



## Hints and Tips for preparation for Diplomate examination

Following each sitting of the Diplomate examination, an Examiners' Comments report is produced. This document highlights recurrent issues highlighted by the examiners, with the aim of helping those who are preparing to sit the exam.

The Diplomate examination of the Faculty of Public Health is designed to test both knowledge (primarily in Paper I) and skills (primarily in Paper II) required of a public health practitioner, and both papers will include questions that address public health practice. The examination expects candidates to demonstrate a breadth of knowledge across the whole of the syllabus; being expert in a few areas of the syllabus will not compensate for lack of depth in others. Remember too, that the questions will sample your knowledge from all areas, using a range of scenarios, some of which may be less common than others. This means that you cannot assume that because something is rare, uncommon or unlikely, it will not be included in the exam.

### What can examiners recommend candidates to do to optimise their ability to score well in paper I?

- Good time management
- Read each question carefully to ensure you understand what the question is asking and thus what your answer must address:
- Balance your responses to the proportion of marks allocated to each part of the question; if a question asks for a list or a definition, a discussion of each element included is not expected, and is likely to use up valuable exam time.
- Ensure that all parts of the question are answered
- Reread the question after you have written your answer to check that it addresses all elements asked for.
- Confine your answers to that which is asked for in the question; avoid extraneous details and avoid repeating information already provided in the question. If the question makes reference to a specific scenario, your answers should also be referenced to the same situation.
- Style your answers in response to the questions; avoid detailed description when asked for Key Features/ 'Define'/'List'. Conversely, if a question asks for discussion about a topic, the answer is expected to be more than just a list.
- Well-structured answers, logically argued/well justified and illustrated with relevant public health-related examples will usually score highly.
- Using a clear structure to layout your answer helps to avoid missing key points/issues from the answer, ensuring for example, that each subpart is clearly identified.

- For some questions, outlining the relevant principles/ theoretical basis/classification framework is helpful in structuring a good answer.
- If you are using a known model or framework, it can be helpful to be clear about this.
- Ensure that you have a good understanding of, such that you are able to both define and clearly explain, all the concepts mentioned in the syllabus.
- When providing definitions, try to be clear and succinct; avoid lengthy detailed explanations
- Frequently, we expect knowledge of examples linked to a specific definition, so when revising, think carefully of how you apply that term or concept.
- When presented with a table or figure, remember first to 'stand back' and look at it as a whole as well as focusing on the individual elements in detail.
- If a question asks for a specific number of examples, additional examples will not attract additional credit, nor will the examiner pick the 'best' examples. Rather they will only mark the examples in the order written, to the specified number.
- In contrast, when a number is not specified, candidates should aim for a range of different, relevant examples rather than several variations on the same theme.
- While some questions will specify the requirement to identify positive and negative aspects, (or compare and contrast), it is usually appropriate to consider strengths/weaknesses/similarities /differences when composing the answer to any question that asks for 'Discussion'.
- Remember that this examination is on Public Health, so answers should in the main have a population perspective
- It is also a professional examination, so for paper I, the use of basic professional terms is expected, unless otherwise stated. If unsure, you can always define the term to clarify you understand it.
- Although a key aspect of the Diplomate exam is to test your public health knowledge base, it does so in context, so candidates should not only be able to demonstrate their theoretical knowledge, but able to show that they understand how that knowledge is utilised in the real world of public health, and the associated challenges. For example, in addition to being able to list the key differences between two different study designs, it is important to be able to demonstrate which you might choose in a practical situation, and why.

### **What can examiners recommend candidates to do to optimise their ability to score well in paper II?**

- Formulaic approaches to critical appraisal are usually not sufficient. While this approach can help structure your thinking about a scientific paper or report, **Paper IIA** is testing your ability to apply the information provided in the paper to a specific context, and good candidates are able to draw out the issues in the paper that are most pertinent to that context.
- Remember this is a Public Health examination, so when critically appraising a paper, it is important to include the identification of the key implications for public health practice.

- Those scoring well give some consideration to the broader public health aspects raised by the paper, rather than only focusing on the content of the paper.
- It may be helpful, particularly when preparing for the Diplomat examination, to take part regularly in critical appraisal of public health studies (perhaps through a journal club), including a focus on the public health utility and impact (the 'so what') of such papers
- Avoid simply repeating information from within the paper in your answers.
- When asked to prepare a summary/response etc, take care to write it in a style that reflects the intended audience, for example avoiding or explaining simply professional 'jargon'.
- When discussing strengths and weaknesses, try to ensure that you pay similar attention to both.
- In **Paper IIB**, candidates should be familiar with (i.e. use, interpret and explain) all the key skills listed in the syllabus.
- Candidates should also ensure they show their working (including intermediate steps) to secure full credit.

#### **Are there any tips on using examples of Public health Practice'?**

- Use focused and appropriate examples from real life Public Health Practice (e.g. from personal experience or observation).
- Ensure that you consider practice from the population perspective, and that examples have Public Health relevance
- Think about what you would do or say if your manager (e.g. the Director of Public Health) asked you to carry out the task specified in the question, and the challenges you might encounter.
- Ensure you are familiar with the skills and techniques associated with the communication of public health messages to non-health professionals, e.g. through media interviews, press releases, etc.
- Remember that public health actions can be implemented at multiple levels, e.g. local, regional and national, and even international settings, and with an extensive range of stakeholders, many of whom are beyond health and health care settings.
- Rehearse explaining common public health and statistical principals and concepts in language accessible to non-health professionals.
- Avoid unrealistic or over ambitious suggestions for the application of Public Health practice

#### **What do examiners say are the most common mistakes made by candidates?**

- Examiners frequently comment on candidates' answers not addressing the question directly and/or including superfluous detail.
- Omitting to specify a setting or population group when asked to do so in the question

#### **What can examiners recommend candidates avoid in their answers?**

- Candidates should avoid repeating the same information across different sections of the same question.

- Including in your answers everything you can think of that might be relevant, when you are unable to specifically answer the question.
- Vague, generic or poorly structured responses.