

Show me the study!

Tristan Walker-Buckton presents the results of the study package survey.

THANKS TO EVERYONE WHO TOOK THE trouble to respond to my study package survey. I got a decent level of responses, including a fair coverage of the larger firms, which hopefully give a better indication of the profession as a whole.

The breadth of variation was much greater than I was initially expecting and so it is only possible to compare different firms in the broadest of ways. However, even giving only an indication of the trends should, I hope, allow you to put your own package into context.

As I didn't get a response from every firm in the profession, it would be unfair of me to name names. It would be wrong though to assume the variation arises across the practice lines, or from big firms to small. Two companies, of similar size and operating in the same markets, can have very different study packages on offer to their employees. As such firms are in direct competition for the same talent, such a disparity surprised me, especially for such an important concern for younger members of the profession.

Time

It was most difficult to compare the number of study days allowed for each exam as there were so many different arrangements. The most common was to allocate a certain number of days for each first sitting, with an additional allowance that was half the original if a resit was required. An approximate average for such an arrangement might see initial credits of nine days for a CT (Core Technical), 26 for CA1 (Core Applications 1), 13 for an ST (Specialist Technical), and 18 for an SA (Specialist Applications).

A significant number offered more generous terms with broadly the same initial credits, but with the full amount offered again if a resit was needed. CA1 had the widest range, with initial credits ranging from 15 to 40 days. The larger initial allowances were normally paired with more generous resit terms, going against what one might expect.

Some packages were fairly niggardly, with less than ten days for a CT subject or 15 for an ST, and no allowance for further sittings. Presumably these students end up having to study more on their own time than their peers.

A few firms rejected this approach entirely and used a 'study bank' where an initial credit of between 40 and 60 days receives a one-time top-up every time a new subject is sat. These are usually ten or 15 days for a CT subject and 15–20 for STs and SAs. How these compare to the more usual terms clearly depends on how many resits you need to take, which eat into your initial allowance.

Most firms allow one study day a week outside the run-up to exams, though with a huge variety of different restrictions. Almost all firms impose a maximum number of days taken in a year – the mean of this from the responses was about 45 days, though the range was from 30 to nearly 60. Others were more firm in monitoring progress, with study leave entitlement reviewed and possibly curtailed after a certain number of sittings without a pass.

A great many of you pointed out that what you were entitled to, and what you were able to take because of work pressures, were completely

different things. Some firms had a rigorous monitoring system to identify where there may be problems, and such attitudes should be applauded.

Money

In terms of the allowance for study materials, a CMP (Combined Materials Pack) and ASET (Actuarial Solutions with Exam Technique) are generally provided, along with the fee for the first exam sitting, with sufficient left over for tutorials or marking. However, many employers were more generous, covering both tutorials and marking and sometimes extending these beyond the first sitting. The vast majority fund for one exam resit, while only occasionally are fees covered beyond that. A few firms are slightly less generous and will refund a successful resit. Only two firms in the responses paid exam fees for the first attempt only.

There was much more of a marked split in the rewards available for exam success. In the main, respondents offered salary increases of around £500 for a CT pass, £1,500 to £2,000 for CA1, £1,100 for a ST pass, and perhaps £1,500 for the SA. However, a sizeable proportion were considerably more generous – usually offering double these amounts, often with additional bonuses for a first-time pass, completing a series, or because they had been visited by three ghosts the night before.

In the main, these amounts refer to salary increases. A small number award one-off payments for exam success instead, but these are not normally the larger amounts described above.

Of course, this needs to be put into the context of total remuneration. Are the firms offering above-average advances for exam success otherwise offering basic salaries below market rate? If not, then such a marked split between firms seems remarkable.

When I first had the idea for the survey, I thought it would simply be a matter of number-crunching some data to produce some pretty charts, but hadn't anticipated the sheer variation in the study support out there. It has certainly opened my eyes to the fact that we aren't all on a level playing field. That said, it's not the size of your package, but how you use it that counts...



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