



Faculty of Public Health

Of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

13th September 2017

Dear Caroline

Thank you for your very helpful collated report summarising the experiences and comments from registrars who took the Part A exam in June 2017. Please accept my apologies for the long delay in receiving my response, which should be read alongside the 'Examiners' Comments – Feedback to Candidates' document that was published on the FPH website in July.

Venue and Invigilation

We are pleased that feedback on the venue was broadly positive despite some difficulties a few individuals had in locating the entrance and the lack of synchronisation of clocks in the room. We hope to continue to use this venue, so this is encouraging. The positive comments about the invigilators is also much appreciated, though we were concerned to hear that some papers were handed out 'face up'. On investigation, it appears that these were given out less than a minute before the start of the exam, so we are reassured that this gave little if any advantage to those candidates.

Paper 1

You raise the issue of 'split style' questions, and while these have been broadly welcomed, there were some concerns as to whether this impacted on individual candidates' revision approach. However, in our view the style of question has been evolving for some time now, and this is reflected in the past papers already published on the FPH website. The marking scheme referred to is an indicative one, and we consider that producing a structured answer is still important and is likely to attract additional credit (further details in the Examiners' Comments document mentioned above).

With respect to your comments about individual questions, we agree that health economics and sociology are very important elements of the syllabus, and each was the subject of a full question, so do not understand the comment made in the first bullet point. We have carefully reviewed question 6 and I'm afraid we do not agree that this was oddly phrased. Importantly also, the examiners' for this question did not identify any particular evidence of confusion in the answers they received. We also do not agree with the comment made about 'question 7' (this was actually question 8 from the description in your letter) – as with many topics in public health, the issue can be considered from a variety of standpoints. Its inclusion in the 'sociology' section and the wording of the question should have led candidates to respond in a sociological context, but of course, an understanding of this underpins effective health promotion activities. Finally, your comment on question 9 is well made and was identified by the examiners who gave credit for either interpretation. The precise wording of this question would be amended were it to be re-used.



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Paper 2A

We were pleased to note that the questions in this paper were felt to be fair. We were conscious that the paper was long and would take time to read. As you mention, it addressed an important topic, but as is frequently the case in the real-world, the outcomes are not necessarily clear cut. As a group of examiners, we spent a long time debating whether to use such a long paper, and if so whether to try and redact more text to reduce the reading required. However, on balance it was felt that the text that remained unredacted was helpful in making a fair appraisal of the paper. We will of course continue to be mindful of the length and complexity of papers when making selections for future papers, but believe the choice was justified in this instance. In terms of what the first question required, and likewise what the request to draft a letter was asking for, we feel the current wording is sufficient to guide candidates. The focus in Paper 2A is on real-world public health practice, and whilst clearly there is a balance between quantity and quality of description, we would expect several different strengths and weaknesses to be identified and described. We again have provided more detailed feedback in the Examiners' Comments document previously mentioned.

Paper 2B

Again, we were pleased to see that candidates were broadly satisfied with the questions being asked, and while we note the concerns over balance between different question types, we do not feel that this paper was especially slanted towards one particular set of skills. We do recognise that the number of practice questions concerns candidates and we are currently working towards expanding the range of questions available on the website. We were also interested in the idea of a formula sheet, and will discuss this further at our Part A Development Committee.

Other issues

We do recognise that moving towards a closed bank of Paper 1 questions may impact on how candidates prepare in future. This is a result of moving to a process of standard setting. However, we believe that over time this will lead to an overall improvement in the assessment process. Our intention is still to provide detailed and useful feedback after each exam and we would value comments and suggestions on the document that has been posted on the FPH website.

Thank you very much again for your helpful comments and feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Richard Holland and Dr Derek J Ward
Chair, Part A MFPH Examiners | Deputy Chair, Part A MFPH Examiners