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CIMA OCS

Past Paper Breakdown

Operational Case Study — SoPa Case

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Contents

Each past-paper analysis follows the same structure: sitting overview · ranked topics · variant-by-variant breakdown · pitfalls & tips

CIMA OCS Exam: Your Comprehensive Guide to Operational Success

Consolidated View | 13 Exams | 75 Variants

This section provides a complete summary of the CIMA Operational Case Study (OCS) exam, consolidating insights from 13 past exams and 75 variants into one unified guide. It highlights the purpose, structure, and recurring themes of the OCS to help students approach the assessment with confidence. Rather than focusing on one sitting, this guide offers a holistic perspective on management accounting, financial reporting, and operational decision-making in realistic business contexts. By integrating knowledge across CIMA's syllabus and applying it to the current SoPa case, this overview equips candidates for success.

1. General Overview of the CIMA OCS Exam

Purpose of the OCS

The OCS evaluates a candidate's ability to apply management accounting, financial reporting, and decision-support skills in a real-world setting. It tests integration across the Operational level of the syllabus, rewarding clear analysis, commercially sound recommendations, and ethical awareness tailored to the case narrative.

Structure of the Paper

The case study centres on a detailed pre-seen for a fictional company in a specific industry. For the current sitting, that company is SoPa, a Latin American-inspired restaurant chain based in the fictional country of Zeeland, founded by husband and wife Paolo and Sofia Perez. SoPa currently operates nine restaurants, six in the capital city Tombor and three in other major Zeeland cities, with a tenth due to open in July 2026. Revenue for 2025 was Z$41.7m with a gross profit margin of 32.6%. The pre-seen covers restaurant operations, menu and cost structures, supplier management, staffing, financial statements, and strategic challenges including potential expansion into Neeland and diversification into branded dips and home delivery. Candidates take on the role of a Finance Officer within SoPa's Finance Department.

2. Ranked CIMA OCS Topics Across 13 Exams and 75 Variants

The table below ranks the main OCS topic areas identified from ApexQualify’s review of 13 past OCS sittings and 75 variants. The counts reflect our classification of substantive topic appearances across those variants. . Topics at the top should be your revision priority.

🥇 1. Financial Reporting – PPE & Depreciation Key Topic

Tested in: 75 variants across 13 exams

Context: IAS 16 application for recognition, capitalisation, depreciation, and disposal. Frequent adjustments between accounting depreciation and tax allowances.

🥈 2. Costing & Decision-Making – Relevant Costing / Make-or-Buy Key Topic

Tested in: 75 variants across 13 exams

Context: Sunk vs relevant costs, opportunity costs, outsourcing vs in-house decisions, pricing choices, contribution analysis.

🥉 3. Budgeting – Incremental vs Rolling / Beyond Budgeting Key Topic

Tested in: 72 variants across 13 exams

Context: Critiquing incremental budgets, contrasting rolling and beyond budgeting, behavioural issues, flexing for seasonal volatility.

🏅 4. Variance Analysis – Labour Key Topic

Tested in: 70 variants across 13 exams

Context: Labour rate, efficiency, and idle time variances. Links to overtime, training, and productivity.

🏅 5. Working Capital – Receivables & Payables Key Topic

Tested in: 66 variants across 13 exams

Context: Liquidity management, factoring, credit terms, cash flow under seasonal patterns.

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5. Aligning Key Topics to the SoPa Case Study

The following section maps the top 12 ranked topics to specific details in the SoPa pre-seen. Each entry identifies where in the pre-seen the exam angle is set up, with a direct pointer to the likely question focus.

🥇 1. Financial Reporting – PPE & Depreciation Key Topic

SoPa reports property, plant and equipment of Z$11.450m at 31 December 2025 (p.19)→ Material balance sheet item across nine restaurants. Expect questions on depreciation, revaluation, or disposal when equipment is replaced or a restaurant is refitted.

The 2025 cash-flow reconciliation includes a Z$2.320m depreciation add-back for PPE (p.20) → Largest non-cash add-back in the operating cash-flow reconciliation. Could be tested on the difference between profit and cash, or reconciling accounting depreciation to tax allowances.

Zeeland's tax rules allow 25% reducing-balance tax depreciation on plant and equipment, but not on property assets (p.34) → Classic adjustment for reconciling accounting profit to taxable profit.

🥈 2. Costing & Decision-Making – Relevant Costing / Make-or-Buy Key Topic

The proposed SoPa-branded dips create a clear make-or-buy issue because Paolo is considering in-house production against outsourcing (p.13) → A direct make-or-buy scenario. Relevant costing would apply to assess incremental costs of in-house production vs outsourcing.

Budgeted variable restaurant running costs equate to Z$9.30 per cover (p.27) → Provides a basis for relevant cost analysis in decisions around pricing, special contracts, or one-off orders.

Budgeted restaurant running costs are split between Z$8.114m variable costs and Z$12.171m fixed costs → Classic cost behaviour split. Could be tested on identifying relevant vs irrelevant costs in short-term decisions.

3. Budgeting – Incremental vs Rolling / Beyond Budgeting Key Topic

Covers are identified as the principal budget factor for revenue and direct costs (P22) → Budget is built entirely from occupancy assumptions. A task could ask students to critique this approach or assess what happens when occupancy assumptions change.

A tenth restaurant is scheduled to open on 1 July 2026 in a new Zeeland region (P13) → New openings mid-year create forecasting uncertainty. Rolling budgets or flexible budgeting would be more appropriate than a fixed annual budget.

The 2026 budget assumes average occupancy of 85% (P22) → Could be tested via what-if analysis — what is the impact on profit if occupancy falls to 80% or rises to 90%?

Comprehensive Analysis of CIMA OCS Past Paper

November 2025 – February 2026

SumTrix | Ski Manufacturer | Reeland

1. What This Sitting Was About

This sitting centred on SumTrix, a ski manufacturer based in the fictional country of Reeland. The three dominant themes were: (1) production constraints and cost accounting — limiting factor analysis, IFRS 16 lease accounting, and activity-based budgeting for the assembly department; (2) decision-making under uncertainty — payoff tables, expected values, and risk appetite (risk-averse vs. risk-seeking) around a supplier switch and materials ordering decision; and (3) sales performance analysis — price, mix, and quantity variances split across website vs. retailer channels, with KPIs for digital sales and a brief on planning vs. operational variances.

2. Ranked CIMA OCS Topics

From the November 2025 – February 2026 exam, by testing frequency across variants.

🥇 1. Variance Analysis

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Sales price, sales volume, sales mix, material price, material usage, labour efficiency, idle time and fixed overhead variances. Students needed to explain what variances meant, identify likely reasons, and sometimes discuss planning and operational variances.

🥈 2. KPIs and Performance Measurement

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Website sales performance, digital marketing, newsletters, promotional videos, department dashboards, Distribution Centre performance, and staff/coordinator performance. Students needed to suggest suitable KPIs, explain how each would be measured, and justify why each was appropriate.

🥉 3. Financial Reporting

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Leases and right-of-use assets, property, plant and equipment, capitalisation, depreciation, revaluation, assets held for sale, and financial statement treatment of specific transactions. Students needed to explain both the accounting treatment and the impact on profit or loss and the statement of financial position.

🏅 4. Short-Term Decision Making and Risk/Uncertainty

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Expected value, standard deviation, coefficient of variation, decision trees, risk-seeking, risk-averse and risk-neutral approaches, maximax, maximin, minimax regret, relevant costing, make-or-buy decisions, and value of perfect information.

🏅 5. Working Capital Management

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Supplier payment terms, EOQ, inventory levels, credit limits, granting credit to customers, supplier discounts, and the impact of working capital decisions on the operating cycle and cash flow.

🏅 6. Budgeting and Forecasting

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Sales budgets, what-if analysis, beyond budgeting, rolling budgets, zero-based budgeting, activity-based budgeting, trend analysis, seasonality, forecasting accuracy, and the use of big data in forecasts.

🏅 7. Costing Systems and Costing Methods

Tested in: All 6 variants

Context: Activity-based costing, activity-based budgeting, activity cost hierarchy, digital costing systems, marginal costing, absorption costing, under/over absorption, cost allocation, and determining the cost of services or products.

3. Variant-by-Variant Breakdown

Variant 1: Development of the Touring Range of Skis

Scenario: SumTrix is developing its Touring range and needs to make operational, financial reporting, supplier and performance decisions.

Key Requirements:

- Analyse IFRS 16 lease treatment for a press.
- Apply limiting factor analysis and shadow pricing to production planning.
- Compare supplier working capital management.
- Use expected value, standard deviation and coefficient of variation for risk-based decisions.
- Discuss big data for sales budgeting.
- Explain app costing, activity-based budgeting, sales variances, planning and operational variances, and website sales KPIs.

Approach: Focus on applying technical models to the Touring range. Explain the accounting treatment clearly, rank production using contribution per limiting factor, and link supplier and sales performance issues back to cash flow, risk and decision-making.

Variant 2: Newsletter and Website Sales Growth

Scenario: SumTrix is trying to grow website sales using newsletters, promotional discounts and video content.

Key Requirements:

- Interpret what-if analysis for discount levels, sales volumes and variable cost changes.
- Use expected value, standard deviation and coefficient of variation to assess risk attitudes.
- Evaluate EOQ for ski accessories.

- Explain digital costing systems for purchasing and costing.
- Discuss beyond budgeting for production departments.
- Analyse KPIs for newsletter retention, promotional videos and discount use.
- Apply IAS 36 impairment and IAS 2 inventory treatment, plus production variance analysis.

Approach: Link website growth to financial outcomes. Explain whether discounts generate sustainable sales or only short-term sign-ups. Apply risk and budgeting techniques, then use KPIs to judge whether the newsletter and video strategy is actually working.

Variant 3: Expansion into North America

Scenario: SumTrix is considering expanding sales channels into North America and needs forecasts, distribution planning and performance measures.

Key Requirements:

- Use time-series analysis, trend lines and seasonal variations to forecast North American sales.
- Discuss big data and big data analytics for sales forecasts.
- Use a decision tree to choose an agent under a risk-neutral approach.
- Consider inventory levels for the Goods Outwards Warehouse.
- Explain fixed production overhead variances and the activity cost hierarchy.
- Apply revaluation accounting, depreciation and KPIs for the North America Distribution Centre Manager.

Approach: Treat the expansion as a forecasting and control problem. Use trend and seasonal data carefully, explain decision tree logic step-by-step, and connect inventory and KPI choices to the practical risks of entering a new market.

Variant 4: Launching an Adapted Ski Range

Scenario: SumTrix is launching an Adapted range and must assess equipment, demand, costs, credit risks and budget control.

Key Requirements:

- Explain the financial reporting treatment of an old press and new press.
- Use time-series information to assess demand for adapted winter sports equipment.
- Suggest KPIs for new coordinator roles.
- Apply short-term decision-making to buying fully assembled outriggers.
- Explain variances and activity-based costing for the Adapted range.
- Use relevant costing for a minimum bid.
- Assess credit terms and credit limits for Alpine Rush.
- Explain rolling budgets and their impact on motivation and control.

Approach: Apply the models directly to the new product launch. Link demand forecasting to production planning, use relevant costing for pricing decisions, and consider both commercial opportunity and risk when granting credit to a new customer.

Variant 5: Expanding the Accessories Range

Scenario: SumTrix is expanding its accessories and clothing range and setting up a new Distribution Centre.

Key Requirements:

- Explain the benefits of a digital costing system, including internal integration and external supplier links.
- Apply IFRS 16 lease accounting for Distribution Centre equipment.

- Explain the importance of budgets for the new Distribution Centre.
- Use risk-neutral, risk-seeking and risk-averse decision approaches.
- Explain limitations of decision information and the value of perfect information.
- Interpret what-if analysis for clothing and accessories.
- Assess EOQ suitability for helmets and other product lines.
- Explain sales variances, planning and operational variances, and digital marketing KPIs.

Approach: Treat this as a scaling-up decision. Focus on how systems, budgets and inventory controls support a bigger product range. For decision-making questions, clearly separate risk, uncertainty and perfect information.

Variant 6: Developing the Custom Ski Market

Scenario: SumTrix is developing the Custom ski market and needs to assess departmental performance, costing methods, promotional spending, supplier terms and asset treatment.

Key Requirements:

- Explain sales and production variances for Custom skis.
- Analyse Custom Department dashboard KPIs.
- Explain under-absorption and compare absorption costing with marginal costing.
- Apply relevant costing to the SumTrix Live event.
- Use zero-based budgeting for a promotional campaign and support activities.
- Assess working capital and operating cycle changes from supplier payment discounts.
- Apply maximax, maximin and minimax regret to promotional campaign decisions.
- Explain impairment and asset held-for-sale treatment for old equipment.

Approach: Focus on performance control and short-term decision-making. Explain variance meanings precisely, justify relevant and irrelevant costs, and link supplier payment choices to liquidity, working capital and the operating cycle.

4. Common Pitfalls and Tips (Based on Examiner's Report)

Pitfalls

- Giving generic theory without linking to SumTrix.
- Doing calculations but not explaining what the answer means.
- Ignoring cash flow, inventory, supplier terms and seasonal demand.
- Confusing similar topics, such as absorption and marginal costing, or planning and operational variances.
- Suggesting KPIs without saying how they are measured or why they matter.

Tips for Success

- Apply answers directly to SumTrix's products, departments and sales channels.
- Use a clear structure: issue, technique, impact, conclusion.
- For calculations, explain the business meaning of the result.
- For variances, explain the cause, impact and what management should investigate.
- For financial reporting, state the treatment and the impact on the financial statements.
- Practise under timed conditions to keep answers focused and concise.

This is just a sample.

Unlock the complete 81-page OCS Past Paper Breakdown.

You've seen the depth and quality of our analysis. The full guide works through every CIMA OCS sitting available, all 13 past exams and every one of the 75 variants, ranking each examinable topic by how often it has actually appeared, then mapping every topic directly onto the SoPa pre-seen so you know exactly where it is likely to turn up next.

★ Every Paper, Ranked by What Really Matters

We have gone through every publicly available OCS sitting, all 13 sittings and 75 variants, and ranked all 34 examinable topics by testing frequency. built on historical testing patterns: you revise in the exact order the examiner has historically rewarded, so your time goes where the marks are.

★ Every Topic Mapped to the SoPa Case

This is what sets the guide apart. After ranking the topics we tie each one straight to SoPa using the real figures, page references and scenario detail from the pre-seen, plus a full variant-by-variant breakdown of all 13 sittings, so you walk in already knowing how the theory maps onto the case in front of you.

Exam-focused. Practical. Results-driven.