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# *CSQS webinar on exam paper analysis*

Sopna Thomas, Wednesday 12 October 2016, 5:30pm



# *Today's session*

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The aim of today's session is to help you use past exam papers and suggested answers to your advantage as you prepare for an exam.

# *Agenda*

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## **Here are the areas we will cover today:**

1. Analysing the exam paper – focus on rubric
  2. Approaches to different styles of question
  3. Learning from student scripts
  4. Learning from examiners' comments
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# *Approaching an exam question - rubric*

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## **Two things to consider when approaching an exam question:**

1. What is the topic/knowledge/content I am expected to demonstrate?
2. What is the command word asking me to do? What form should my question take?

Don't forget to look at the mark allocation and ensure that you are not writing too much or too little.

# List of command words

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## CSQS study support

Welcome to the study support hub - designed to provide information and resources to support anyone studying CSQS.

Here you can find detailed support on each of the CSQS modules, plus a number of general study resources to assist you at any level of CSQS.

**Level one modules**

- Financial Reporting and Analysis
- Applied Business Law
- Corporate Governance
- Health Service Governance
- Corporate Law

**Level two modules**

- Financial Decision Making
- Strategy in Practice
- Corporate Secretarial Practice
- Chartered Secretaries Case Study

**General CSQS resources**

- Exam preparation
- Exam timetable
- Recommended study texts
- Find a tuition provider

Understanding command words in exam questions

## Command verbs and approaches to exam questions

Question requirement beginning with	Definition and examples of CSQS exam questions
<b>Advise</b>	Provide recommendations and offer solutions (e.g. Corporate Law: advise X on any other legal petitions he may be able to make and the remedy he might expect to secure)
<b>Analyse</b>	Separate information into components and identify characteristics (e.g. Corporate Governance: analyse the criticisms which are made regarding the effectiveness of NEDs)
<b>Comment</b>	Give brief conclusions on...
<b>Define</b>	Give the exact meaning of (e.g. Financial Reporting and Analysis: define each of these terms, giving an example of each: financial assets, financial liabilities and equity).
<b>Describe</b>	Explain fully and clearly, the details and facts of... (e.g. Health Service Governance: describe the types of conflicts of interest for directors).
<b>Discuss</b>	Write about in detail, taking into account different issues or points of view. (e.g. Corporate Governance: discuss the factors that can affect decision-making and board effectiveness)
<b>Evaluate</b>	Judge the suitability of...
<b>Explain</b>	Make clear the meaning, purpose of/justification for... (e.g. Corporate Law: explain the key legal benefits and shortcomings of using a private company limited by shares to operate the business, in contrast to operating the business as a general partnership)
<b>Outline</b>	Describe briefly without elaboration or explanation (e.g. Applied Business Law: outline the importance of data protection laws)
<b>Prepare</b>	Make or get ready for use (e.g. Financial Decision Making: prepare a monthly cash budget for the first four months of the year ended 31 May 2016)
<b>Recommend</b>	Select and then communicate a preferred solution or course of action (e.g. Strategy in Practice: Recommend an appropriate alternative strategic management model to the one employed by Marsh)

# *Approaching an exam question - rubric*

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## **Helping you make sense of the command words:**

- Describe: portray in words.
- Explain: to make clear the meaning.
- Identify: recognise and correctly name.
- Discuss: examine critically .

# *Approaching an exam question - rubric*

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## **Helping you make sense of the command words:**

- Analyse: examine in detail.
- Evaluate: reach a conclusion.
- Recommend: to offer routes as being appropriate or examples of good practices and procedures.
- Prepare/Provide: put together (a report/briefing note).

# *Examples of rubric from CSQS exam papers*

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## **How this works in an exam paper:**

CG: Prepare a report to the board of Diagon in which you explain what the overarching corporate governance principles described within the original King Code are.

ABL: Explain the rights of the data subject under the Data Protection Act 1998.

ABL: Discuss an individual's right to suitable alternative employment under the Employment Rights Act 1996.

## *Examples of rubric from CSQS exam papers*

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### **How this works in an exam paper:**

SiP: Using the findings from Marsh's consulting report, evaluate the key success factors required to maintain a leading position in the global bicycle manufacturing industry.

CL: Identify the legal business structures Amy and Brian could adopt to run their business, including the different types of registered company, and describe the key distinguishing legal characteristics of each.

Other possibilities: FRA: Calculate the non-controlling interest at 31 October 2015.

# *Examiner's comments on rubric/mark allocation*

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## **Corporate Governance:**

The command words used and the marks available for the parts of a question serve to act as a guideline for candidates as to the amount of detail that is required. Too many candidates provide excessive, and mostly irrelevant, information for questions where only around 8 marks are available.

For questions with higher marks available, candidates need to appreciate that a sufficient depth of knowledge will be required on the relevant topic in order to perform well.

# *Examiner's comments on rubric/mark allocation*

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## **Strategy in Practice:**

As this paper sits in the advanced section of the ICSA examinations, questions usually required candidates to apply critical and applied thinking skills and to use their own voice (supported by case and academic material) to provide insights and well-argued opinions as responses to the questions. Precise knowledge of the requirements of the key question command verbs appeared irregular.



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# *Past exam questions and rubric*

1. Assess 2. Evaluate 3. Explain 4. Analyse 5. Report



# *1. Assess questions*

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Weigh up to what extent something is true. Persuade the reader of your argument by citing relevant knowledge/principles but also remember to point out any flaws and counter-arguments as well. Conclude by stating clearly how far you are in agreement with the original proposition.

# *Assess questions*

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## **Applied Business Law, Q5 June 2016**

Bob works as an accounts clerk at a local college. He was injured three years ago in a car crash and has since had to use a wheelchair. Before the crash he did not have strong religious beliefs, but this changed when he was recovering from his accident and he became part of a religious group in which all the followers grow their hair long.

As part of a major reorganisation, the college is moving the accounts department from the ground floor onto the third floor. The college does not have a lift and Bob tells his office manager that he will not be able to work on the third floor, as he cannot use the stairs. The manager says that if Bob cannot get to the third floor he will have to leave the job.

## *Assess questions*

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Bob was considering applying for a job advertised by a different employer. However, the advertisement stated: “Must be of smart appearance; no long hair, earrings, tattoos etc.” Bob applied for the job anyway. He was invited for interview but when the employer saw his long hair he refused to interview him.

### **Required**

**Assess** the likely outcome in relation to claims for discrimination which Bob could make. *(25 marks)*

## *Examples from the suggested answer*

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### **A assess question so you need to weigh up to what extent something is true:**

In determining what is reasonable for the employer to do regard should be had to the extent to which taking a particular course of action would prevent the discriminatory effect, the extent to which it is practicable for the employer to take that step, the financial and other costs of so doing, the employers' financial resources and the financial and other assistance available to him in doing so (*O'Hanlon, HMRC (2006)*) It must be reasonable, in all the circumstances of the case, for the employer to have to undertake the adjustments. This is an objective test for the Employment Tribunal to decide.

## *Examples from the suggested answer*

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### **However, you need to weigh up whether Bob has a case...**

Clearly, Bob is being discriminated against by being told that if he cannot get to the third floor, he will have to leave his job. The issue is then what reasonable adjustments his employer would be required to make. The college does not have a lift and it may not be reasonable to require the college to install one. But, as a college, it should cater for disabled students therefore the tribunal may find that it would be reasonable for the college to install a lift. Alternatively, Bob could have his desk on the ground floor or he may be able to work from home as the nature of his job does not seem to require him to be on site. If his employer fails to make such adjustments as the tribunal deems reasonable then he would be able to make a claim for compensation for discrimination.

## *A student script*

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### **When answering this question, a student wrote:**

Should Bob be made to leave the college for the reason that no lift can be installed, he would automatically have a claim for unfair dismissal because of his protected characteristic under the Equality Act 2010. Because of this he will also not have the usual qualifying period for regular employees.

Bob would likely succeed in his claim against the college because they have not taken reasonable steps to accommodate his disability and find him suitable alternative

## *Strengths and weaknesses of this response*

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- ✓ Clearly identifies the correct legal rule and links to the command word
- ✓ Able to use the correct terminology 'protected characteristic'
- ✗ The response fails to explain what this means, not a developed answer
- ✓ The student developed all other areas of disability discrimination

They gained 15/25 marks overall.

## *2. A 12 mark 'evaluate' question*

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### **Strategy in Practice, Question 1 June 2016**

Using the findings from Marsh's consulting report, evaluate the key success factors required to maintain a leading position in the global bicycle manufacturing industry.



## *A 12 mark 'evaluate' question*

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### **Examiner's comments:**

'The key to answering this question part was to firstly ensure a correct conceptual understanding of a key performance indicator (KPI) and then both identify and evaluate the importance of KPIs in the case context. There was no definitive right order or 'set' of KPIs...'



## *A 12 mark 'evaluate' question*

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Suggested answer (extract only):

Market selection is an important factor. Current industry estimates indicate that East Asia may be the best potential marketplace and this should be the primary focus. It is however important that manufacturers ensure a degree of flexibility in their market focus to accommodate any future variations in geographical demand patterns (the report, disappointingly, does not address this). Manufacturers should consider downsizing or even divesting activities in the USA given the deterioration of market prospects.



## *A student script*

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### **When answering this question, a student wrote:**

Market place: a critical success factor could be the market in which you operate. If a manufacturer is within a growing market for bicycles then they have an advantage over manufacturers who may need to export their products to customers which is an additional cost.

## *Strengths and weaknesses of this response*

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- ✓ Clearly identifies a KPI
- ✓ Attempts to develop the response with an example but limited.
- ✗ The response does not go into any detail about strategies that manufacturers could adopt in a particular market place or how it relates to Marsh

For this section, the student gained 6.5/12 marks

### *3. A question starting with 'explain'*

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#### **Corporate Governance, Q1 June 2016:**

1 (b) **Explain** how Bryant and its board can overcome the issues it is experiencing, discussing the specific contributions that you and Louise can make to this process of improvement. (13 marks)

## *Suggested response (extract)*

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The **technical nature of** the industry in which Bryant operates makes the papers difficult to understand. The board could invite a member of the **relevant technical team**, or external advisor, to attend a meeting and present to the board. An initial presentation could perhaps be made in advance of a proposal being formally considered by the board. In this way, the board would be provided with an overview of the proposal before receiving the more detailed paper for consideration. Likewise, a relevant expert could be asked to be available on the day of the board meeting should they be required to answer any questions.

## *Student response (extract)*

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Ask technical team and external advisers to come in for the briefings before board meetings. May look to set up a separate technical committee with independent NED as a chair.

Louise and the Company Secretary should work together to ensure board papers are more clear, accurate, not containing jargon and set out with plenty of time to be digested.



## *Student response (extract)*

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The Company Secretary needs to meet with board members to ensure they are given advice and support needed.

The Company Secretary should be the secretary of the nomination committee and support chairman in appointing another NED if this is decided with board approval.

## *Strengths and weaknesses of this response*

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- ✓ Clear structure throughout the entire response
  - ✓ Improvements explained and kept within parameters of an 'explain' question
  - ✗ There is some **limited** explanation of why this is a valid solution
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## *4. An 'analyse' question*

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### **Strategy in Practice, November 2015:**

Using appropriate frameworks and models, **analyse** the current organisational culture at Harp.

(12 marks)



# *An 'analyse' question*

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## **Strategy in Practice:**

Analyse questions, especially with a scenario, need a sound understanding of the relevant analysis models. You need to think about the scenario and how it relates to the organisation in question.

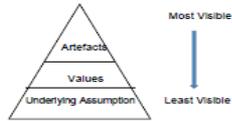
The correct approach in this kind of question is to use models as **tools of analysis** and combine with case material and analyse the key points.



# A student script

'Culture' is a very fluid concept and one which is difficult to define. Ultimately it is a view of 'how we do things around here'. It is very unique to each organisation and is influenced by many factors (There are outlined by Johnson et Al's frames of reference, although this will not help analyse the culture).

The first model that I will apply is Schein's approach to culture. This characterises the elements of culture into 3 headings, Artefacts values, and underlying assumptions. This is demonstrated in the figure below.



Taking each in turn, and applying them to Harp:

- **Artefacts:** There are the most visible elements of culture. Harp appears to have very prestigious clients and has a reputation for high salaries. It will therefore have a visible reputation on a high end firm. This is further supported by its high prices.
- **Value:** Harp appears to have strong values that maintain their traditional approach to many elements of work. They have a low turnover of staff so these values will be well embedded.
- **Underlying Assumptions:** These are the underlying factors upon which the organisation is built. For Harp, there are the fact that it is a traditional practice that has been built from a small family owned practice into what it is now today.

A second framework that might be applied is that of Deal and Kennedy. Their matrix allows us to place organisations into one of four categories: 'Macho', work hard play hard, bet your company, process.

High      Fast      ←————→      Slow

Urgency/ Nature of work	Macho Organisation	'Bet your company' Process
	'Play hard work hard'	

Low

I would place Harp in the 'Macho' organisation category. These companies have high feedback and deal with fast paced work. They also appear at the forefronts of career paths which a law firm is.

Thirdly we could look at Johnson et al Cultural Wed. This considers the below:

- **Power Structure:** Hierarchical structure in Harp which instils traditional roles and values
- **Organisational Structure:** This is traditional and divisional although has no specialist functional departments. This might be an area for Harp to make big improvements.
- **Control Systems:** We do not know too much about Harps control systems, however client feedback might go some way to initializing one.
- **Rituals and Routines:** Harp appears to be stuck in their traditional ways with regards to IT, training and recruitment. This might also be an area for development.
- **Symbols:** Harp is attempting to maintain a traditional law firm symbol when this may be out of date, and ultimately restrictive.
- **Stories:** Harps story is one of a family practice which ultimately underpins its cultural restrictions.

## Examiner's comments

You show good levels of technical understanding in this answer together with excellent awareness of key models. You apply Schien well but please avoid drawing out the models: just get on and apply them. You also need to provide more evidence from the case and via argumentation to substantiate application of points e.g. "Macho."

## *Examiner's comments on a student response*

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### **Strategy in Practice:**

You show good levels of technical understanding in this answer together with excellent awareness of key models. **You apply Schien well but please avoid drawing out the models: just get on and apply them.** You also need to provide more evidence from the case and via argumentation to substantiate application of points.



## 5. A 'report' question

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### Strategy in Practice:

(b) In light of the concerns raised in the Rogers report, **draft a brief report** to the board of Harp, recommending appropriate changes to Harp's organisational structure which will be required to maximise its competitive sustainability.

(13 marks)



## *An 'report' question*

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### **Suggested answer:**

To answer this part of the question, candidates were required to set their answer out in the style of a board report:

To:

From:

Date:

Subject:





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# *Approaching exam questions: some techniques*



# *Critical reading*

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- For some modules you will need to answering questions that start with ‘discuss’, ‘evaluate’ , ‘assess’.
  - Critical reading will help with this – read and look for the arguments, look at facts and consider different opinions.
  - Think about how you would write about this topic.
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## *Focus on your weak points*

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- Select some questions from past papers- which ones do you find most difficult?
  - Study hardest, and early, on these areas while maintaining a good knowledge of stronger sections
  - Run through the relevant questions *after* studying each topic area.
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# *Timing*

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- Select some questions from a past papers – practice the 15 minutes reading time and how you would read, select and understand a question. Can you plan too?
  - Timed questions and check content and style
  - Read through past papers and check that you understand all the rubric.
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## *Next webinar*

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I will be running a webinar on Tuesday 15 November on exam strategy, 5:30 – 6:15 pm UK time.

Details on MyICSA and email to follow.

# *Contacts*

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If you have questions about payments, registering for exams, your exam centre or accessing any online details and logging into MyICSA, please contact our Client Relations team at:

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*Good luck!*

