



**FACULTY OF
PUBLIC HEALTH**

Protecting and improving the health of the public
through the organised efforts of our members

FPH Online Examinations

Misconduct policy and procedure 2020-21

September 2020

1. Introduction

- 1.1 This policy applies to all candidates for examinations of the Faculty of Public Health of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom.
- 1.2 The Faculty of Public Health (FPH) of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the United Kingdom reserves the right to debar any candidate from sitting and/or passing the Examination or any constituent part of it if there is doubt concerning the sufficiency and/or authenticity of the certificates produced by the candidate or if there exists any other reason regarding the fitness of that candidate to become a member of FPH.
- 1.3 Candidates should note that by virtue of entering to sit an examination they are deemed to have understood and agreed to respect and abide by all relevant regulations including, but not restricted to, this Misconduct Policy and documentation sent to candidates on the conduct of individual parts and components of the examination.
- 1.4 FPH reserve the right to withhold the issuing of results while investigations are ongoing. Depending on the outcome of the investigation, results may be released, amended or permanently withheld. FPH also reserve the right to conduct retrospective investigations, and consequentially to amend or cancel results after they have been issued to candidates.
- 1.5 This policy and procedure does not apply to anyone employed by or acting in any official capacity on behalf of FPH, including invigilators and examiners. In such cases invigilators, staff and officials should expect their conduct to be investigated under the FPH Complaints Procedure.
- 1.6 Throughout these procedures, the FPH Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy may delegate any of the duties ascribed to him/her to another appropriate member of FPH staff.
- 1.7 Any dispute as to the interpretation of this policy shall be referred to the Academic Registrar, whose decision in the matter shall be final.

2. Definitions

- 2.1 This policy and procedure cover all aspects of academic and professional misconduct in MFPH examinations. Misconduct includes, but is not restricted to:
 - (a) Introduction into any examination of any materials other than those specifically permitted for the examination;
 - (b) Removal from any examination of any materials other than those specifically permitted;
 - (c) Any attempt to communicate with another candidate (or person other than the invigilator) during the examination;
 - (d) Any attempt to gain access to or read the work of another candidate during the examination;
 - (e) Any attempt to gain or pass on information about the contents of the examination during, in advance, or after the date of the examination;

- (f) Any attempt to capture or record information about the content of the examination during, in advance or after the date of the examination;
 - (g) Deliberately disconnecting the internet connection during an online examination and claiming that this is due to a technical issue;
 - (f) Impersonation or attempted impersonation of a candidate; and
 - (g) Failing to abide by the instructions of an invigilator or examiner in relation to the examination regulations.
- 2.2 Any invigilator or examiner present shall be empowered to refuse to allow a candidate to continue with an examination on grounds of misconduct (subject to the guidance given in other areas of this procedure - see paragraphs 3.3.1 and 3.4.2). The procedure for enacting these regulations is set out below.

3. Reporting procedures

- 3.1 Suspected misconduct may be reported to FPH by examiners, invigilators, examination officials, candidates, role-players and any other FPH-related personnel by person(s) who becomes aware of suspected misconduct.
- 3.2 Anonymous reports of misconduct will be acted upon only if there is supporting evidence. In such cases invigilators and any other relevant officials may be informed of the allegation and asked to comment.

3.3 Reporting Procedure for the FPH Diplomate Examination (DFPH)

- 3.3.1 Where an invigilator or other examination official suspects a candidate of infringing examination room rules he/she shall:
- (a) In the instance of written exams, confiscate any unauthorised material in the possession of the candidate;
 - (b) Make a formal and contemporaneous note of the time when the alleged infringement was discovered/noted. Wherever possible an invigilator should invite another invigilator or other examination official to act as witness to the suspected infringement, and then countersign the note to confirm this;
 - (c) Allow the candidate(s) in question to continue the exam. Ejection from the examination room should only take place in the event of a candidate's conduct causing disruption to other candidates.
 - (d) In the instance of online examinations, the exam will be terminated if a candidate fails to stop the forbidden activity at the request of the invigilator. The infringement will be noted in the invigilator report and FPH will review this together with the relevant evidence.
 - (e) Inform the candidates(s) in question at the end of the examination, that a written report of the incident will be submitted to the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy.
 - (f) Prepare within three working days a written report on the alleged incident and send it with any retained confiscated materials to the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy.

3.3.2 Candidates must on request surrender to the invigilator/remove from the room any materials or aids that are reasonably believed by the invigilator not to be permitted. The invigilator can, on request, issue a brief receipt for such articles. The invigilator must include all such materials with his/her report, or for online exams, include the video footage demonstrating this, which may be copied or retained by the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy at his/her absolute discretion.

3.4 Reporting Procedure for the FPH Final Membership Examination (MFPH)

3.4.1 Where an examiner, invigilator or other examination official or representative of FPH has grounds to suspect that a candidate has attempted to acquire information about the content of the examination in advance of commencing it, he/she must notify the Chair/Vice-Chair of the MFPH immediately. After consultation with the FPH Education Office, the Chair/Vice-Chair shall determine what action is necessary to safeguard the integrity of the examination. It should be presupposed that the examination will go ahead as scheduled, and that any necessary action will be taken after the event when the facts are known. The Chair/Vice-Chair of the MFPH shall conduct an investigation and then ensure a written report is submitted to the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy within three working days of the matter coming to their attention.

3.4.2 Where an examiner considers a candidate is acting in an unprofessional or inappropriate manner during an MFPH exam in a way intended to result in an unfair advantage to themselves at any point during their examination, they shall alert the Chair/Vice-Chair of the MFPH as soon as possible. The Chair/Vice-Chair shall:

- (a) Confiscate any inappropriate materials/ask the candidate to remove these from the room and decide whether the candidate in question may continue with the examination. In most cases the examination should continue as scheduled and any necessary action taken after the event. Candidates should be prevented from proceeding with the examination only if it is the view of the Chair/Vice-Chair that their conduct is likely to cause distress, influence or disrupt other candidates. Alternatively, in the instance of online examinations, the exam will be terminated if a candidate fails to stop the forbidden activity at the request of the invigilator. The infringement will be noted in the invigilator report and FPH will review this with the relevant evidence.
- (b) Inform the candidate at the end of the examination that a written report of the incident will be submitted to the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy;
- (c) Prepare within three working days a written report on the alleged incident and send it with any confiscated materials to the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy.

3.5 All other instances of academic or professional misconduct

3.5.1 The examiner or person(s) identifying the misdemeanour shall prepare a written report on the alleged incident and send it with any relevant materials to the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy within three working days of the examination.

4. Procedures for investigation

- 4.1 The procedures by which the alleged offences to the DFPH are investigated shall be undertaken wherever possible ahead of the Examining Board meeting for the relevant examination.
- 4.2 The procedures by which the alleged offences to the MFPH shall be investigated as soon as possible following the relevant examination. FPH reserve the right to withhold the issuing of results for any candidate while investigations are ongoing.
- 4.3 The Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy shall review all reports of alleged cases of misconduct, and, after consulting with other members of staff where necessary, shall determine whether there is sufficient evidence of a prima facie case to be answered. This should not preclude a letter of reprimand being issued in cases deemed to be of a very minor or technical nature where no further action is appropriate.
- 4.4 In all other cases, and within 10 working days of receiving a report of suspected misconduct, the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy will inform the candidate in writing of the allegations that have been made about them, and provide them with a copy of this Policy and Procedure. The candidate shall thereby be invited to admit or deny the charge, and be informed that the establishment of a Misconduct Hearing Panel can be dispensed with should they choose to accept the allegations.
- 4.5 The candidate shall provide their response in writing to the allegations within 10 working days from the date of the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy's letter. If no response is received within 10 days, then a warning letter shall be sent. If no response to this warning letter is received within another 10 working days, then full details of the case shall be passed to the Chair of the relevant examining board for a final decision along with a recommendation of an appropriate penalty.
- 4.6 Where a candidate admits in writing to the allegations, full details of the case shall be passed to the Chair of the relevant examining board for a final decision along with a recommendation of an appropriate penalty. The candidate shall have the opportunity to include with their response a written statement which may be taken into account by the board.
- 4.7 Where a candidate responds within the time limit and denies the allegations (in whole or in part) the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy will convene a Misconduct Hearing Panel as soon as possible to formally consider the case.
- 4.8 The establishment of a Misconduct Hearing Panel under paragraph 4.7 does not preclude the candidate from, at any point, admitting the allegation in writing for action to be taken in accordance with paragraph 4.6, except that the fact of the candidate's initial denial will also be communicated to the Chair of the relevant examining board to take into account. However, all candidates who have committed misconduct should note that promptly admitting guilt, taking responsibility and expressing contrition for their actions is viewed by FPH as an important and appropriate step, and that this will be kept in mind whenever any penalty is being determined.
- 4.9 Decisions will be reached on cases passed to the Chair of an examining board (in accordance with paragraphs 4.5, 4.6 and 4.8) as soon as possible, and candidates

should normally have received notification of the action to be taken in regard to their case within 15 working days after the candidate's response is received. In the case of no response, candidates will be notified 20 days after the Director's letter, as referenced in paragraph 4.5. In exceptional circumstances a decision may be deferred until the next scheduled meeting of the relevant board of examiners, but candidates must be informed of this within 15 working days of their response; and then be notified of the action to be taken in regard to their case within 5 working days of the examiners' meeting.

5. Establishment of Misconduct Hearing Panel

- 5.1 A Misconduct Hearing Panel shall be convened if a candidate denies an allegation in whole or in part.
- 5.2 The purpose of the Panel is to examine the facts of a case, and the strength and veracity of the evidence being presented. It is to determine on the balance of probabilities whether the allegation of misconduct has been proven, to the satisfaction of the majority of the Panel. Where an allegation is found to be so proven, it is to determine an appropriate penalty based upon established guidelines detailed in paragraphs 8.1, 8.2 and 8.3.
- 5.3 The Misconduct Hearing Panel shall be constituted with one member from each of the following categories, or their nominee:
 - (a) The FPH Assistant Academic Registrar;
 - (b) The Chair/Vice-Chair of the relevant Board of Examiners; and
 - (c) A member of FPH's Board of Examiners (not previously involved in the examining of the candidate or specific case).
- 5.4 A Secretary to the Hearing Panel shall be appointed by the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy. The Secretary's role shall be to record the proceedings and deliberations of the Panel, and he/she may not attempt to guide or influence the discussions or decisions of the Panel in any way but may advise on procedural matters.
- 5.5 The first task for members of each Hearing Panel shall be to elect one of their number to act as Chair.
- 5.6 The Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy will present the details of the allegation and all available evidence to the Panel.
- 5.7 The candidate shall have the right to be present at all proceedings of the Panel subject to the procedures detailed below in paragraphs 6.1, 6.6 and 6.8, and to present written or oral evidence to the Panel. Such evidence may include references attesting to previous good character, although candidates are advised to keep in mind that those approached to supply such references may then subsequently expect the candidate to provide them with details of the outcome of the Hearing.
- 5.8 Proceedings of the Panel shall not be invalidated by reason of the absence of the candidate, provided that the procedure detailed below has been observed.
- 5.9 The candidate has the right to be accompanied at the hearing by a Next Friend. The Next Friend may advise and counsel the candidate, but may not make any statements

to, or cross-examine, any other person present at the Hearing. If the candidate wishes to be accompanied by a Next Friend they must provide the Secretary to the Misconduct Hearing Panel with the name, address and roles of the nominated person, and the reasons for their involvement, not less than five working days before the hearing.

- 5.10 The Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy shall inform the candidate of the scheduled date of the Misconduct Hearing Panel as soon as possible and not less than 15 working days before the date of the Hearing. The Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy will then arrange for a copy of each document that he/she shall present to the Panel to be sent to the candidate not less than 10 working days before the date set for the Hearing, which shall include a list of any witnesses that may be called. Such documents shall include any statement(s) provided by the candidate, whose responsibility it is to ensure any such documents and list of witnesses they intend to call are received by the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy at least 12 working days before the date set for the Hearing. No documents or witnesses may be presented to or referred to by the Panel, unless details have been circulated in this manner, except with the consent of the Panel, the candidate and Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy. All documents will also be circulated in advance to members of the Panel so that they may familiarise themselves with the evidence before the date of the Hearing.
- 5.11 No confirmation of whether the candidate has provisionally passed or failed the examination in question, if results have not been released, shall be provided to either the candidate or the members of the Panel.

6. Misconduct hearing panel procedure

- 6.1 The Panel may, at its discretion, meet before the scheduled start of the Hearing for preliminary discussions. The Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy, the candidate, their Friend and any witnesses may not be present, although the Secretary shall be present and keep a record of proceedings.
- 6.2 At the start of the Hearing Panel all present shall introduce themselves. The Chair shall ask the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy to outline the allegations, and shall then ask the candidate whether they admit or deny misconduct. If, at this stage, the candidate decides to admit to the allegations in full, the Panel has the authority to proceed immediately to consideration of the penalty to be imposed as detailed below in paragraphs 6.7 and following.
- 6.3 In all cases other than those covered by 6.2 above, the Chair shall then invite the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy to present his/her documentary material and call witnesses. The Chair shall then invite the candidate to question the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy and his/her witnesses, after which members of the Panel may do the same.
- 6.4 The Chair shall then invite the candidate to present their documentary material and call witnesses in support of their case. The Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy may then question the candidate and his/her witnesses, after which members of the Panel may do the same.

- 6.5 The validity of proceedings shall not be affected by the unwillingness or inability of any party to reply to questions or to appear before the Panel. Where the Panel concludes that an individual is unwilling to reply to a question, it may make reasonable inferences from that refusal.
- 6.6 The Hearing Panel may, at its discretion and at any time, interrupt proceedings to ask questions, or to order the room to be vacated for private discussions. Neither the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy, the candidate, their Friend nor any witnesses are entitled to be present at such times, although the Secretary shall be present and keep a record of proceedings.
- 6.7 Before they are dismissed, the Chair shall give the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy and the candidate the opportunity to make a closing statement. Before leaving, the candidate shall be reminded that he/she will be notified of the outcome within five working days.
- 6.8 The Panel shall then consider the matter in private, as soon as the Chair has reminded the Panel of its role and purpose as detailed in paragraph 5.2. The Secretary shall be present.
- 6.9 The decisions of individual Panel members shall always be treated as confidential.
- 6.10 Exceptional or mitigating circumstances shall not be considered by the Panel when determining whether an allegation has been proven, but may be referred to when an appropriate penalty is being discussed.
- 6.11 Following the meeting the Secretary shall prepare a written report summarising the proceedings and the decisions of the Panel (including where the decision is that no misconduct has been committed). This shall be sent to the candidate within five working days of the Hearing, and a copy presented to the next meeting of the relevant Board of Examiners.

7. Appeals procedure

- 7.1 Appeals may only be allowed on the following grounds:
- (a) Where there is evidence of administrative or procedural irregularity;
 - (b) Where there is new evidence of extenuating circumstances that could not reasonably have been presented before;
 - (c) Where there is evidence that the Misconduct Hearing Panel acted unreasonably.
- 7.2 Appeals against the decision of an Examining Board or Misconduct Hearing Panel must be received in writing by the Director of Education, Standards and Advocacy no later than 10 working days after the date on which the candidate was notified of the decision. A FPH Officer, who must have no prior involvement in the case, will then review the appeal and determine whether there is sufficient evidence for an Appeals Panel to be convened based on the grounds given in 7.1.
- 7.3 The establishment and conduct of an Appeals Panel will be the same as for a Misconduct Hearing Panel, except that the Appeals Panel will normally be chaired by the FPH Academic Registrar or other FPH Officer and no member of the Panel or their Secretary may have been previously involved with the case.

- 7.4 The Appeals Panel may hear and take into account fresh evidence presented by either side as long as it is circulated in accordance with the provisions of paragraph 5.8.
- 7.5 The Appeals Panel shall have the power to confirm, reverse or amend the original decision of the Misconduct Hearing Panel in any way. The Appeals panel decision is final.

8. Guidelines for penalties for attempts to cheat or gain an unfair advantage

8.1 As stated in paragraphs 4.5, 4.6 and 5.2 of this policy, where an allegation of academic or professional misconduct is sustained, the relevant authority will decide the appropriate penalty. In making these decisions, all involved are expected to have regard to the recommendations listed below. However, these are guidelines for normal circumstances and not binding, and do not preclude the relevant authority from determining a lesser or more severe penalty to be appropriate should the circumstances warrant this. However, in all cases the responsible authority shall consider:

- (a) The need to preserve the integrity of the examination;
- (b) Natural justice and consistency with previous sanctions; and
- (c) Evidence of contrition and an understanding of the gravity of the offence.

8.2 Summary of standard penalties

- (a) No further action;
- (b) A written warning;
- (c) Results for an examination or part of an examination to be annulled/withheld;
- (d) Candidate barred from entry for a specified period;
- (e) Candidate barred from entry to any future exams of the Faculty of Public Health;
- (f) Candidate reported to relevant regulatory body;
- (g) Any combination of any of the above, apart from (a) and apart from (d) and (e) combined; and
- (h) Any other sanction that is deemed appropriate.

8.3 Table of typical offences and example penalties (the nature of misconduct may determine a more severe penalty)

Description	Further information	Range of penalties
Introduction of unauthorised material or item into an exam	Material/item irrelevant to subject, with no proof of attempt to use	b
	Material/item relevant to subject, or of general use (e.g. a mobile phone), with no proof of attempt to use	b and/or c
	Material/item relevant to subject, or of general use, with proof of attempt to use	b, c and/or d, and/or f
Contact with others	Talking during an examination	b
	Colluding with another candidate	b, c and/or f
	Communicating with another candidate in any format	b, c and/or f

	Copying from another candidate	b, c and/or d, and/or f
	Soliciting information about an examination from other candidates during the period of an examination	b and/or c
	Soliciting information about an examination from role-players, examiners or other source	b, c and/or d and/or f
	Impersonation, deliberate use of wrong name and/or exam number, arranging to be impersonated	b, c - f
Sharing exam questions	Any attempt to gain or pass on information about the contents of the examination during, in advance or after the date of the examination	g or h
	Attempting to capture examination questions during, in advance or after the date of the examination	g or h
Breach of Regulations	Completing an exam script after time has been called, ignoring invigilators instructions	b and/or c
	Repeatedly ignoring invigilators' instructions, misuse of or removal of examination material from the venue	b, and/or c, and/or f
Inappropriate behaviour or answers	Obscene language or drawings aggressive or offensive comments	b, c - e, f or h
Certification	Falsification or forgery of any document or record	b, c - e, f
Bribery	Attempting to obtain information, answers, certification or qualifications by some form of incentive	b, c - e, f
Notification from Regulatory Body	Suspension or removal from relevant regulatory body	b, c - e
Repeated Misconduct	Multiple acts of misconduct, either at the same or different occurrence	b, c - e, f

First published: 2009

Last updated: September 2020