



Faculty of Public Health

Of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom

Working to improve the public's health

Caroline Vass
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10th April 2018

Dear Caroline,

Re: Part A Feedback letter for January 2018 Part A, MFPH

As ever, I would like to thank you very much for collating comments from your colleagues about this exam and apologise for our delay responding.

In response to your comments:

Venue/instructions/organisation and invigilation: it is very good to hear that the venue was considered excellent, instructions were clear, the exam was well-organised, and our invigilator team was helpful, friendly and supportive. We are also grateful for the positive feedback about Laura Bland, our Part A administrator.

Late entry of candidates: we are sorry for the disruption these candidates caused and will review our procedures on how to handle late arrivals. We are aware that in many other exams late entrants are denied access altogether.

Numbering error in one Paper 2b question: we regret this mistake. We plan to add in an extra level of scrutiny to our proof-reading system. We will also review our procedures where announcements are made in exams, and time given as a result.

Preparation: we understand the continuing issues around 2b preparation materials and continue to work on several additional example questions for our website.

General comments: the exam is trying to assess core knowledge of public health practice and the ability to apply that knowledge to public health examples. This does include data interpretation and appraisal/interpretation of published evidence etc. We have previously considered use of computers for testing, but when investigated this proved to be too expensive. Nevertheless, we will continue to keep that area under review. However, we are clear that MCQs are not an appropriate testing method to replace our current exam format as these do not allow us to assess depth of interpretative ability and a candidate's skill at providing reasoned argument.

Paper 1a and b:

- we are very glad to hear that this paper was generally considered to be fair. We note issues around time pressure, but are glad that our greater use of structured short-answer style questions has been appreciated. Wherever this is suitable, we are using this approach, as it does tend to ensure greater clarity of question delivery, and is therefore better for both candidates and examiners.

- A minority of our questions do only require relatively brief answers. Candidates should be strongly guided by the marks awarded to each question. Such questions tend to attract only 1-2 marks (i.e. 10-20% of marks available for questions on Paper 1a & b).
- We can reassure you that the wording that was criticised in one of the 1b questions (reported as 'define') was remembered incorrectly. The question was appropriately worded for candidates to ensure they understood exactly what was required of them by this question.
- We can likewise reassure you that "individuals, team/groups and their development" is covered by the syllabus within the organisation and management section.

Paper 2a:

- We are pleased to hear that this was considered an interesting paper with reasonable questions by several of your respondents. It is a reasonable point to consider whether longer papers should have a different word limit (and timings) and we will review this at our Part A development committee (PADC). Given time limitations inevitable within our exam set-up, we will consider whether it is appropriate to limit the length of papers that we use, either through selection, or via redaction. However, this does need to be considered in detail by the PADC.

Paper 2b:

- This paper always consists of a mix of calculation, data interpretation and more generic public health questions. We do not plan to change that. Inevitably, with only five questions the exact balance between those elements will vary somewhat at each sitting.
- Concerns about question 5: the question was reviewed in detail at the exam board and it was decided to remove the question. This did not disadvantage any candidate as no candidate had reached the pass mark set for this question.

General points raised by individual candidate comments:

We thank the committee and respondents for these very helpful comments and will review timing of our instructions to candidates including ID advice, and the calculators we provide.

We will seek to harmonise the system by which we indicate marks allocated throughout all papers, using marks awarded throughout.

The syllabus for this exam will be reformatted in parallel with the next review of the Public Health training curriculum. The questions are all set by practising Public Health specialists and are considered to relate to current public health practice.

We hope the above is helpful and thank you very much for taking the time to collate the responses. Please do not hesitate to let us know if you have any further queries.

Yours sincerely



Prof. Richard Holland
Chair, Part A Examiners



Dr Derek Ward
Deputy Chair, Part A Examiners