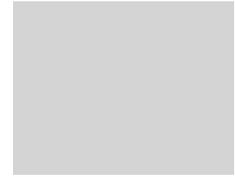


**NB this letter is redacted for publication, in order to preserve the integrity of the question bank.**



Caroline.vass@nhs.net

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

26 February 2018

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 in January 2018.

I 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. I was not at this sitting so the feedback is strictly as I received.

15 people responded. The comments have been collated and are reflected below. The number of responses to a specific issue is denoted in brackets. Comments made by more than one person are presented first.

### **Venue**

Nine respondents praised the excellent venue and the facilities. (9)

### **Instructions**

The instructions to candidates and materials sent out in advance were identified as clear and concise, and the handbook was useful. (6)

### **Organisation**

The candidates felt that the exam was well organised and a number of respondents cited the excellent support received from Laura Bland. (5)

Accommodation for people needing additional arrangements was appreciated including needs of dyslexic candidates and others. (2)

### **Invigilation**

Most respondents' experience of the Invigilators and staff running the exam was positive: that they were approachable, pleasant, supportive, helpful and friendly. (6)

However, there were some issues associated with the exam that the invigilators had to manage which were problematic and distracting for a number of respondents:

- At every sitting there were candidates who entered the room late or after the exam began, which was extremely distracting to those sitting nearby. For one paper the late candidate needed instructions explaining again after the exam start, since he had missed the initial briefing. The experience of repeating instruction during exam time is reflected in more than one return. It is not clear whether this was due to late entrants in every case, or just the invigilator approach. (4)
- There was a numbering error in Paper 2 which required an interruption during the exam to announce the error and an additional one minute to accommodate this. One minute was not felt to be adequate compensation for the error or the disruption this caused. (8)

### **Preparation**

- It is frustrating that there are very few resources which candidates can access to practice for Paper 2b. Candidates understand that reduced access to past papers is due to the development of a bank of questions, but still felt that the available information to support preparation is insufficient. (4) – *see also 'expectations' under section: paper 2b which received 11 comments.*

### **General comments**

- Unclear on what the exam is trying to examine – appears to be a process of rote learning. (2)
- Consider updating eg: to use computers or MCQs. (2)
- Large font made questions easy to annotate where necessary. (2)
- The comprehensive curriculum is challenging to cover over 2 days – perhaps consider more time between papers 1 and 2 / a staged exam. (2)

**Paper 1** was seen as fair with generally clear and unambiguous questions. As in previous sittings' feedback, the time pressure is noted. (4)

The structure of this paper tended towards short-answer style questions, which although some felt made the questions easier and clearer does not reflect the preparation advice which focuses on essay style questions as seen in past papers. (3)

A couple of respondents felt that short-answer questions become a test of how fast and coherently candidates can write and cover the required knowledge. Questions typically appeared to only require superficial levels of knowledge, with 'describe' and 'define' being used in many questions rather than 'discuss'. For this reason it wasn't clear whether a simple description of facts was needed rather than a more in-depth discussion of the concepts. (2)

### **Paper 1a Specific question issues**

- Lack of questions about diseases important to PH. (2)

### **Paper 1b Specific question issues**

- Concern was raised that a whole question was taken up with 'define [redacted]': this seemed quite a lot of marks for a definition and might be better presented if the question was to 'explore' or 'discuss' the characteristics. (4)
- The final question in paper 1b covered items not listed in the syllabus for the exam. (2)\*
- There was a question which asked to describe 4 different theories of [the same topic] [redacted]. This was found to be repetitive and too specific to enable an adequate critique of these. In addition these are not specified on the syllabus. (2)\*

*\*my note: It is not clear if the responses summarised in the previous 2 bullet points refer to the same question on paper 1b. If they do, then four respondents raised the issue. CV*

**Paper 2** The paper was considered broadly fair, with sufficient time given for paper 2a. (3) Two people felt the time pressure associated with paper 2b impacted on their ability to answer the questions with confidence, particularly given the use of more 'wordy' answers which requires more time than statistical calculations. (2)

### **Paper 2a specific question issues**

- The choice of paper for the critical appraisal was identified as more complex than expected (3), although some felt it was a good and interesting paper with reasonable questions (3). It was also felt that the 600 word answer limit and timings might be reviewed if the article were longer or the research contained multiple findings. (4)

### **Paper 2b**

Paper 2b contained an error regarding the question numbering, the management of which is reflected in the section on invigilation. (8)

Expectations of Paper 2b: There appears to be a gap between the expectations of this paper and the reality, noted by 11 of the 15 respondents. Available practice materials, courses, and the syllabus suggest a requirement for students to carry out complex calculations, statistical analyses and applied maths, yet candidates identified that this paper covered very little in the way of statistical calculations, instead was heavily focussed on the interpretation of data. (11)

### **Paper 2b Specific question issues**

- Possible error in question 5: [redacted] - The time periods covered within the question did not appear to match and were inconsistently formatted. (3)
- Some questions felt ambiguous and candidates could not tell what the examiner was looking for, [redacted]. (2)

### **Comments made by single respondents:**

- The online registration and payment process for the exam was not clear. (1)

- A second set of instructions and ID requirements sent just before the exam might be helpful for candidates, (1),
- Clarity was requested on type of ID to bring and phone etiquette. (1)
- That it might be cheaper to use a smaller and more central location (eg Birmingham). (1)
- Clarify that the main entrance of the venue is to be used. (1)
- Desks were too small. (1)
- Some calculators appeared to be in poor condition / not working. (1)
- It was queried why the marks are presented in papers 1a, 1b and 2a as ‘%’, but paper 2b as ‘marks’. (1)
- Proof read to check for mistakes and consider adjustments to marking in light of any mistakes found in the question papers following administration. (1)
- Using standard size A4 paper for the answer book might help people who have practiced their word count using standard size paper. (1)
- Suggestion that the need for complex calculations does not accurately represent the activities of consultants any more. (1)
- Faculty should review the statistical methods required for Part A to be clear which methods need to be learned and may be tested. (1)
- Questions didn’t allow opportunities to relate situation to real life (1)
- Q1 – poor data display (1)
- The last question on paper 2a [redacted] had a] potential for confusion about whether that question wanted press lines responding to the previous issue or specific [redacted]. The candidate felt it would be unfair for people to have lost marks on that account. (1)
- MCQ [redacted]: 2 options appeared to be correct. (1)
- [redacted] question was unclear if comparison was for year average or week 29. (1)
- Ambiguous question [redacted]. (1)

As you can see the feedback was generally helpful and positive, with some key concerns flagged. If you have any queries about any responses, please do not hesitate to ask.

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

yours sincerely,



Caroline Vass  
Wessex deanery

On behalf of the SRC of the FPH