

Chair of Part A Examiners
Faculty of Public Health
4 St Andrews Place
London
NW1 4LB.

14 July 2017

Dear Professor Holland,

Part A feedback

Thank you for the opportunity to feed back on the experiences and comments of registrars taking the Part A exam June 2017.

I have requested feedback from all registrars who sat the exam via their regional SRC representative, and also via a general email request to the public health yahoo group. The comments have been collated and are reflected below.

I have stated where the comment was made by one person or many people. I have not provided a personal reflection on the feedback received.

Venue:

- The June 2017 Part A sitting was held in a new venue. The feedback was broadly positive, including adequate space and facilities. However, some found the venue noisy, with no natural light, no windows, and no fresh air.
- A note: the clocks in the hall were not all reading the same time which some found confusing.
- Some people had difficulty finding the entrance as google maps wasn't clear.
- A suggestion was made that if the venue was to be changed in the future then a good notice period helps those who are booking hotels early (some people had booked near to the previous venue)

Invigilators:

- There was consistently high praise and appreciation for the 'organised, friendly and supportive staff', with feedback including comments such as 'excellent', 'kind', 'a reassuring presence'.
- A candidate specifically mentioned 'the gentleman on day two who helped calm candidates' nerves and was just generally very calm and professional'.
- A couple of responders fed back that the first few rows were handed their 2a papers face up giving those rows more time to look over the article.
- One person made a plea for invigilators to wear quieter shoes, and another that invigilators didn't talk to candidates within seconds of the start time as this was distracting.

Instructions to candidates and information on the day

- The instructions to candidates were generally felt to be good, and the organisation on the day and running of the exam was good, and kept to time.
- A couple of responders fed back that the first few rows were handed their 2a papers face up giving those rows more time to look over the article.
- One element of the exam that could have been made clearer is that the numbering of the pages should be by question, rather than whole paper.

Paper 1 (a and b)

- The feedback agreed that the questions themselves were felt to be generally fair.
- By far the greatest proportion of the feedback on paper one reflected the question format and the move to an increasingly split-question format. This raised issues as follows:
 - Revision support opportunities tend to focus on essay style questions rather than split questions, and as such some people felt their revision guidance did not reflect the requirements of the questions.
 - There were requests for more specimen questions that are split into sections, as per this exam, to help with the different revision requirements.
 - Some people struggled to know what level of information was wanted for the marks offered, given the time available, with some parts of a single question feeling like whole questions themselves.
 - The split-question format was welcomed as providing a natural structure to answers, with a reduced possibility of not being able to answer an entire question.
 - One person asked if the marking scheme will be changed to reflect that giving a point for structure is less relevant now than in previous years.

Individual questions

- There were some issues of clarity on individual questions:
 - One person suggested that as health economics and sociology are large parts of the curriculum it would be useful to have one question on each of these and maybe only one question on data or another topic to allow a broader range of questions.
 - Question six was difficult to understand and was oddly phrased leading to confusion with understanding what was required (especially relevant when there is no option to check the question as the papers will not be uploaded)
 - Question seven (the sociology question) felt like a health promotion question (asking about needs of prisoners).
 - Question nine looked for three 'methods' of addressing conflict within a team using management theory - it was not clear whether this was looking for three different management theories, or one theory which described three (or more) methods.

Paper 2a

- As for paper one, the questions were generally felt to be very fair.
- All the respondents raised concern over the length and complexity of the critical appraisal paper. It was identified that the paper included numerous analyses, with different methodologies, parameters, different variables, and an unusual design of sub-studies. This meant that candidates found it difficult to digest and ambiguous in outcome. Although the paper was also identified as interesting.
- Greater clarification was requested for the critical appraisal question and the expected balance between quality and quantity, for example: whether to describe *many* strengths and weaknesses in reasonable but brief detail, or focus on a few *key* strengths and weaknesses and discuss these in more depth.
- Single responses advised:
 - That there was a lack of clarity at what was expected from the instruction to draft a letter;
 - That it seemed disproportionate to give five marks for the definition of a Kruskal Wallis test;
 - That outside knowledge was required in some cases (eg that cotinine is linked to nicotine).

Paper 2b

- There were fewer than expected statistical tests required and the calculations were felt to be straightforward, with feedback suggesting a preference for a greater number of statistics based questions, or at least, a better balance of stats to interpretation.
- The limited number of practice questions raised concerns about opportunities for revision.
- One person felt that a formula sheet would be useful and more reflective of a real life situation and suggested a trial of this.
- One person had a broken calculator and felt that the spares were of dubious quality/condition.

Any other comments

- As key points for the questions are no longer to be posted after the exam, it was noted that it will be difficult to see where mistakes had been made in the event of failing the exam. How can we (FPH) address this issue?
- There is a request for revised preparation strategies if future papers are going to be different in structure, and, if going forward, past papers are going to be part of a closed bank of papers.

There were some issues that I believe are raised perennially, and as such have been addressed many times, but are presented here for completeness:

- time constraints in particular for papers 1b and 2b,
- inconsistencies with previous feedback (eg: candidates should write three points if asked for three points, compared to some questions where candidates get extra marks for writing more)
- anomalies in the revision materials supplied by the faculty
- request for greater use of technology for taking the exam and when applying and paying for the exam.

As you can see the feedback was generally helpful and positive, with some key concerns flagged.

Should you wish for the SRC support in disseminating any response to this feedback, we would be happy to oblige,

yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Caroline Vass'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Caroline Vass
Wessex deanery

On behalf of the SRC of the FPH