

CIMA[®] Case Study (CS) Examinations are capstone examinations, designed to demonstrate mastery of previously acquired knowledge, skills and techniques and the drawing together of these to provide solutions to unstructured problems. By their position and design, CS Exams are synoptic. This means each CS Exam combines the content covered in the three pillar subjects at the level into a single assessment. Its aim is the “undoing” of the pillar and subject divisions of the syllabus and the application of knowledge, skills and techniques together with the mindset of a CIMA finance professional.

Therefore, CIMA CS Examination tasks will be practical and applied, not theoretical or academic. To be successful, you will have to perform the core activities (as found in the [Exam Blueprint](#)) in the same way, and to the same standards, that would be valid and valued in the workplace. You’ll find it very helpful to understand how your CIMA CS Exams answers are marked.

Let me illustrate this using an exam task from a past Management CS Examination (August 2020; Variant 1 – Section 2 (c)).

Requirement: ‘Discuss how the conflict between Joe and the other managers at GS could be resolved’. (30%)

It must be stressed that the nature of the case study examination tasks means that a range of responses will be valid. CIMA uses levels-based marking scheme and the descriptors within it are holistic. Therefore, these are the steps followed by the markers.

Step 1: Marker reads your answer for a given task, in full. This is to ensure that the marker adopts a holistic approach to marking, which means your answer to each task is read and judged on its merits.

Step 2: Marker selects the most relevant level to the answer, out of the 3 levels, using a best-fit approach. (See the Marks Scheme applicable for this sub-task below.)



SECTION 2 (continued)			
Task (c) Discuss how the conflict between Joe and the other managers at GS could be resolved.			
Trait			
Conflict management	Level	Descriptor	Marks
		No rewardable material	0
	Level 1	Offers an explanation of where the conflict arises but does not provide an explanation of how this can be resolved	1-2
	Level 2	Offers a clear explanation of where the conflict arises and offers at least one suggestion of how these may be resolved. Some points may lack clarity	3-5
	Level 3	Offers a clear explanation of where the conflict arises and offers more than one suggestion, clearly expressed, of how these may be resolved	6-7

How your CIMA Case Study Examinations answers are marked

The answer does not need to meet all the criteria of the level descriptor. The marker will place your answer at the level where it meets more of the criteria of this level than the criteria of the other levels. If the answer is on the borderline between two levels, then the marker will place either at the top of the lower band or the bottom of the higher band, depending on where it fits best.

Step 3: Once the marker has selected the level, they will need to choose the mark to apply. A small range of marks may be given at each level, as you noticed above in the Marks Scheme for this task.

Markers apply their professional judgement to decide which mark to allocate. For instance, if the answer is of high quality and convincingly meets the requirements of the level, then markers award the highest mark available.

It is worth stressing that Marking Schemes can accommodate a range of acceptable responses. If the marker is in doubt as to the application of the marking scheme to your answer, they consult their lead marker. In other words, there is no one correct answer for CIMA CS Exams; your common sense, general knowledge, work experience together with appropriate technical knowledge of syllabus topics are useful ingredients in producing a Level 3 answer.

In an Examiner's Report, the examiner mentioned, 'demonstrating good technical understanding is not enough on its own to pass. Candidates need to demonstrate technical understanding in the context of the scenario and the particulars of the issue being addressed. Information given to candidates as part of the task is there for a reason and should be, as far as possible, incorporated into answers, along with relevant information from the pre-seen'.

The markers are subject to extensive training and ongoing monitoring to ensure that judgements are made correctly and consistently. Markers are instructed to apply the marking schemes positively so that candidates are rewarded for what they have demonstrated and not penalised for omissions. All marks on the scheme are designed to be awarded and full marks should be awarded when all level descriptor criteria are met. It is quite obvious that an answer which does not address the requirements of the task is awarded 0 marks.

Be reminded that the marking scheme and indicative answers are provided as a guide to markers. They are not intended to be exhaustive and other valid approaches will be rewarded. Equally, you are not expected to make all the points mentioned in the indicative answers to receive the highest level of the marking scheme.

Therefore, the single common determinant of Level 3 answers is that you should apply your technical understanding to the scenario (see the suggested answer below). Candidates who simply summarise the technical content relating to a task are likely to score low marks. For example, in this task, the marking scheme generally will allow some credit for a description of conflict and techniques for resolution. However, most marks will be allocated to the application of that technical understanding of conflict resolution to the scenario. Indeed, a well-justified discussion applying the conflict resolution tactics to the scenario will provide all the assurance that is necessary that the candidate understands the underlying technical content.

How your CIMA Case Study Examinations answers are marked

In conclusion, it is a good idea to refer to the level-specific *Performance Descriptors*, which can be found in the CIMA Planner for each level of CS Exam. They state the characteristics and level of achievement that candidates who met the passing standard would generally demonstrate. For instance, the Management level Performance Descriptors applicable for this question requirement states, a Level 3 answer 'demonstrates professional judgement in the resolution of potentially conflicting interests, including negotiations and the management of internal trade within organisations'. (Core Activity: E; Assessment Outcome: 'I can advise on conflict management'.)

The suggested answer:

This scenario implies that the management team has a high level of assertiveness and a low level of cooperativeness. That implies a 'competing' form of conflict in which two parties are trying to win, possibly at one another's expense. One approach that could help manage the conflict would be to work towards conflict reduction, which would involve building on areas of agreement. Taking the example of the staff scheduling, it would be ideal if both sides could agree that there are inefficiencies in the previous arrangements. If such an agreement can be reached, then it may be possible to develop a response to the inefficiency that the whole management team can support, even if that means some compromise from both sides. Ideally, in the longer term, the basis of the conflict can be resolved. If Joe and the other managers can agree that they will be assessed together, then they may be prepared to work towards maximising their performance. Clear communication is essential if the managers are to be persuaded that they have no reason to fear Joe or to be jealous of his position as their hotel manager. Joe should consider not imposing too many major changes without their agreement.

Note: Read the Examiner's Reports in conjunction with the examiner's suggested answers and marking guidance for valuable insights, in particular for common mistakes and practical advice from the examiner to prepare for future CS Examinations.

