A-LEVEL BUSINESS • EXERCISE SHEET

7.4 Human resource management strategy

Name: ____________ Class: ________ Date: __________ **Total: 29 marks**

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **human resource management strategy** 人力资源战略—**hard and soft HRM** 硬性和软性人力资源管理, **workforce planning** 人力规划, and **trade unions** 工会 and **collective bargaining** 集体谈判.

You must be able to:

- explain the difference between hard and soft HRM
- describe workforce planning and the role of trade unions
- analyse and evaluate an HRM approach for a business

1 Worked examples

■ Hard vs soft HRM

Hard HRM	Soft HRM
staff = a resource, used at lowest cost	*staff = the most valuable asset, developed*
tight control	training & involvement
short-term contracts	long-term careers
cost-driven	motivation-driven

Two approaches to managing people: hard HRM (cost-driven) versus soft HRM (motivation-driven)

- **Hard HRM:** staff are a resource to use at lowest cost —tight control, short-term contracts.
- **Soft HRM:** staff are the firm's most valuable asset —training, involvement, long-term careers.
- **Trade union:** an organised group of workers; through **collective bargaining** it negotiates pay and conditions for the whole group; if talks fail, members may take **industrial action** (a strike).

Answer shapes: AO1 + AO2 + AO3 (reasoning chain) + AO4 (a supported judgement *in context*).

2 Practice

2.1 State the difference between *hard* and *soft* HRM. [2]

2.2 Define the term *trade union*. [2]

2.3 Define the term *collective bargaining*. [2]

3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Explain one benefit to a business of using a **soft HRM** approach. [3]

3.2 Analyse two reasons why **workforce planning** is important to a business. [8]

3.3 A manufacturer is choosing between a **hard** and a **soft** HRM approach. Evaluate which it should use. [12]

4 Go further

You are now ready for the real exam questions on this subtopic. Open the **7.4 Human resource management strategy** past-paper sheet in the Library, or try this related Paper 3 case-study question in **Practice mode**:

- 9609/31 J25 —Q3 (labour productivity)

Solutions

Business answers are marked by **level of response** against the assessment objectives: award **AO1** knowledge, **AO2** application, **AO3** analysis and **AO4** evaluation.

2.1 hard HRM treats staff as a resource to be used at lowest cost (tight control); soft HRM treats staff as a valuable asset to be developed and motivated (2 for a clear difference; 1 for a partial idea).

2.2 an organised group of workers that speaks and negotiates for its members (2 for a clear definition; 1 for a partial idea).

2.3 negotiation between a trade union and an employer over pay and conditions for a whole group of workers at once (2 for a clear definition; 1 for a partial idea).

3.1 *[3]* **AO1** 1 —name a benefit (higher motivation; lower labour turnover; better skills). **AO2** up to 2 —develop it, e.g. training and involvement make staff feel valued → they stay longer and work better → lower recruitment costs and higher quality (2 developed / 1 limited).

3.2 *[8]* For **each** of two reasons: **AO1** 1 + **AO2** 1 + **AO3** up to 2. Example chains —*right staff at the right time*: planning shows future skill gaps → the firm trains or hires in good time → no shortage that slows production. *Cost control*: planning avoids over-hiring → wage costs stay efficient → higher profit. Maximum 4 per reason, 8 total.

3.3 *[12]* **AO1** 2 / **AO2** 2 / **AO3** 2 / **AO4** up to 6. **Hard HRM:** lower wage costs and flexibility —but low motivation, high turnover and possible poor quality. **Soft HRM:** motivated, skilled, loyal staff and better quality —but higher training and pay costs. Judgement: soft HRM suits a firm relying on skilled, customer-facing staff, while hard HRM may suit low-skill, cost-driven work —the best approach depends on the type of work and the labour market.