

Research Report – sources of information required for the different topics

When you are writing your research report there are 20 different topics to choose from. These topics cover different aspects of the ACCA syllabus and do require different sources of information.

This article will consider the different forms of data and possible data sources for the different topics. This will then help you choose a topic for which you can carry out the required research and plan the collection of data you need.

Primary data is data that has been generated in order to answer the research question (this might be through questionnaires or interviews). Before collecting primary data collection, you must be granted permission by the organisation you are working in and accessing participants through, as well as the participants themselves.

Secondary data is data that is available and that can be used to answer a research question but wasn't generated for that purpose.

Internally available information is information, such as management accounts, generated by an organisation but not publicly available. You must be granted permission to use such data by the organisation that generates the information.

Publicly available information can be published by an organisation (e.g. Annual Reports) or externally generated (press commentary). When using publicly available information it is essential to consider the authenticity of the source, and if you use this information, acknowledge the source by referencing the material.

Use of accountancy / business models

For each topic, you are required to identify and apply relevant accountancy / business models, concepts or theories. Your ACCA study texts (or sources such as the Kaplan Financial Knowledge Bank <https://kfknowledgebank.kaplan.co.uk/>) are a good place to look for relevant models / concepts / theories. This is secondary data (as you are using publicly available information) and you must include a reference for these models / concepts / theories. Justify your choice of model / concept / theory by explaining how and why it relates to your topic.

Evaluate the model / concept / theory by highlighting any limitations of the model / concept / theory particularly in the way that you intend to apply it. Most topics require two models. The models are there to provide a framework to answer your research question.

For each of the topics, I have identified whether primary or secondary data is required, and whether access to internally available documentation is needed.

Research Report Topics

- 1) An analysis and evaluation of **an organisation's budgetary control system** and its links with performance management and decision making.

This topic requires the evaluation of **an organisation's budgetary control system** and so access to internally available information (about budgets and how they are managed) is necessary. In order to evaluate the links with performance management and decision making you should collect primary data (interviews or questionnaires).

- 2) An evaluation of how the introduction of a new technology can assist an organisation in achieving **its business objectives**.

In order to evaluate whether the introduction of a new technology has assisted in the achievement of business objectives, you probably need access to internally generated information. It is unlikely that publicly available information will provide sufficient detail to make an assessment of the success in achieving the organisation's business objectives. Primary data collection might be helpful here.

- 3) An assessment of the potential impact of an aspect of impending legislation on the operations and financial position of an organisation.

The nature of the impending legislation will have been discussed publicly. You do not need to collect primary data, or have access to internally generated information to assess the potential impact of the legislation although these can be helpful in modelling financial impact.

- 4) A review of the business management and accounting issues of environmental costs of an organisation.

In order to review the business management and accounting issues you will probably need access to internally available information. Primary data collection may help you explore the issues (both accounting and management) associated with environmental costs.

- 5) An evaluation of the use of short term and long term Islamic financial instruments and their impact on the financial statements of an organisation.

The use of Islamic financial instruments will have been discussed publicly. You do not need to collect primary data, or have access to internally generated information to assess the impact of these financial instruments although these can be helpful in modelling financial impact.

- 6) A critical review of key factors or indicators in the motivation of employees **in** an organisation.

This topic requires an evaluation of the views of employees within an organisation. Collecting employees' views is primary data collection. You may also need access to internally available information (such as HR policies).

- 7) A critical evaluation of the restructuring of an organisation's operational activities and the effect on the organisation's financial performance.

In order to evaluate a restructuring of an organisation's operational activities you may need access to internally available information. It is unlikely that publicly available information will have sufficient detail to enable you to critically evaluate the impact of the reorganisation. Primary data collection may help you explore the operational issues, and possibly the link with

financial issues. It is important to base the analysis on both the pre- and post-restructure, so that the impact of the restructure is clearly dealt with.

- 8) An analysis and evaluation of the business and financial performance of an organisation over a three year period.

You can analyse and evaluate the business and financial performance of an organisation using secondary, publicly available information. It is essential to consider the credibility of the sources you use.

- 9) A critical evaluation of the planning and implementation of an information system **in** an organisation.
- 10) A review of the effectiveness of the use of costing techniques **within** an organisation.
- 11) An investigation into the financial and operational costs and benefits of the internal audit / internal review activities **within** an organisation.

Each of these three topics asks you to evaluate what is happening within an organisation. At a minimum you will need access to internally generated information, and collecting primary data may help you in the evaluation.

- 12) An investigation into the possible effects of a proposed accounting standard on the financial statements and business activities of an organisation.

The proposed accounting standard will have been discussed publicly. You do not need to collect primary data, or have access to internally generated information to assess the potential impact of the legislation although internal data access may help you with modelling of the financial impact.

- 13) An evaluation of the contribution made by human resource activities to the attainment of business and financial objectives.

In order to evaluate the contribution HR activities make to business and financial objectives you will need access to internally generated information (HR policies and activities). There may be some publicly available information but it is unlikely to be in sufficient depth. Collecting primary data may help you in the evaluation.

- 14) An appraisal of the business and financial objectives of a strategic investment decision made by an organisation and its impact on key stakeholders.

In order to evaluate the impact of a strategic investment decision, you probably need access to internally generated information. If you use publicly available information, you need to ensure there is sufficient detail to enable you make an assessment of the impact of the investment decision.

- 15) An analysis and evaluation of the management of an organisation's working capital over a three year period and its impact on the organisation's funding strategies.

When analysing and evaluating the management of an organisation's working capital, it is very helpful to have access to internally generated information as this enables you to consider the impact on the organisation's funding and asset management strategies. Primary data collection may also be helpful.

16) A critical evaluation of the financial and operational risk management **within** an organisation.

In order to evaluate financial and operational risk management, you probably need access to internally generated information. It is unlikely that publicly available information will provide sufficient detail to enable a critical evaluation. Primary data collection might be helpful here.

17) Select an organisation that has been identified as having **weak** corporate governance structures within the past 5 years. Critically evaluate their corporate governance practices including an assessment of the origins of the corporate governance issue(s) **and the organisation's response**.

You can analyse and evaluate an organisation's corporate governance issues using secondary, publicly available information. Justify your selection of organisation by referring to the corporate governance issues that have been publicly identified.

Do make sure you evaluate the organisation's response. It is essential to consider the credibility of the sources you use. Students can be overly descriptive in this topic. Make sure you identify and use an appropriate model to evaluate the corporate governance issues.

18) A review of the marketing strategy of an organisation and its effectiveness.

You can evaluate the effectiveness of a marketing strategy using secondary, publicly available information. It is essential to consider the credibility of the sources you use. In order to avoid overly descriptive work, use models as a framework for your evaluation. The use of comparator information can also support your evaluation.

19) An analysis and evaluation of the financial and operational consequences of a merger between two organisations or of the acquisition of one organisation by another.

It is possible to research this topic using publicly available information. It is essential to consider the credibility, and timeliness of the sources you use. When, in relation to the date of the merger or acquisition, was the information published? A pre and post merger analysis is essential. Operational consequences must also be covered.

20) Select an organisation that has been identified as having **weak** social responsibility practices within the past 5 years. Critically evaluate their social responsibility practices, including an assessment of the origins of the problem(s) and the organisation's response and the impact of this on the organisation's key stakeholders.

You can analyse and evaluate an organisation's social responsibility issues using secondary data (publicly available information). The organisation must have been publicly accused of poor CSR practice. Avoid being overly descriptive and do make sure you evaluate the organisation's response and the impact on key stakeholders.