

# Exam Technique

## Tips for passing Diploma exams first time

Passing exams is about technique as well as knowledge. Successful candidates pace their studies, acquire a depth of knowledge and practice their exam technique through taking past papers. Here are some hints and tips you may wish to consider to help you on your Diploma journey:

### Deciding what to study

- Get a copy of your learning statement
- Ensure any relevant prior learning is accredited where applicable
- Plan how you will accumulate the 140 credits required to pass Diploma
- Match subjects to your experience, knowledge and strengths
- Consider combining relevant papers, i.e. JO4, JO5 & AF3
- Consider using one advanced paper towards the total credits required for Diploma
- Bear in mind the potential requirement for 'gap filling', focusing on Tax, Investment and Planning to minimise the need to undertake additional CPD
- Develop at least an 8 week study plan – you could spend circa 100 hours studying each unit (this is an average, some candidates will take longer)

### Learning the material

- Read and understand the syllabus – exam questions will be based on learning outcomes from the syllabus and the indicative content
- Read the whole book at least once
- 2–3 weeks from the exam, practice using past papers
- Pay particular attention to the examiners comments in Exam Guides – they are there to help and give advice on how to avoid common errors
- An Exam Preparation Course with a dedicated Tutor will enable tailored feedback to be given
- Use the free on-line Revisionmate tool provided by CII
- The Patterson Audio CDs are also an effective way of learning, as someone reads the book to you
- Make the most of product provider learning and revision resources
- Don't go it alone – facilitated study groups enable you to get together with your peers
- Revision days are proven to improve chances of exam success
- It's a simple equation; the better prepared you are the higher your chance of passing!

### Preparing for the exam

- Enter for the exam in plenty of time (and at a convenient location)
- Check the confirmation when it comes to ensure you have been allocated your choices (and to give yourself time to resolve any issues)
- Be clear about how you will get to the exam centre on time (and where you will park etc)
- There is a nominal pass mark of 55% and the CII uses a positive marking system, meaning that the examiner will try to give you marks, rather than penalise
- Write legibly and use bullet points where appropriate rather than lots of prose to get your answers across (and make best use of your time)
- Show calculations and workings to demonstrate understanding – sometimes, the final answer is worth a fraction of the total marks
- Read the question carefully – questions do not waste words, so each is there for a reason
- Answer the question written down, not the one you hoped for or wanted to answer
- Relate your answer to specific parts of the question
- Answer the question in the manner asked (list/state/explain briefly/describe etc)
- You will be made aware of the tax regime applicable for the exam you are taking in the syllabus which is updated annually – where relevant use and reiterate the information in the tax tables
- State the obvious, such as the basic rate of income tax, as this may pick up an extra mark
- Remember, the examiner doesn't know that you know, so make it obvious that you know and understand!

**Good luck!**