a) Identify and assess the potential impact of disruptive technologies such as Fintech, including cryptocurrencies.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess the impact of new products, processes, service developments and innovation in supporting organisation strategy.<sup>[2]</sup>

### 3. Enabling success: talent management

- a) Discuss how talent management can contribute to supporting organisational strategy.<sup>[3]</sup>

- b) Analyse opportunities for organisational improvement using the four view POPIT (people, organisation, processes and information technology) model.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 4. Enabling success: performance excellence

- a) Apply the Baldrige model for world class organisations to achieve and maintain business performance excellence.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Assess and advise on how an organisation can be empowered to reach its strategic goals, improve its results and be more competitive, focusing on its critical success factors (CSF).<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 5. Managing strategic change

- a) Evaluate the effectiveness of current organisational processes.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) Evaluate different types of strategic change and assess their implications.<sup>[2]</sup>
- c) Establish an appropriate scope and focus for organisational process change using Harmon's process-strategy matrix.<sup>[3]</sup>
- d) Assess and advise on possible redesign options for improving the current processes of an organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Recommend a process redesign methodology for an organisation.<sup>[2]</sup>
- f) Manage change in the organisation using models such as Lewin's three stage model.<sup>[2]</sup>
- g) Assess implications of change in an organisation using Balogun and Hope Hailey's contextual features.<sup>[3]</sup>

#### 6. Leading and managing projects

- a) Determine the distinguishing features of projects and the constraints they operate in.<sup>[2]</sup>
- b) Discuss the implications of the triple constraints of scope, time and cost.<sup>[2]</sup>

- c) Prepare a business case document and project initiation document.<sup>[2]</sup>

- d) Analyse, assess and classify the costs and benefits of a project investment.<sup>[3]</sup>
- e) Establish the role and responsibilities of the project manager and the project sponsor.<sup>[2]</sup>
- f) Assess the importance of developing a project plan and its key elements.<sup>[3]</sup>
- g) Monitor and control project risks and slippages, recommending improvements.<sup>[2]</sup>
- h) Discuss the benefits of a post-implementation and a post-project review.<sup>[2]</sup>

## I Professional skills

### 1. Communication

- a) **Inform** concisely, objectively, and unambiguously, while being sensitive to cultural differences, using appropriate media and technology.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) **Persuade** using compelling and logical arguments demonstrating the ability to counter argue when appropriate.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) **Clarify** and simplify complex issues to convey relevant information in a way that adopts an appropriate tone and is easily understood by the intended audience.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 2. Commercial acumen

- a) **Demonstrate awareness** of organisational and wider external factors affecting the work of an individual or a team in contributing to the wider organisational objectives.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) **Use judgement** to identify key issues in determining how to address or resolve problems and in proposing and recommending the solutions to be implemented.<sup>[3]</sup>

- c) **Show insight** and perception in understanding work-related and organisational issues, including the management of conflict, demonstrating acumen in arriving at appropriate solutions or outcomes.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 3. Analysis

- a) **Investigate** relevant information from a wide range of sources, using a variety of analytical techniques to establish the reasons and causes of problems, or to identify opportunities or solutions.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) **Enquire** of individuals or analyse appropriate data sources to obtain suitable evidence to corroborate or dispute existing beliefs or opinion and come to appropriate conclusions.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) **Consider** information, evidence and findings carefully, reflecting on their implications and how they can be used in the interests of the department and wider organisational goals.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 4. Scepticism

- a) **Probe** deeply into the underlying reasons for issues and problems, beyond what is immediately apparent from the usual sources and opinions available.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) **Question** facts, opinions and assertions, by seeking justifications and obtaining sufficient evidence for their support and acceptance.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) **Challenge** information presented or decisions made, where this is clearly justified, in a professional and courteous manner; in the wider professional, ethical, organisational, or public interest.<sup>[3]</sup>

### 5. Evaluation

- a) **Assess** and use professional judgement when considering organisational issues, problems or when making decisions; taking into account the implications of such decisions on the organisation and those affected.<sup>[3]</sup>
- b) **Estimate** trends or make reasoned forecasts of the implications of external and internal factors on the organisation, or of the outcomes of decisions available to the organisation.<sup>[3]</sup>
- c) **Appraise** facts, opinions and findings objectively, with a view to balancing the costs, risks, benefits and opportunities, before making or recommending solutions or decisions.<sup>[3]</sup>

## J Other employability and digital skills

1. **Use computer technology to efficiently access and manipulate relevant information.**
2. **Work on relevant response options, using available functions and technology, as would be required in the workplace.**
3. **Navigate windows and computer screens to create and amend responses to exam requirements, using the appropriate tools.**
4. **Present data and information effectively, using the appropriate tools.**

## 6. Summary of changes to Strategic Business Leader (SBL)

ACCA periodically reviews its qualification syllabuses so that they fully meet the needs of stakeholders such as employers, students, regulatory and advisory bodies and learning providers.

There have been no additions to or deletions from the syllabus.

## 7. Approach to examining the syllabus

The Strategic Business Leader syllabus is examined using a 100% integrated case study, examining across a breadth of organisational functions.

The examination assesses the technical and digital capabilities that potential leaders need to demonstrate in senior positions within organisations but will also be focused on the following professional skills and behaviours:

- Communication
- Commercial acumen
- Analysis
- Scepticism
- Evaluation

Each exam will therefore assess both technical skills and the above professional skills. Whilst marks will be awarded for the relevant technical points that candidates make, up to 20% of the total marks within each exam will be allocated to these professional skills, as determined by the requirements.

The examination requires the demonstration of appropriate digital and employability skills in accessing relevant sources of information to carry out various tasks and being able to use the relevant functionality and technology to prepare and present answers in a professional manner.

These skills are specifically developed by practicing and preparing for the SBL exam, using the learning support content for computer-based exams available via the practice platform and the ACCA website.

### Examination Structure

Pre-seen information will be released two weeks before the exam sitting. The pre-seen contains background and contextual information on the fictitious organisation that the exam will be based on and the industry in which it operates.

Students are expected to familiarise themselves with the pre-seen information in advance of the exam, making sure that they understand the terms and concepts that are included within the pre-seen. Students are not expected to conduct further research into the industry that is covered in the pre-seen.



The examination is based on an integrated case study. The exam itself will contain further information relating to the fictitious organisation in the pre-seen. The information could be from a range of sources, such as extracts of meetings, board reports and spreadsheets.

Each exam will contain three tasks with a varying number of marks. These tasks may require the candidate to take on different roles, depending on the situation.

The number of marks allocated to all these tasks will add up to 100 in total. Within the total marks available, there are 20 professional skills marks. Most tasks will contain professional skills marks. All tasks must be completed.

The examination is of 3 hours and 15 minutes duration, but this includes Reading, Planning and Reflection time (RPRT). This time can be used flexibly at any time during the exam.

### **Guidance on learning hours**

The ACCA qualification does not prescribe or recommend any particular number of learning hours for examinations because study and learning patterns and styles vary greatly between people and organisations. This also recognises the wide diversity of personal, professional and educational circumstances in which ACCA students find themselves.

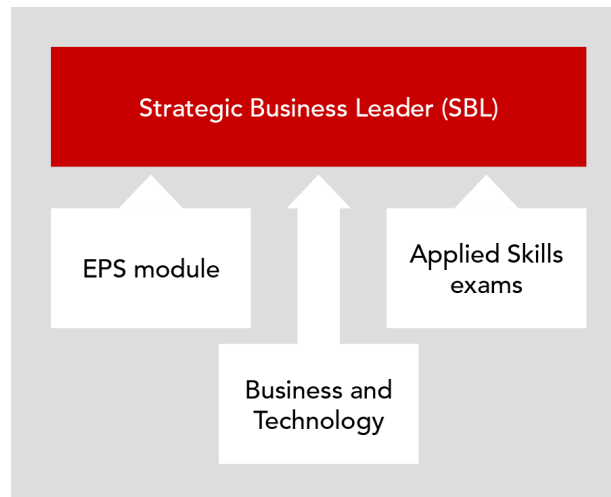
However, the Strategic Business Leader examination has a broad syllabus and the assessment style as a fully integrated exam requires more teaching and learning time than in the other exams at this level. This includes direct contact time and guided learning time where a taught programme is delivered, or self-study and revision time where the student is self-taught or uses distance-learning programmes.

The additional time is required for the following:

1. To cover the broader syllabus content.
2. To allow adequate practice time for case study assessment and revision.
3. To encourage and develop the demonstration of professional skills to support the award of professional skills marks.
4. To become familiar with and understand the information contained within the pre-seen document.

## 8. Relational diagram linking Strategic Business Leader (SBL) with other exams

This diagram shows links between this exam and other exams preceding or following it. This diagram indicates where students are expected to have underpinning knowledge and where it would be useful to review previous learning before undertaking study.



## 9. Guide to ACCA examination structure and delivery mode

The pass mark for all ACCA Qualification examinations is 50%.

The structure and delivery mode of examinations varies.

### Applied Knowledge

The Applied Knowledge examinations contain 100% compulsory questions to encourage candidates to study across the breadth of each syllabus. These are assessed by a two-hour computer-based examination.

### Applied Skills

The Corporate and Business Law exam is a two-hour computer-based objective test examination for English and Global.

For the format and structure of the Corporate and Business Law or Taxation variant exams, refer to the 'Approach to examining the syllabus' section of the relevant syllabus and study guide.

The other Applied Skills examinations (PM, TX-UK, FR, AA, and FM) contain a mix of objective and longer type questions with a duration of three hours for 100 marks. These are assessed by a three-hour computer-based exam. Prior to the start of each exam there will be time allocated for students to be informed of the exam instructions.

The longer (constructed response) question types used in the Applied Skills exams (excluding Corporate and Business Law) require students to effectively mimic what they do

in the workplace. Students will need to use a range of digital skills and demonstrate their ability to use spreadsheets and word processing tools in producing their answers, just as they would use these tools in the workplace. These assessment methods allow ACCA to focus on testing students' technical and application skills, rather than, for example, their ability to perform simple calculations.

### Strategic Professional

#### Essentials:

Strategic Business Leader is ACCA's case study examination at Strategic Professional and is examined as a closed book exam of 3 hours and 15 minutes, including reading, planning and reflection time which can be used flexibly within the examination.

Pre-seen information for the Strategic Business Leader exam will be released two weeks before the exam sitting. The pre-seen information contains background and contextual details in order for students to familiarise themselves with the fictitious organisation that they will be examined on and the industry in which it operates.

The Strategic Business Leader exam will contain new information in the form of exhibits and students are required to complete several tasks. All questions are compulsory and each examination will contain a total of 80 technical marks and 20 professional skills marks.

As this is a closed book exam, the pre-seen information is also available within the examination.

Strategic Business Reporting is a three-hour 15 minutes exam. It contains two sections and all questions are compulsory. This exam contains four professional marks.

#### Options:

The Strategic Professional Options are all three hours and 15 minutes computer-based exams. All contain two sections and all questions are compulsory.

All option exams contain a total of 80 technical marks and 20 professional skills marks.

The question types used at Strategic Professional require students to effectively mimic what they would do in the workplace.

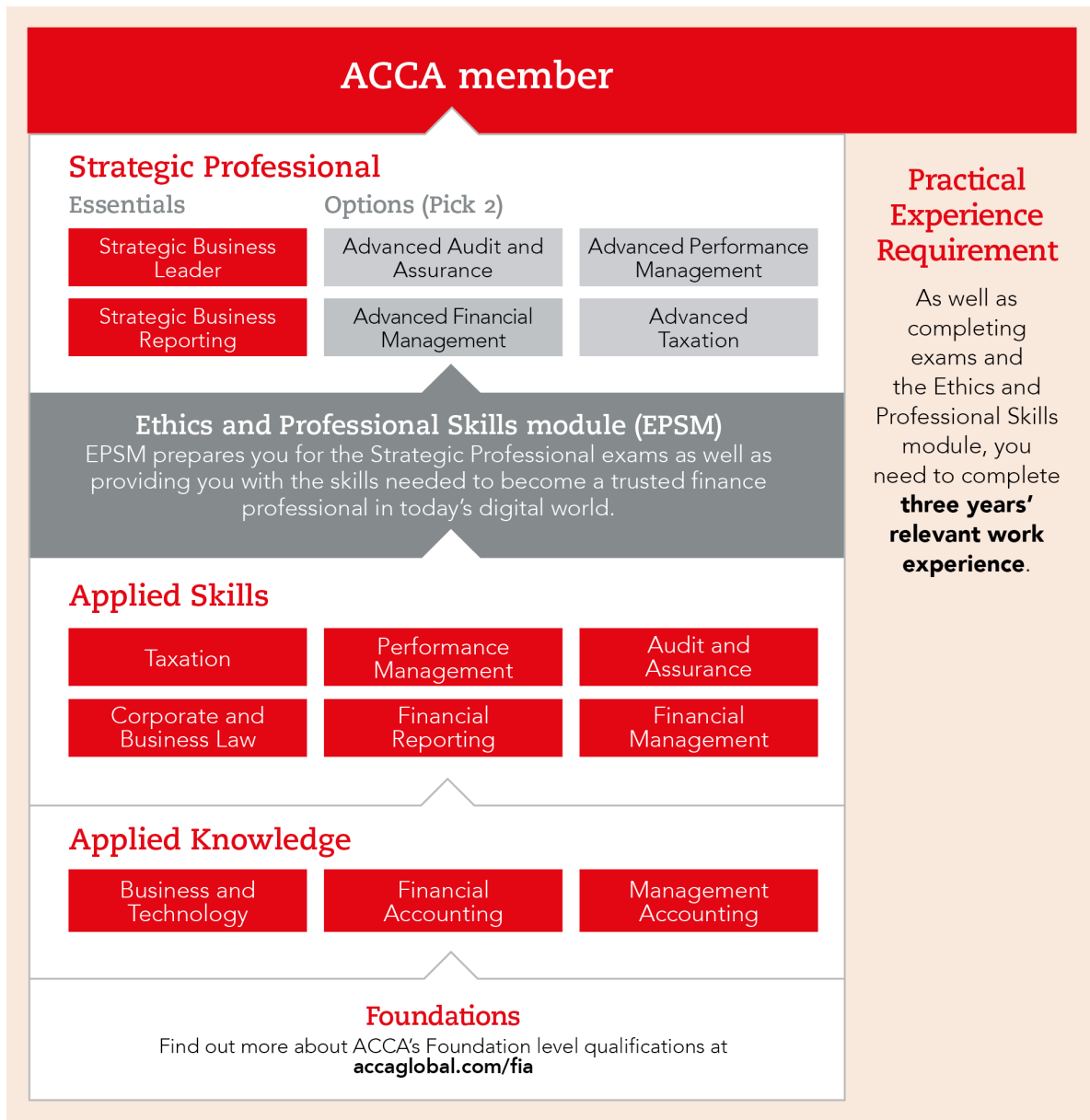
These exams offer ACCA the opportunity to focus on the application of knowledge to scenarios, using a range of tools including word processor, spreadsheets and presentation slides - not only enabling students to demonstrate their technical and professional skills but also their use of the technology available to today's accountants.

### Time management

ACCA encourages students to take time to read questions carefully and to plan answers but once the exam time has started, there are no additional restrictions as to when students may start producing their answer.

Students should ensure that all the information and exam requirements are properly read and understood.

## 10. The structure of ACCA qualification



\*See accaglobal.com for details

## 11. Guide to ACCA examination assessment

ACCA reserves the right to examine any learning outcome contained within the study guide. This includes knowledge, techniques, principles, theories, and concepts as specified. For the financial accounting, audit and assurance, law and tax exams except where indicated otherwise, ACCA will publish *examinable documents* once a year to indicate exactly what regulations and legislation could potentially be assessed within identified examination sessions.

For most examinations (not tax), regulations **issued** or legislation **passed** on or before 31 August annually, will be examinable from 1 September of the following year to 31 August of

the year after that. Please refer to the examinable documents for the exam (where relevant) for further information.

Regulations issued or legislation passed in accordance with the above dates will not be examinable if the **effective** date is in the future, unless explicitly stated otherwise in this syllabus and study guide or examinable documents.

The term issued or passed relates to when regulation or legislation has been formally approved.

The term effective relates to when regulation or legislation must be applied to an entity's transactions and business practices.

The study guide offers more detailed guidance on the depth and level at which the examinable documents will be examined. The study guide should therefore be read in conjunction with the examinable documents list.

For **UK** tax exams, examinations falling within the period 1 June to 31 March will generally examine the Finance Act which was passed in the previous year. Therefore, exams falling in the period 1 June 2024 to 31 March 2025 will examine the Finance Act 2023 and any examinable legislation which is passed outside of the Finance Act before 31 May 2023.

For additional guidance on the examinability of specific tax rules and the depth in which they are likely to be examined, reference should be made to the relevant Finance Act article written by the examining team and published on the ACCA website.

None of the current or impending devolved taxes for Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland is, or will be, examinable.

## 12. Learning hours and education recognition

The ACCA qualification does not prescribe or recommend any particular number of learning hours for examinations because study and learning patterns and styles vary greatly between people and organisations. This also recognises the wide diversity of personal, professional and educational circumstances in which ACCA students find themselves.

As a member of the International Federation of Accountants, ACCA seeks to enhance the education recognition of its qualification on both national and international education frameworks, and with educational authorities and partners globally. In doing so, ACCA aims to ensure that its qualification is recognised and valued by governments, regulatory authorities and employers across all sectors. To this end, the ACCA qualification is currently recognised on the education frameworks in several countries. Please refer to your national education framework regulator for further information.

Each syllabus is organised into main subject area headings which are further broken down to provide greater detail on each area.

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