

CII Certificate in Financial Planning (CertFP) v ifs Certificate for Financial Advisers (CeFA)

This article expresses Wizard Learning's view on the main aspects of these qualifications. We have written this in response to a variety of queries we have received. The CII and the ifs School of Finance (ifs) websites both contain full details and should be looked at before making a decision on what best suits each individual's personal situation. These qualifications have both been set at level 3 by Ofqual (previously QCA).

Brief overview of the ifs's Certificate for Financial Advisers (CeFA)

To achieve the ifs Certificate for Financial Advisers (CeFA), you will be required to complete four modules. Each module is assessed by means of a two-hour multiple-choice examination. The pass mark for each exam is 70%.

Modules 1 to 3 are divided into units. These are shown below with the number of questions applying to each unit:

Module 1 UK Financial Regulation

Unit 1 Introduction to the Financial Services Environment & Products – 1 hour (50 MCQs)

Unit 2 Financial Services and Regulation – 1 hour (50 MCQs)

Module 2 Investments and Risks

Unit 3 Principles of Investment – 1 hour (Section A 40 MCQs, Section B 2 case studies of 5 MCQs each)

Unit 4 Investment Products – 1 hour (Section A 40 MCQs, Section B 2 case studies of 5 MCQs each)

Module 3 Retirement Planning and Protection

Unit 5 Protection – 1 hour (Section A 40 MCQs, Section B 2 case studies of 5 MCQs each)

Unit 6 Retirement Planning – 1 hour (Section A 40 MCQs, Section B 2 case studies of 5 MCQs each)

Module 4 Assessment of Investment Advice Knowledge

Incorporates 6 case studies on key areas of financial planning. Each of those case studies will have 10 multiple-choice questions.

Wizard Learning provide online training for all the CeFA exams by way of online courses as well as assessment packages see

<http://www.wizardlearning.com/accounts.php?action=list> for details.

Brief overview of the CII's Certificate In Financial Planning (CertFP)

To achieve the CII Certificate, you will need to complete five "CF" units. However, these more or less follow the same set of syllabus learning outcomes as the CeFA qualification, so you are examined on the same subject matter albeit in a slightly different way. The pass mark for CF1 to CF4 is 70%. For CF5, it is 55%. The format for each exam is shown below.

CF1 UK financial services, regulation and ethics – 2 hours (100 MCQs)

CF2 Investment and risk – 2 hours (100 MCQs)

CF3 Protection – 1 hour (50 MCQs)

CF4 Pensions – 1 hour (50 MCQs)

CF5 Integrated financial planning – 2 hours (2 case studies with written answer questions)

Wizard Learning provide online training for all the CertFP exams by way of online courses as well as assessment packages, see <http://www.wizardlearning.com/accounts.php?action=list> for details.

What is best for me?

In recent years, the offerings at this level from both the CII and the ifs have become much closer in their “style” of learning materials and method of assessment, largely because a more consistent approach has been promoted by the regulator and implemented by the publication of standard learning outcomes from the Financial Services Skills Council (FSSC) for qualifications at each level.

There are though subtle differences. For instance, if you have an allergy towards written answers, the CII’s CF5 examination may be a final stumbling block towards achieving the overall qualification. With sufficient knowledge and practice on exam technique, passing the exam should be perfectly feasible however. Taking the exams is becoming physically easier too. For units CF1 to 4, the exam can be taken at a time convenient to you at one of the CII’s designated exam centers around the country using computer based testing. For CF5, the CII run open exams throughout the year at a number of venues around the country. For 2009, there are six sessions in January, April, June, July, October and December.

Although the CeFA exam format is all multiple choice and computer based, you will be required to achieve a 70% or more mark to pass each module. You will have the advantage of taking exams for all modules at one of the ifs’s designated exam centers in the UK.

What is cheaper?

The ifs's CeFA qualification costs £135 per module with no other hidden fees. This cost includes a course book and exam registration for one exam, so to complete CeFA1 to 4 will set you back a total of £540. If you need to re-take any exam, the cost is £105 per module.

The overall comparable total costs of the CII's CertFP for CF1 to CF5 is £649 or £588 if you are a member of the CII. The costs vary between modules/units and the study book and exam entry are separately priced. CII membership at this level costs £70 per

annum with an initial one off registration fee of £36.

What takes the least amount of time to pass?

There should not be much in it. Each module will have a recommended study time and then it's more or less up to you when you want to take the exams subject to a minimum notice period of about 1 week. The only exception to this would be CII's CF5 exam, which can only be taken at certain dates in the year.

What if I want to do further studies?

The CII offers progression with its Diploma in Financial Planning qualification. With this qualification, the individual will have the opportunity to learn and be assessed on a wide range of financial planning areas at a more detailed level. Unlike the compulsory units that need to be taken to achieve the Certificate, there are a choice of 8 units. It is entirely up to the candidate as to which one to take. The first 7 units are worth 20 credits. The final unit is worth 30 credits (if taken). The candidate needs to achieve 140 credits, 80 of which must be at Diploma level. The Certificate in Financial Planning will provide 70 credits towards the overall Diploma qualification.

The ifs offers its own Diploma for Financial Advisers qualification. The qualification is made up of an initial 100 question multiple-choice test covering key areas of financial planning practice, a coursework assignment and final exam, all of which need to achieve a minimum "pass mark".

Both the CII's and the ifs's diploma qualifications are set at level 4 by Ofqual.

Each institute also offers specialist "certificate" level qualifications such as those for mortgages, equity release and long term care. Exams completed under the main Certificate of Financial Planning and CeFA qualifications will often be needed as part of the specialist certificates as well.

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June 2009



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