

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Chartered Secretaries Qualifying Scheme?

CSQS is one of the most broad-based professional qualifying schemes equipping you for a variety of different career paths. Valued worldwide by employers, this highly marketable qualification comprises eight modules. You may need to study all eight modules or, depending on your existing qualifications, you may be exempt from some.

Before registering on the scheme we recommend that you read [Is CSQS right for me?](#) This section gives you detailed information on the level of the scheme and what experience and/or qualifications you may need.

If you are a qualified lawyer or accountant take a look at our [Fast-Track Professional route to CSQS](#) – with your current qualifications and experience you may be eligible to fast-track through the scheme.

2. What level is CSQS?

The Chartered Secretaries Qualifying Scheme (CSQS) has two levels, with four modules at each level. CSQS Level One is set at the standard of modules in the final year of an undergraduate degree (Level 6 of the UK higher education framework) and CSQS Level Two is set at the standard of modules in a Master's programme (Level 7).

The scheme leads to an international professional qualification and so is set at an appropriate level. This means that you should carefully consider whether you have the appropriate underpinning knowledge necessary for CSQS before registering as an ICSA student.

You can also discuss the relevance and suitability of any previous qualifications, education and experience with our student support team.

3. How will I be assessed?

All CSQS modules are assessed by three-hour closed book examinations, in which you will need to write extended answers to problem-based questions.

ICSA exam questions are often based on scenarios or case studies which reflect the kind of complex issues arising in an organisation at the level at which a Chartered Secretary is working. You are typically asked to draw on relevant knowledge from the module and apply this to the facts of the scenario to offer advice or solutions.

There is an expectation that you will be able to refer in detail to the module content and show the ability to analyse and apply this knowledge critically, and with reference to what happens in

organisations in practice. This can involve drawing on your wider reading about organisations or your experience of working within them.

When you have completed the modules at Level Two, you will need to take and pass a final test of competence based on all the syllabus content you have studied. This is a three-hour exam based on an extended case study. Sample examination papers can be found on the ICSA website.

4. How much studying will I need to do?

You will be expected to commit to around 150 hours of study per module, pre-recorded webinars, incorporating tuition, self-study with the recommended text, wider reading, using online support, study time with other candidates, practice assessment tasks and the exam itself.

We strongly recommend that you tackle the Level One modules before sitting the Level Two modules. The final Chartered Secretaries Case Study module can only be attempted once you have passed – or been awarded exemption from – all the other modules.

5. What are the requirements for entry?

To register as a student with ICSA you must be 16 years of age or over.

All the ICSA study material is produced in English and the examinations are all conducted in English. To enable your progress on the qualification it is recommended that you have a score of at least 6 on the International English Language Testing System (IELTS) or an equivalent. It will help if you have previously studied other subjects, and particularly if you have done essay-style assessment in English before.

Otherwise, ICSA operates an open entry policy for registration to CSQS: we leave it up to you to decide whether your previous qualifications or experience are suitable for entry on to the programme. If you have no degree level qualifications or any suitable relevant professional experience you should carefully consider the level and breadth of the qualification and the amount of study required before registering. Our How can I prepare for CSQS guidance should also help with this.

6. I have relevant qualifications and/or experience. Can I get exemptions?

Holders of degree-level or higher qualifications in law or finance are able to apply for exemptions from some relevant modules. See our exemptions chart for full details.

Members of relevant professional bodies, such as Chartered Accountants and Law Society qualified lawyers may qualify for entry onto our Fast Track Professional route to CSQS. See our Fast-Track Professional page for more information.

Holders of other ICSA qualifications, such as the Certificate and Diploma in Business Practice, the Certificate and Diploma in Offshore Finance and Administration and other ICSA certificates will start at Level One of the scheme.

If you do not hold any previous degree level or professional qualifications, but have considerable previous relevant work experience you may decide that you are prepared to start the course on this basis, and will be able to register for CSQS Level One modules. Our student support team will be able to advise you on this.

7. How can I prepare for CSQS?

The scheme covers a broad base of subject areas, including law, governance, finance, accounting and business strategy, with the modules Corporate Governance and Corporate Secretarial Practice at its core.

Many ICSA students will have previously studied some of these areas but, given the range of subjects within CSQS, may feel less confident about one or two modules. We suggest that you review carefully the parts of the CSQS programme you haven't studied before, or for some time, and consider some preliminary reading or study at an introductory level before starting those CSQS modules.

For example, someone with a legal background who is working in a company secretarial department may feel that the mix of theoretical knowledge and practical experience this provides is sufficient to embark on the CSQS law, governance and secretarial practice modules without preliminary study. However, for the finance modules it may be worthwhile to do some preparation, such as working through introduction to accounting books or taking classes before studying these subjects.

8. I don't think I'm ready for CSQS. What study can I do to prepare?

We strongly recommend that if you do not have any degree level qualifications or relevant work experience you should undertake some form of preliminary study before registering for CSQS.

Even if you have prior qualifications and experience, you may not feel familiar enough with all the subjects to go straight into study at CSQS level. If this is the case, you should consider doing some introductory-level study in these subject areas.

This could take the form of self-study or more formal tuition.

Self-study – online research: there are a number of archives of educational material freely available online, and if you are confident about self-studying then this is an easy way to get started. For example, the iTunes U website contains complete business study programmes from Yale, Stanford and the Open University.

Self-study – texts: the recommended texts which have been developed or selected to support the CSQS modules will give you a good indication of module coverage and level and will help you to decide whether you want to tackle that module straight away.

Each CSQS module has a 'core text' which you will need to buy and study. In order to pass the exams you will need to do other wider reading, but this core text will cover the main areas of the syllabus. There is no requirement that you sign up for classes to study CSQS, so you may decide that studying with the core text and other sources on your own is sufficient preparation. This may be the case if you have studied and passed exams in the subject area before.

9. What support will I get as a student?

Workspaces have been created on ICSA's website for each module. Each workspace includes links to webinars (if available for that module), practice exams and marking schemes, a forum where students can pose questions to each other and the examiner as well as information on the course study materials. It is the responsibility of all candidates to ensure they have the most up to date study materials.

10. What is Fast-Track Professional?

If you are a qualified lawyer or accountant you may be eligible to study CSQS via our Fast-Track Professional route. This means that, instead of studying all eight modules, you need to study and pass the following two modules in order to achieve the qualification:

- Corporate Secretarial Practice
- Chartered Secretaries Case Study

Assessment for each module is by examination. Exams are held in June and November. More details on dates and exam centres can be found in the How to study section.

Once you have achieved GradICSA status you can immediately apply for full Membership (ACIS).

11. Am I eligible to fast-track?

To be eligible you must have been qualified for five years or more and have five years appropriate experience and be a current member of one of the following major accountancy bodies:

- Chartered Accountants (CA)
- Certified General Accountants (CGA)
- Certified Management Accountants (CMA)
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants in England and Wales (ICAEW)
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants of Scotland (ICAS)
- The Institute of Chartered Accountants in Ireland (ICAI)
- The Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA)
- The Chartered Institute of Management Accountants (CIMA)
- The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA)

Or you must be a current member of the Law Society or compliant with the Qualified Lawyers Transfer Regulations and have five years or more appropriate post-qualifying experience.

Appropriate experience would include:

- Company secretarial and legal work
- Corporate governance
- Financial management
- Committee administration and accounting
- General management and administration
- Pensions
- Insurance

You will need to send your full CV with your current job description along with your application so that we may assess the suitability of your experience.

12. How do I register?

If you want to register for CSQS please follow the registration stages below.

STAGE 1 – ESTABLISH IF CSQS IS RIGHT FOR YOU

STAGE 2 – WORK OUT WHICH MODULES YOU ARE LIKELY TO NEED TO STUDY

Take a look at our exemptions chart to establish if you are likely to be exempt from any of the modules. If you believe you may be eligible for exemptions go to Stage 3. If you believe you will need to study all eight modules go to Stage 4.

STAGE 3 – APPLYING FOR EXEMPTIONS (IF APPLICABLE)

If you are applying for exemptions you will need to submit certified copies of your academic/professional qualification and a transcript. These must be in English. If your documents were not issued in English they must be translated and certified as “an accurate translation of the original” by someone who is fluent in both languages and is not related to you. Certified copies of both the original document and translated document should be submitted. Please only send copies of your documents, not the originals as we cannot guarantee their return to you.

Please note that exemptions are offered and confirmed only once your previous qualifications and experience has been assessed.

STAGE 4 – COMPLETE REGISTRATION FORMS

Complete the Student Registration form and select the exam or exams you wish to write. You can get this form by contacting the National Office at:

ICSA Canada
300 March Road, Suite 202
Kanata, ON K2K 2E2
613-595-1151 or admin@icsacanada.org

STAGE 5 – ORGANIZE PAYMENT

When you send your registration forms you will need to pay the initial registration fee and the annual subscription fee. The initial registration fee is: \$50; the annual student subscription fee is : \$200; and, if you would like to be evaluated for the Fast-Track Professional Program, the fee is \$200.00.

If you are registering for an exam you will also need to include \$400 for each one selected.

Please note: Canadian students are also required to pay applicable taxes. Any questions on fee payment can be addressed to info@icsacanada.org or by calling 613-595-1151/800-501-3440 ext: 2.

If you are paying by credit card, please include the card information on the registration form. Alternatively, you can pay by cheque or money order made payable to ICSA Canada. These fees are valid until December 31 2014.

STAGE 6 – SEND FORMS AND PAYMENT

Please note that all registration and exam entry applications must be accompanied by your payment. Send your completed forms along with your payment to:

ICSA Canada
300 March Road, Suite 202
Kanata, ON K2K 2E2

or

admin@icsacanada.org

Please note that we cannot register you until we receive payment.