



**FACULTY OF  
PUBLIC HEALTH**

Dr Alexander Allen  
Vice Chair of the SRC  
Speciality Registrar Committee

10<sup>th</sup> April 2019

Dear Dr Allen,

**Re: SpR feedback letter on Part A, January 2019**

Thank you very much for your detailed letter summarising the feedback you received from your colleagues sitting the Part A exam in January. I do apologise for the delay in providing this response.

Thank you also for your kind comments about Laura Bland's management of the exam processes. Information about additional items permitted within the exam room is published, but Laura will clarify that for future sittings. In terms of those sitting alone, candidates with adjustments are advised that they will be taking the examination in a separate examination room at the venue. The number of candidates within the additional room will, however, vary by sitting and according to the numbers with specific adjustments in place. In addition, arrangements do at times need to be altered on the day (where candidates withdraw). Unfortunately, it is therefore not practical to provide detailed information to each candidate in advance of the exam on the precise arrangements they will encounter.

Venue: desk size is commented on each sit. These are provided by the venue, which has many advantages. Unfortunately, therefore this will not change.

The siting of the venue in London is also commented on regularly. Inevitably there are pros and cons to any single site chosen, whether London, Birmingham, Loughborough or elsewhere. Whilst it would be ideal to have more local arrangements for each candidate, as yet this is not possible. Were we in due course to move to some form of computer based testing, this may be able to be re-visited.

In terms of invigilation, the Chief Invigilator spoke only very briefly over the start time (one minute), and the end time was therefore adjusted. Nevertheless, we understand that this can affect candidates' question timings and will feedback your colleagues' desire to ensure start times are as planned.

In terms of preparation, we have recently released additional 2B practice questions and will consider releasing a further example of a 2A paper.

We are pleased that our current format is appreciated by candidates, with questions generally broken down to smaller sub-sections (particularly in Paper 1). This helps focus candidates' answers, and also assists with marking.

For Paper 1, we re-reviewed those questions drawing particular comments at the Examination Board, and we do not agree that sub-sections of individual questions were too similar, nor did we consider that any question was vaguely worded. Furthermore, candidates queried which part of the syllabus one Paper 1 section E question was asking about. Candidates are always guided by the section of the exam paper as to which part of the syllabus examiners are testing within any question, and this question was clearly linked to this part of the syllabus. Indeed, contrary to candidate feedback, our section E examiners considered that candidates performed particularly well at this sitting on their section.

Given feedback within this letter, we thought it would be helpful to describe our exam setting processes. Exam setting starts with question development. This is a structured process. Examiners seek to set questions from across their syllabus area, and candidates are advised to consider the whole syllabus when preparing for the exam. Examiners develop and peer review each other's questions by question section. Questions generated are then submitted to our exam setting meeting (held annually). There, questions are rigorously reviewed by the full examiner body prior to final selection in to a paper. Where necessary, certain selected questions are sent back for further editing by the relevant question writer. Full papers are then constructed and submitted for standard setting (again an annual meeting) which allows the examiner team to re-review all questions and clarify any areas of potential confusion. Finalised papers are subsequently submitted for approval to the Academic Registrar of FPH and the Hong Kong Censor – both of whom can ask for further clarification or final edits where needed. Final papers are then proof checked by the Chair and Deputy Chair and now also sent for separate proofing by our Chief Invigilator.

As already commented in the exam feedback, Paper 2A proved the least well answered element of this exam sitting. We have changed the format of the first question to aid candidates split their time effectively. In general, this appeared to help candidates gain marks in terms of identifying key findings and public health impact – which was generally answered well, and considerably better than the first part of the question (critiquing the paper). Please see our Exam feedback document for further comments.

In contrast, despite candidates considering Paper 2B to be particularly difficult, in general candidates performed reasonably well on that paper, with the exception of question 4. Again all questions have been carefully checked and none appear to have vague wording. Furthermore, the graph considered to be rare (as mentioned in your letter) is in common use. Timing has not changed in this paper and nor has question length, but we do understand the challenge posed by exam time constraints. Our strong advice to candidates is always to limit their answers according to the mark scheme provided.

In terms of calculator functionality, we plan to replace the current stock for the June sitting and will take your feedback on board when the new models are chosen.

In terms of computer based testing. As previously requested, this is an area under close review. Unfortunately, as yet we have not found a cost efficient way of delivering the exam in that way; indeed all quotes we have so far seen would put exam costs up considerably. In terms of introducing MCQ or EMQ type questions, this too has been requested previously. However, our examiner team consider that it would only suit a minority of question areas. Finally, in terms of overall costs, we do sympathise in terms of exam expense, however, the Faculty do regularly review the costs to ensure it is kept to a level where the fees brought in cover the exam's delivery costs and no more. Equally, examiners are not paid a fee for marking and most undertake their Part A work in their own time.

Thank you very much again for your helpful feedback and comments and I hope that this response combined with the formal Exam feedback document prove helpful to you and your colleagues.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. N. Holland'.

Prof. Richard Holland

Chair, Part A examiners