

This is the second article in the series looking at the Chartered Insurance Institute's (CII) examinations processes. It follows on from the article in the edition of *Financial Solutions* (March/April), looking at the recruitment and training of examiners and assessors and the main roles in the examining process.

This article focuses on an incredibly important part of the process, which is creating our examination and assessment materials and using our quality assurance arrangements to make sure the question papers and marking schemes are as clear, relevant, unambiguous and error-free as is humanly possible.

Overview of the examination paper production process

- 1. Senior examiner appointed:** The senior examiner has overall responsibility for producing the test specification, examination paper and marking scheme.
- 2. Assessor appointed:** To quality-assure the process by ensuring that the balance and weighting of the paper is in accordance with the test specification and syllabus areas.
- 3. Annual syllabus review:** The syllabus is updated and agreed.
- 4. Test specification:** The senior examiner selects the syllabus areas for examining and provides a test specification outlining the appropriate areas for testing for the assessor to review before producing the draft paper.
- 5. Setting the question paper:** The senior examiner writes a minimum of one-third of the questions and other suitably qualified question writers write the remaining, using the test specification. All questions are quality assured by the assessor.
- 6. Questions to senior examiner (if applicable):** The senior examiner reviews the questions from question writers or the bank and selects the appropriate ones. Recommended changes/improvements are fed back to the question writer. Once all amendments have been made, the selected questions are put into a first draft paper.
- 7. Checklist for question writers:** After the question writer/senior examiner has written the question, it must be reviewed against syllabus content, format, language and presentation before submission to the CII. A checklist is provided for each question.
- 8. Questions edited:** The CII co-ordinator reviews and copy-edits the questions. This involves checking syllabus content and ensuring the questions are clearly worded,

CREATING AND QUALITY-ASSURING OUR ASSESSMENTS

Paul Turner reveals how the CII examinations are created and quality checked

grammatically accurate and comprehensible. Once reviewed and amended, they are sent to the senior examiner and the assessor.

- 9. Paper and marking scheme final draft:** The senior examiner and assessor review the question paper and marking scheme, adding amendments and comments. The paper is now ready for the assessor panel meeting (APM).
- 10. APM:** The panel consists of the senior examiner, the assessor and two industry specialists. The draft paper is sent to the APM members at least one week before the meeting. At the meeting, the question paper and marking scheme are reviewed for clarity, technical accuracy, relevance to the syllabus and appropriate level of difficulty. Final comments are added and the paper is returned to the senior examiner for approval.
- 11. CII technical check:** The head of examination operations completes a technical check of the question paper and marking scheme. Comments and suggestions are sent to the senior examiner and the assessor for their consideration.
- 12. Scrutineers:** The scrutineers are subject matter experts not involved in the paper-setting process. They complete the paper as a student under controlled conditions. They then send in their answer papers with a report containing any written recommendations for improvements or queries.
- 13. Senior examiner/assessor's comments:** The senior examiner and assessor review the paper against the scrutineers' comments.

The senior examiner and assessor return the paper with a written report on any amendments. The senior examiner submits a written report on the scrutineers.

- 14. CII technical check:** The director of educational standards and head of examination operations complete final technical checks of the paper and marking scheme. Any comments and suggestions are sent to the senior examiner and assessor.
- 15. Final version of the question paper and marking scheme:** Sent to the senior examiner and the assessor for technical signoff. At this stage, the paper is as it will appear to candidates.
- 16. Final proof:** The paper is checked for proofreading errors only before it is finally checked and signed off by the head of examination operations or an appointed manager or director.
- 17. The final paper:** Once the head of examination operations or appointed manager has finally proofed the paper, there are two options: any last changes proposed should be made and sent back to the senior examiner and the assessor for agreement and a further final signoff; if no technical changes are made, it can be sent for printing.

In a little more detail... Planning for the year

At the end of each year, the syllabuses are reviewed for the next testing period. Each syllabus is reviewed and updated with any

changes in law, regulation or market practice and any known changes before the next testing period. Furthermore, two experienced examiners will review and update syllabuses again remotely after the Budget when significant changes can be introduced, such as the recent announcement on annuities. Amended syllabuses are passed to the head of examination operations and the head of qualifications projects to agree and sign-off any changes. Reading lists are updated by knowledge services. Once signed off, the marked-up syllabuses are sent to the editorial manager in learning solutions so any extra changes can be forwarded to the study text authors.

The team of senior examiners and assessors kickstart the process by identifying which aspects of the syllabus should be assessed in a particular set of examinations, bearing in mind what has gone before and the need to test all aspects of the syllabus in a defined period of time. This sets the tone for the rest of the paper production process.

Paper production schedule

A schedule is set up for each examination session to record the exam paper production cycle for each unit. The schedule also records marking teams, moderators and dates of APM, co-ordination and results moderation meetings. The production schedules are updated daily.

Test specification

On receipt of a contract, the senior examiner is required to complete the test specification form using the current syllabus, identifying the syllabus areas and specific learning outcomes for testing. They must ensure adequate coverage of the syllabus, including all 'core' areas and that there is a fair and equal spread of questions. The senior examiner sends the completed test specification to the assessor for signoff before writing questions.

Setting the question paper

This process is the sole responsibility of the senior examiner and is divided into two stages. The questions are selected and then the examination paper and marking scheme are put together. The senior examiner will write a minimum of one-third of the questions, with the remainder allocated to question writers. All of the questions are checked for technical accuracy and appropriateness by the assessor.

Commissioning question writers

The CII co-ordinator selects question writers to write the remaining questions for the question paper in accordance with the test specification,

explaining their role, appropriate deadlines, the number of questions needed and which learning outcomes/syllabus areas the questions should be based on. Paperwork will only be sent on receipt of signed contracts.

Questions reviewed by senior examiner

As soon as all questions are received and logged, they are sent securely to the senior examiner, who is required to review each question and consider their suitability and content for the paper. If a question is deemed unsuitable or requires revision, the senior examiner completes an evaluation report, providing detailed and constructive feedback for the question writer to amend the question. The senior examiner also completes an assessment form for each question writer.

Questions to be retained in the question bank

For questions to remain in the bank, nothing needs to be moved. The paper copies that the senior examiner returns can be destroyed. These spare questions can be taken to the APM.

Paper and marking scheme first draft

Once all questions in the question paper have been received, logged, processed and edited they should be put together as a first draft paper and marking scheme.

APM

The question paper and marking scheme are reviewed by a panel of industry specialists, along with the senior examiner and assessor. The meeting should consist of the assessor, senior examiner and a minimum of two other panel members. The purpose of the meeting is:

1. The paper is approved and is consistent with previous papers in level of difficulty;
2. The areas tested are within the syllabus;
3. The questions and answers are technically correct;
4. The questions are easily understood by the students (ie no ambiguities or unnecessary complexities and plain English is used);
5. The answers and marks fairly reflect the question asked and can be answered in time;
6. The information provided is sufficient and accurate to answer the question.

Post-APM review

The checked APM version should then be sent to the senior examiner and assessor for a final check to ensure all changes have been recorded correctly and to make any other changes

necessary. The question paper and marking scheme may be sent to the senior examiner and assessor several times before the final draft.

CII technical check

When the agreed post-APM papers are received from the senior examiner and the assessor, the co-ordinator should complete a general check before passing to the head of examination operations for a technical check. Once the technical checks have been completed, the co-ordinator marks up the changes, comments and suggestions in track changes. The marked-up papers are then sent to the senior examiner and the assessor for review to agree one version and return it with any other changes tracked.

Scrutineers

Once the paper has been through the technical check process and confirmed by the senior examiner and the assessor it is ready to be sent to the scrutineers. The final draft paper is sat by scrutineers under exam conditions – ie as close to possible as the conditions under which a candidate would sit the exams. Scrutineers are required to answer all questions on the paper and prepare a report on each question, regarding clarity, technical content and the ability to score the marks in the time available. This is an extremely important part of the process as it can raise new issues that only become evident as a result of a paper actually being sat in this way.

Sending scrutineer papers to the senior examiner and the assessor

The senior examiner marks the answer books and provides a feedback report for each scrutineer on the overall performance of the scrutineer and their comments. The senior examiner and the assessor review the question against the scrutineer's performance and make any necessary changes. The feedback form completed by the senior examiner should then be sent directly to the scrutineer with the feedback letter.

Final check

The director of educational standards checks the scrutineers' comments and the responses and raises any queries with the head of examination operations and the senior examiner. Any final amendments are signed off and the paper is ready for printing.

The next article in this series will look in some detail at the script marking process. 📄

Paul Turner is director of educational standards at the CII