



Pathways to Membership

PREPARING YOUR EXAMINATION OF EXPERIENCE SUBMISSION

Please refer to the application form when reading these notes – references such as Section 3, Part 1 relate to sections of the application form. You can download the application form from the ICAEW website at [icaew.com/pathways](https://www.icaew.com/pathways)

The Examination of Experience requires you to answer questions using examples from your career to date, highlighting your professional and transferable skills. Professional skills are applicable whether you work in academia, audit, consultancy, tax or other accounting related areas.

As a guide, you should expect to spend at least two days considering, writing and reviewing your application.

The expected length of your answers at the Examination of Experience Part 1 is between 3,000-6,000 words – with approximately 500 words per question. If you go too far either side of this guide, the examiners may reject your answers, assuming that you lack experience or that you are unable to summarise concisely. As a guide, each answer should fill approximately one page of typed A4 paper.

The examiners are looking for evidence of your personal involvement. Please prepare your answers in the first person, using the word 'I' rather than 'we'. If you currently work or have worked as part of a team (or lead a team), please make your personal role and skills within that team clear. Do not use standard textbook answers and do not copy phrases from the illustrative examples published on our website or used at our workshops.

Plagiarism, i.e. incorporating within your work, work (published or unpublished in whatever format or medium) created by another person, is considered to be **misconduct**. Where ICAEW believes misconduct may exist, the case will be referred to ICAEW Assessment Committee for investigation and potential disciplinary action, and referral to candidate's current professional body.

If your experience is in a specialist area, please explain it in a way that an experienced chartered accountant in general practice would understand. Avoid unnecessary use of jargon. **Overly technical answers to the questions are unlikely to be highly rewarded.**

In Part 2 (Summary of Employment) you should provide information about your responsibilities at work broken down year-by-year for the last five years. **You should only draw upon your last five years' work experience in answering the questions in Part 1. You should clearly reference which year of your experience each of your answers is drawn from.**

Start each answer on a new page and write the question at the top of your answer sheet, so that you can easily refer to it when compiling the answer. This will help you to ensure your answer is specific to the question. Keep your answer focused on what is necessary for each question. For example, in answering Question 3.1 make sure you describe the various options available to you, and in Question 4, make sure you actually do describe some advice that you gave. Make sure that you state which year of your five years' experience each answer is drawn from.

Finally, if your first submission isn't successful, don't be put off – re-submit. However, make sure you carefully read the feedback we give you. This will be specific to your submission and will help you in addressing the examiners' concerns about particular answers. For re-submitted questions, do remember also to still keep within the suggested guidance of one A4 page for your answers.

Pass criteria

ICAEW Examination of Experience is designed to test candidates' professional experience of a number of skills, through five questions. The five questions seek evidence of skills ranging from the identification of issues (Question 1) through to dealing with an ethical issue (Question 5).

Because the examination is for full membership of ICAEW, it is necessary for candidates to provide a reasonably broad range of evidence of these skills in order to pass.

Reflecting this, the requirement to pass Pathways is as follows:

- 60% and higher is a pass, irrespective of how many questions are passed.
- 55% to 59% is also a pass as long as no more than one of Q1 to 5 are failed.

For Questions 1 to 4, which have two parts, a question is the combination of the two parts. For example, the mark scored by a candidate for Question 1 is the total of the marks achieved for the two parts of that question. For Questions 1 to 4, the pass mark is 11 out of 20. For Question 5, which has just one part, the pass mark is 6 out of 10.

There are 100 marks available in total, with a combined 10 marks being awarded for good presentation of the submission (both format and language) and for appropriate use of candidates' last five years' work experience.

Providing evidence of your professional skills

You should only draw upon your last five years' work experience when answering the questions, with the date measured back from your first submission date.

The examiners will be assessing your higher professional skills, planning, analysis, judgement and awareness of current and technical issues. Low-level skills or experiences (e.g. basic IT, compilation of reports, diary management) will not be rewarded.

The examiners will be looking for depth and breadth in your experience, so you are advised to use examples covering the whole five years of your recent work experience. You are advised not to use the same example to answer more than one question.

Including irrelevant information will impair the quality of your answers. Using multiple examples to answer the same question is likely to score lower marks than using one well-articulated example. Repeated examples may miss the point of the question; or provide insufficient depth of discussion.

There will be no cross marking of questions. If you have already described a situation under one question that you are considering using for another, you should clearly differentiate between the two aspects of the experience in order to demonstrate how it is relevant to both questions, however, you are advised to use different examples to answer each question.

Your sponsor must sign your application to confirm that the information and evidence provided by you is true and accurate. The examiners will expect that the sponsor has read your submission and

is satisfied that it is true and accurate. Sponsors should also be mindful that candidates are not permitted to plagiarise work from other people, or from ICAEW illustrative examples.

If you fail the Examination of Experience and choose to re-submit, you may still draw upon the five years' experience that you used in your first application, even though by the time you re-submit, some of that experience will be older than five years.

Detailed guidance on each question

In order to help you choose an appropriate issue or situation to answer some of the questions it may be helpful to consider the following.



Questions 1, 2 and 4 could be considered to follow the life cycle of work that is typical in an accountancy practice or in a business or in other professional settings.

Question 1 asks you to describe a situation where you **identified** an issue. The question specifically asks you to describe **how** you identified that issue.

Question 2 asks you to describe a situation where you have **analysed** an issue. This question asks for evidence of detailed work that you might have fulfilled after an issue has been identified.

Question 4 asks you to provide evidence of a situation where you have provided **advice**. The question tests the application of skills in providing that advice.

The skills to be able to **identify**, **analyse** and **advise** are different, and typically occur at different times in the life cycle of a project, as illustrated in the diagram below.

Question 3 asks you to provide evidence of situations in which you made judgements. Question 3.1 probes a situation where you were faced with options as to how to proceed. Question 3.2 asks you to provide an example of a situation in which you prioritised a set of issues that needed to be dealt with.

Q1.1 and 1.2 – Identification of issues

‘Using your recent work experience, describe how you identified two different business or professional issues.’

These are the Examination of Experience questions that typically get answered least well.

The key to answering this question well is to ensure that you provide sufficient information about **how an issue was identified**.

Example scenarios:

- Audit planning – how you **identified** a major issue to focus on
- **how** you **discovered** that your client had a cash flow problem
- **how** you **discovered** that your client’s worsening financial results were due to poor stock control.

- **how you discovered** that your department was not meeting its efficiency, economy or effectiveness goals

Highly rewarded:

- Description of how you discovered a high-level issue
- ‘I reviewed’, ‘I compared’, ‘I noticed that’, ‘I discussed with’
- Not definitive analysis – but likely to lead to detailed analysis at a later stage.

The table below illustrates two types of answer that are likely to get high marks for this question. These are the **brand new discovery of an issue** and the **discovery of the causes of a known issue**. Both of these situations are likely to require high-level analysis.

Things to avoid:

- generic audit risk models unless tailored to a specific situation
- advice
- recommendations.

Table: Type of answer that is likely to get high marks for Q1.1 and 1.2

In each of the examples used in the table, the key type of work performed is highlighted.

<u>Very likely</u> to be a suitable situation	<u>Likely</u> to be a suitable situation
Discovery of a new issue	High-level probing of a known issue to discover the underlying cause(s)
Examples:	Example:
During the 2015 audit at XYZ Ltd, I discovered that debtors were seriously under-stated . I discovered this by comparing the 2015 debtors to the 2014 debtors. This was confirmed by a quick estimate of debtor days for the 2 years, which had changed markedly.	There was a cash flow problem at ABC Ltd. By performing a high-level review of ABC Ltd’s management accounts, I discovered that the reason for its cash flow problems was that its debtor days had increased from 90 to 120, and its creditor days had stayed stable at 45 days.
During my review of ABC Ltd’s management accounts for December 2014 I discovered that there was a cash flow problem . I noticed this by comparing the closing cash figure to that for November. A quick estimate of sales margins made it clear that heavy discounting had occurred in December, which was exacerbated by a fall in revenue in the month.	

Checklist for questions 1.1 and 1.2

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Evidence of your PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT in your chosen example;**
- **That you have chosen A PROFESSIONAL ISSUE;**
- **That the issue is at an APPROPRIATE LEVEL;**
- **That the issue that you have used is WELL DESCRIBED; and**
- **That you have described HOW YOU IDENTIFIED your issue.**

Q2.1 – Analysis using technical expertise / business knowledge

‘Using your recent work experience, describe how you have used your technical expertise and/or business knowledge to analyse a business or professional situation.’

To answer this question well you must clearly articulate the technical expertise or business knowledge that you used to perform the analysis that you did. The analysis needs to be well described.

The key to passing this question is demonstrating the application of technical expertise or business knowledge to the analysis of a situation.

Example technical expertise:

- audit processes
- tax knowledge
- business takeover rules
- exam assessment
- complex accounting issues.

Example business knowledge:

- how takeovers tend to proceed
- how to sell a business
- how to assess whether a market segment is attractive.

Highly rewarded:

- good description of the scenario
- description of the technical expertise that you used **or** the business knowledge that you needed in this situation
- good description of the analysis undertaken.

Things to avoid:

- no analysis
- simply stating that you knew what to do based on ‘experience’
- detailed advice or recommendations.

Checklist for question 2.1

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- Evidence of your **PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT** in your chosen example;
- That you have chosen an **APPROPRIATE SITUATION** (which entailed you performing some analysis);
- That the situation that you have used is **WELL DESCRIBED**;
- That the technical expertise / business knowledge that you used is **CLEARLY DESCRIBED**;
- That the technical expertise / business knowledge that you used is **RELEVANT** to the situation; and
- That there is a clear **DESCRIPTION OF THE ANALYSIS** you undertook.

Q2.2 – Analysis using numerical techniques

‘Using your recent work experience, demonstrate how you have used numerical techniques to analyse a business or professional situation.’

To answer this question well you should clearly articulate what numerical techniques you used, how you used them and how they helped you perform some analysis.

The key to passing this question is to demonstrate evidence of the application of numerical techniques to analysis.

The key skill is the ability to analyse data.

Example numerical techniques:

- net present value
- discounted cash flow
- internal rate of return
- data modelling and regression analysis
- statistical measurements
- break even forecasts
- sensitivity analysis.

Highly rewarded:

- clear description of the numerical technique used
- relevant numerical technique to the analysis performed
- good description of the analysis undertaken.

Things to avoid:

- no mention of numerical techniques
- textbook descriptions of numerical techniques, not tailored to the situation
- only brief details of analysis performed
- detailed advice or recommendations.

Checklist for question 2.2

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- Evidence of your **PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT** in your chosen example;
- That you have chosen an **APPROPRIATE SITUATION** (which entailed you performing some analysis);

- **That the situation that you have used is WELL DESCRIBED;**
- **That you have CLEARLY DESCRIBED why the numerical techniques that you used were appropriate;**
- **That the numerical techniques that you used are RELEVANT to the situation; and**
- **That there is a clear DESCRIPTION OF THE ANALYSIS you undertook.**

Q3.1 – Choosing between options

‘Using your recent work experience, describe how you have used professional judgement in choosing between options.’

To answer this question well you need to give a clear description of **mutually exclusive** options. In addition, you should show how you have made or recommended a choice based on a **clearly explained rationale**.

Example situations:

- leasing versus buying an asset
- different forms of disbursement by a company
- different forms of legal entity structure for a business
- different research areas for funding.

Highly rewarded:

- there is more than one way to proceed
- a choice must be made
- typically, the options will be mutually exclusive
- judgement demonstrated.

Things to avoid:

- options not described
- when the ‘options’ can all be taken forward, either concurrently or in series
- no choice made between the available options
- describing ‘the best option’ without explaining why it is the best.

Checklist for question 3.1

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Evidence of your PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT in your chosen example;**
- **That you have chosen an APPROPRIATE SITUATION (which entailed you being faced with a set of mutually exclusive options);**
- **That the situation that you have used is WELL DESCRIBED;**
- **That there is clear DESCRIPTION OF OPTIONS that were available to you,**
- **That you have described the advantages and disadvantages of each option;**
- **That you have SELECTED ONE OF THE OPTIONS; and**
- **That you have described the RATIONALE for selecting one of the options FOR THIS SPECIFIC SITUATION**

Q3.2 – Prioritisation of issues

‘Using your recent work experience, demonstrate how you have applied professional judgement to prioritise issues.’

The key to answering this question well is to list a set of issues that all need addressing but for which there are resource or time constraints, meaning that they cannot all be performed concurrently.

Example situations:

- tasks required to be completed in a disposal
- tasks needing to be completed in the re-financing of a business
- issues that need to be resolved before a tax investigation can be concluded.

Highly rewarded:

- a scenario where several things ‘need to be done’
- a time or resource constraint means that they cannot all be done at the same time
- judgement needed to choose the order in which things should best be done
- rationale given for choice of order in which things should be done.

Things to avoid:

- where a natural order or sequence dictates what order in which the issues should be done; in this case there would be no need for a judgement to be made.
- where it would not matter what order a number of tasks were undertaken as none is more important or urgent than any other.
- describing a generic busy workload.
- using a scenario of day-to-day practice management issues, which would not require an accountant to prioritise them.
- providing a list of issues in the order in which you carried them out, without explaining how you decided that this was the most appropriate order.

Checklist for question 3.2

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Evidence of your PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT in your chosen example;**
- **That you have chosen an APPROPRIATE SITUATION (in which you faced more tasks than you could tackle at the same time);**
- **That the situation that you have used is WELL DESCRIBED;**
- **That there is clear DESCRIPTION OF the issues that you had to deal with;**
- **That you have DESCRIBED THE RESOURCE OR TIME CONSTRAINT that you faced that meant that the issues had to be prioritised;**
- **That you have STATED THE ORDER in which you prioritised the issues; and**
- **That you have described the RATIONALE for the order of tackling the issue that you selected, for example in terms of importance, urgency or impact.**

Q4.1 and 4.2 – Providing advice

‘Using your recent work experience, describe two situations where you have used your technical knowledge and/or practical experience to develop advice.’

To answer this question well you need to demonstrate that you have not only provided advice, but that you used either practical experience or technical knowledge to do so. Candidates who fail this question usually do so because they have provided either basic advice or no advice at all. Advice can be provided internally within your organisation or externally to a client or a different organisation.

Example situations:

- tax planning advice
- valuation advice
- acquisition advice
- advice on how to deal with a tax investigation
- advice on retirement planning
- advice on academic and professional collaborations.

Highly rewarded:

- advice is given
- advice that it would be reasonable to expect from a qualified accountant
- advice is practical.

Things to avoid:

- low level or basic advice
- non-accountancy advice
- textbook or theoretical advice.

Checklist for questions 4.1 and 4.2

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Evidence of your PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT in your chosen example;**
- **That you have chosen an APPROPRIATE SITUATION (in which you gave advice typical of an accountant’s skills set);**
- **That the situation that you have used is WELL DESCRIBED;**
- **That the technical expertise / business knowledge that you used is CLEARLY DESCRIBED;**
- **That the technical expertise / business knowledge that you used is RELEVANT to the situation; and**
- **That you DESCRIBE THE ADVICE that you gave.**

Q5 – Dealing with an ethical issue

‘Using your recent work experience, demonstrate how you dealt with an ethical issue.’

To answer this question well, you need to provide sufficient evidence of **how** you dealt with an ethical issue. The issue should be within a professional context. In doing this you will need to describe which fundamental ethical principle (integrity, objectivity, professional competence and due

care, confidentiality and professional behaviour) was at risk and the action you took to ensure that you complied with the principle.

Example issues:

- dealing with conflicts of interest between stakeholders
- dealing with doubtful accounting or commercial practices
- inappropriate pressure to achieve a particular result (for example to present figures favourably)
- dealing with confidential information
- suspicion of money laundering
- governance issues
- suspicion of fraud
- appropriate segregation of duties (e.g. between audit and consultancy within the same practice)

Highly rewarded:

- a real issue that **you** dealt with
- a description of what you did to explore the issue
- a description of how the issue was concluded
- a description of the rationale for your approach.

Things to avoid:

- low level or basic issue
- textbook or theoretical answer
- a theoretical description of your, your firm's or your profession's approach to ethics
- a description of ethical training that you have had.

Checklist for question 5

In summary, the main requirements for this question are as set out in the bullet points below. You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Evidence of your PERSONAL INVOLVEMENT in your chosen example;**
- **That you have chosen an issue that illustrates the application of one or more of ICAEW fundamental ethical principles:**
- **That the situation that you have used is WELL DESCRIBED; and**
- **That you DESCRIBE how you dealt with the issue.**

Checklist for 'format and language' requirement

The ICAEW's Examination of Experience has a clear requirement that answers should be well formatted. In addition, because the process is for full membership it is important that candidates' answers conform to good levels of grammar and spelling.

You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Spell check your submission;**
- **Proof read it yourself at least once;**
- **Ask a friend or colleague to proof read it for you;**
- **Do not overly rely on bullet points in your answers, you need to provide adequate descriptions of the examples used in your submission;**
- **Use business English, as opposed to overly colloquial language;**

- **Adequately explain any technical issues; and**
- **Make sure that your answers are neatly set out.**

Checklist for the ‘use of experience’ requirement

The ICAEW’s Examination of Experience only takes into account candidates’ last five years’ work experience. In addition, candidates are required to provide a breakdown of that five years’ period of work. You should break down the last five years into five sections of 12 months.

Part 2 Summary of Employment of the application form clearly states:

‘For each of the last five years, add into relevant yearly box, a short paragraph of your role during that year, the work you carried out during that period, and the question(s) to which this activity refers in your Examination answers in Part 1.

For each year, you will need to include, where relevant, different employers, or different roles with a single employer, or different projects within a single role.’

A pro forma template table is provided for you to complete, which will allow you to describe your last five years’ work experience. The summary of your experience should be split into each of the five years. The table should, therefore, have five sections – one section for each of your most recent five years’ work experience.

The five sections should end at the date of your application. For example, if you applied on 28 February 2017, the table that you include in your application should include five sections, as shown below.

Year 5 of your experience – 1 March 2016 to 28 Feb 2017

Year 4 of your experience – 1 March 2015 to 28 Feb 2016

Year 3 of your experience – 1 March 2014 to 28 Feb 2015

Year 2 of your experience – 1 March 2013 to 28 Feb 2014

Year 1 of your experience – 1 March 2012 to 28 Feb 2013

You may find this a useful checklist to appraise your answer against, before submitting it:

- **Analyse your most recent five years' experience into 12-month sections;**
- **Saying that you had the same job or role for five years is NOT SUFFICIENT;**
- **If you have been in the same job for the past five years make sure you analyse your experience into what you did during the relevant periods;**
- **You should give the question number where you cover the relevant time period;**
- **You should date your examples within your answers; and**
- **Use a good spread of your experience in your answers.**

EXAMINERS' TOP TIPS

1. Use the latest application form and template

Ensure that you have used the latest application form and template, as the wording of the Pathways' questions **may** change over time. You can download these from the ICAEW website at [icaew.com/pathways](https://www.icaew.com/pathways)

Each question in the exam is looking for the candidate to demonstrate skills that are typically expected of a chartered accountant.

2. Describe suitable level of work

Because the Examination of Experience is a route to full membership of ICAEW, we are seeking good evidence of work and skills that would be of complexity typical of a qualified accountant. You are strongly advised not to pick low-level work, analysis or recommendations.

Because you have unlimited time to complete your submission, examiners will expect you to draw on good examples of your recent work experience.

3. Use only one example for each answer

Ensure that you only provide one situation for each question. Examiners will not reward multiple examples when only one situation has been asked for.

4. Take your time

Unlike an examination that is sat under time pressure, the Examination of Experience allows you to spend as much time as you like in perfecting your submission and examiners will expect you to demonstrate a good standard of English grammar and punctuation.

Once you have completed your submission, it is advisable to ask a friend or colleague to read it to ensure that it reads well, is understandable and answers the questions. Your sponsor, in particular, should be a good source of constructive feedback on your application.

5. Write about yourself

This is an examination of **your** experience. Examiners want to read about what you did not about 'the firm' or 'we' or 'the team', but **you!**

6. Keep it recent

Only draw upon the last five years of your professional experience. If you have had (for example) a two-year career break in the last five years, tell us in Part 2 (Summary of Employment) of the application form – in this case you could use the last seven years, as you would still be using the last five years of your professional experience.

7. Read the feedback and action it !

If you do fail the exam, read carefully the feedback that you get on your submission. The feedback will be specific to your submission and should really help you in addressing the examiners' concerns. You should still keep within the suggested guidelines for length of answer.

8. Use as much of your experience as possible

One of the things that the examiners will be looking for is that you have used a reasonable spread

of examples of your work experience, drawn from your five years' experience. You are advised to use a different situation for each of the questions.

9. Cross-reference by including question numbers in your Part 2 Summary of Employment analysis

Don't forget to include in Part 2 Summary of Employment of your Examination of Experience (i.e. the breakdown of your last five years' experience), the relevant questions from Part 1 against each period of your recent career.

10. Make it easy to read

Start each answer on a new page and write the question at the top of your answer sheet, so that you can easily refer to it when compiling the answer. This will help you to ensure your answer is specific to the question.

11. Date each of your examples

You should state at the beginning of each of your answers to the questions, the date that the situation took place.

Remember, that in answering the questions make sure that you only use examples from the most recent five years' experience.

12. Describe your job roles

Part 2 of the Examination of Experience (the Summary of Employment) asks you to describe your last five years' work experience. It is important that you describe separately each of the years of that five-year period. If you have been performing the same role (in terms of job position) for the whole five years you should still be able to describe what you did in each of the five years in terms of projects that you have worked on.

13. Read the example submissions

ICAEW website contains examples of Examination of Experience submissions that may be helpful when you are answering the questions. These can be found at [icaew.com/pathways](https://www.icaew.com/pathways). However, in making your own submission, you should not copy any parts of those examples or those used at our workshops (see the note on plagiarism on page 1).

14. Use the checklists in this guidance note

This document contains checklists for each of the nine questions. You are strongly advised to ensure that your submission to each question meets all of the criteria for the relevant question. In addition, you may wish to draw the checklists to the attention of your sponsor who may be able to check whether your submission meets all of them.

15. Proof read your submission

It is a really good idea to thoroughly proof read your answers before you submit them. In addition, why not ask a friend or colleague to also proof read it for you? Your sponsor must also read through your full submission before signing it and confirm that it is a true and accurate reflection of your work experience.

Updated: October 2017.