CISRO / OCRA

Guidelines for drafting and review
Harmonized LLQP exam questions

December 2014

Context

The characteristics of the Harmonized Life License Qualification Program (LLQP) exam dictate the type of questions that must make it up.

- The exam is competency-based:

  Its questions must test candidates' understanding of evaluated concepts rather than rote learning. Evaluated concepts are those that have been deemed relevant to entry-level professional practice; they are identified in the LLQP Curriculum.

- The exam is open-book:

  The answers to its questions must not be found textually in the exam preparation manuals, they must require application and consolidation of knowledge. However, material in the exam preparation manuals should be sufficient to understand and answer questions correctly.

Furthermore, to ensure valid agent licensing, all questions submitted must be original – they must not be copied from other sources or must not have been used for other purposes in the past (e.g. training).

Preserving the confidential nature of exam questions is of utmost importance in withholding the integrity of the LLQP. Subject matter experts (SMEs) involved in the drafting or review of LLQP exam questions must, under all circumstances, ensure that the questions in their possession are safeguarded against plagiarism and publication and destroyed after the writing or review mandate.

Exam question development process

The exam question development process is overseen by measurement and evaluation (M&E) specialists, whose role it is to help SMEs formulate questions that respect best testing practices and meet the evaluation objectives of the LLQP Curriculum. The process includes numerous measures meant to avoid the inclusion of inappropriate questions in the exam.

- A first draft is submitted by an SME:

  The question evaluates a concept included in the Curriculum and addressed in the exam preparation manual. Its characteristics are documented (answer, source, etc.).

- The draft is reviewed by an M&E specialist:

  The specialist validates that the question is well-written (clarity, relevance) and compliant with best testing practices, and requests modifications, if applicable.

- A revised draft is submitted by the SME:

  Requested changes are brought and clarifications are provided, if applicable.

- The question is adjusted by the M&E specialist:

  Final adjustments are made and the question is prepared for SME review by removing the documentation provided by its author (answer, source, etc.).

- The question is reviewed by

  The review grid is filled out for each question and

| an SME: | suggestions are submitted to improve the quality of specific questions, if need be. |

- The question is finalized by the M&E specialist:

In cases of divergence between author and reviewer, the M&E specialist may request further clarifications from one or the other of the SMEs. If concerns remain, the question is rejected.

- The question is copy-edited:

A professional copy-editor ensures the quality of the language used to formulate the questions and answer options (clarity, absence of any ambiguity). Compliance with vocabulary used in the Curriculum and the exam preparation manuals is validated.

- The question is integrated into the question bank:

The M&E specialist categorizes the question in the question bank, in order to facilitate selection when constructing exam module formats.

Components of a complete exam question

The Harmonized LLQP exam is composed of multiple-choice questions that constitute very brief case studies meant to address situations that occur in the first years of professional practice. In order to be considered complete by M&E specialists, all questions must include the following components.

- Stem, or case:

The stem is the information provided to contextualise the task. It is intended to give the candidate a good representation of a case study. It must be a case that involves one or more individuals in a real-life situation. This situation could very likely be encountered by an entry-level agent during his professional practice. Infrequent situations may be addressed if they serve to evaluate essential knowledge.

- Question:

The question must be in relation to the information presented in the stem. It must aim to evaluate a competency component included in the Curriculum. It should be an actual question (with a question mark rather than a sentence that must be completed) that is formulated in a direct, positive form and as specifically as possible so that candidates may know what type of answer is requested (avoid indirect and negative formulation). The question must ask candidate to do something, not only ask what is good or wrong, true or false. SMEs must refrain from using words such as always, never, all, or none. Savvy candidates know that few statements are absolute or universally true.

- Correct answer:

There must be only one correct answer and it must be specific and unequivocal, i.e. not subjective and not only

partially true. Answers such as "all of the above" or "none of the above" are not acceptable. Material required to select the correct answer must be available in the exam preparation material. The correct answer must be clearly identified.

- **Three distractors:** Three other answer options must be provided to discriminate between candidates who do not know the correct answer and those who do. They must be attractive, plausible but entirely incorrect. Unrealistic or far-fetched answer options are not appropriate distractors since they can be easily eliminated by all candidates, even those that are not well prepared. Answer options that are partially true are also inappropriate distractors since they constitute a trap and do not properly discriminate between candidates who understand the concept and those who do not. Distractors must also be in relation to the information presented in the stem, in the question and in the exam preparation manual.

- **Reference to Curriculum:** The specific competency sub-component evaluated by the question must be identified. The relationship between the competency and the question should be self-explanatory. Questions that are outside the scope of the Curriculum will be automatically rejected.

- **Reference to exam preparation manual:** Material provided by the exam preparation manual must be sufficient to understand the question and then select the correct answer. References to specific sections and pages where this material can be found must be provided. The relationship between the contents cited and the question should be self-explanatory. Questions that are outside the scope of the exam preparation manual will be automatically rejected.

- **Complementary documentation:** M&E specialists will request supplemental information to document the question, such as expected level of difficulty, necessity to update the question yearly (if rates are involved) and possibility to clone the question (create a very similar question by changing some of the data presented). The template provided to submit drafted questions will list the information required.

Qualities of a good exam question

Over and above the components listed in the previous section, multiple-choice exam questions must comply with a number of best testing practices that help ensure questions are valid and reliable, i.e. that it evaluates what it sets out to and does so accurately. The following is a non-exhaustive list of principles that should guide drafting and of flaws that must be avoided.

Throughout the drafting and review process, M&E specialists will request modifications and adjustments from SMEs to guarantee that all questions integrated into question banks comply

with these and other best practices. The review grid also provides insights into the qualities that will be validated. It is a useful tool for those drafting the questions.

▪ Answer options should "fit" with actual question and be well-balanced:	Formulating answer options appropriately ensures that candidates select the correct answer based on their understanding rather than on their test skills or on chance. To avoid making the correct answer readily identifiable: - All answer options should be formulated in a way that is grammatically compatible with the question and provide the type/quantity of information requested; - The position of the correct answer should vary; - All options should be of the same length approximately and present the same type/amount of information; - Yes/no-type questions should have 2 "yes" options and 2 "no" options with different justifications. The "no" answer should not only be a negation of a "yes" answer. The difference between answers should be based on the justifications that follow these answers; not only on "yes" or "no", "true" or "false.
▪ Most questions should be of average difficulty:	Questions of average difficulty are those that give equal chances to all well-prepared candidates of answering the question correctly. Questions that are too difficult and those that are too easy do not help to discriminate between candidates that have acquired the evaluated competencies and those that have not. The object of the evaluation is not to trap candidates with difficult questions, nor is it to test general knowledge through questions that may be answered correctly by those that have not assimilated the evaluated concepts.
▪ All components of a question must be clearly and simply formulated:	The stem must include all information required to answer the question correctly but the aim should not be to test candidates' reading abilities. As such, short, simple sentences should be used. This applies for the actual question and the answer options as well. Negatives are proscribed as well as the use of adverbs such as "always", "never", "often", or the use of questions asking the candidate for his opinion or requesting the best answer. Care must be taken to use the same vocabulary as that used in the Curriculum and the exam preparation manual and to avoid regional expressions that could penalize second language candidates.

Characteristics of a thorough review

The objective of reviewing questions is to confirm the accuracy of the documentation provided during the drafting stage (accuracy of correct answer and quality of distractors, link with Curriculum and exam preparation manual, etc.) and to validate the question's overall quality and relevance to professional practice.

A grid is provided to guide and focus the review; it must be filled out for every question being reviewed. But the grid must not be filled out mechanically and the reviewer must go beyond its criteria – each question must be carefully analyzed and weighed in order to detect potential flaws that could penalize candidates and should be corrected before the question is included in a question bank.

A comprehensive review will include suggestions to improve the question and requires reviewers to keep in mind the following considerations.

- Questions must be approached from the viewpoint of new agents:

  Reviewers should try to put aside their professional experience and rely only on the exam preparation manual to analyze the question. Any inconsistencies between the question and the manual needs to be highlighted. The correct answer must be entirely true only based on the information presented in the question and the manual and should not be extrapolated from past experience. Furthermore, the question and manual must also provide sufficient information to identify the distractors and discard them as being entirely false.

- Questions must not present difficulties other than understanding evaluated concepts:

  The presence of flaws such as poor wording, non-equivalent or ambiguous answer options, infrequent terminology, etc., constitute biases and artificially and unnecessarily increase a question's level of difficulty. Reviewers must be attentive to these flaws and suggest means of eliminating them.

- Questions that present weaknesses may be improved:

  Reviewers that suggest problems with the question through answers they provide on the grid (e.g. inappropriate vocabulary, or lack of relevance to professional practice) should also provide suggestions to correct these issues. The objective should not be to simply criticize questions but to improve their overall quality and validity.

Appendix A – Question drafting template

Question 1

Even though using "lorem ipsum" often arouses curiosity due to its resemblance to classical Latin, it is not intended to have meaning. Where text is visible in a document, people tend to focus on the textual content rather than upon overall presentation, so publishers use lorem ipsum when displaying a typeface or design in order to direct the focus to presentation. "Lorem ipsum" also approximates a typical distribution of spaces in English.

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua?

a) The most common lorem ipsum text reads as follows: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.
b) The most common lorem ipsum text reads as follows: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.
c) The most common lorem ipsum text reads as follows: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.
d) The most common lorem ipsum text reads as follows: Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipisicing elit, sed do eiusmod tempor incididunt ut labore et dolore magna aliqua.

Drafting information:

Correct answer: d

Calculations, if applicable (including calculations for distractors): N/A

Relevant sections of exam preparation manual: Lorem ipsum, section 1.2.3.4, p.123, and section 5.6.7.8, p.456

Evaluated competency sub-component in Curriculum: Lorem ipsum, 1.2

Cloning possibilities? Yes. Duis aute irure dolor in reprehenderit in voluptate velit esse cillum dolore eu fugiat nulla pariatur. Excepteur sint occaecat cupidatat non proident, sunt in culpa qui officia deserunt mollit anim id est laborum.

Annual updates required? No.

Appendix B – Question review grid

1. What is the correct answer?	**a b c d None**
2. What calculations are required to obtain the correct answer?	
3. Where can the material required to find the correct answer be found in the exam preparation manual (section and page numbers)?	
4. Which of the Curriculum's competency sub-components is evaluated by this question?	
5. Are answer options presented in a numerical, alphabetical or logical order? If not, please suggest an alternate order.	**Yes No**
6. Can this question be cloned? If so, please indicate which elements could be changed to create a new question.	**Yes No**
7. Does this question need to be updated annually? If so, please indicate what data should be validated yearly.	**Yes No**
8. Does the vocabulary used comply with that of the Curriculum, the exam preparation manual, and of professional practice in general?	*Not at all* ⟶ *Entirely* **1 2 3 4 5**
9. Is the question relevant to entry-level professional practice?	*Not at all* ⟶ *Entirely* **1 2 3 4 5**
10. Is the competency or concept evaluated by this question used frequently in the course of entry-level professional practice?	*Never* ⟶ *Often* **1 2 3 4 5**
11. How would you qualify the level of difficulty of this question?[1]	*Very easy* → *Very difficult* **1 2 3 4 5**
12. Please correct any flaws or weaknesses of the question, such as ambiguous answer options. If it is too complicated to do so, please explain why.	

[1] **General indications of level of difficulty :**
1. Very easy: over 95% of candidates should answer correctly;
2. Easy: about 80% of candidates should answer correctly;
3. Average: about 60% of candidates should answer correctly;
4. Difficult: about 40% of candidates should answer correctly;
5. Very difficult: less than 5% of candidates should answer correctly.