



OSPHE Summary Report 2021

Foreword

The following document is a report on the performance and development of the Final Membership exam, providing feedback on a number of areas of delivery; from an overview of Candidates performance at each sitting, through to Examiners feedback on their experience of the exam.

2021 saw the OSPHE exam delivered online for all sittings, following the implementation of the exam platform and development of supporting systems in autumn 2020.

The information has been collected as the Faculty delivers the exam and has been used to improve exam delivery and provide support for the Candidates and Examiners.

The Faculty would like to thank all Examiners and members of the Final Membership Educational Development Committee for their continued support and expertise during this period of transition.

Overview of delivery of the 2021 OSPHE

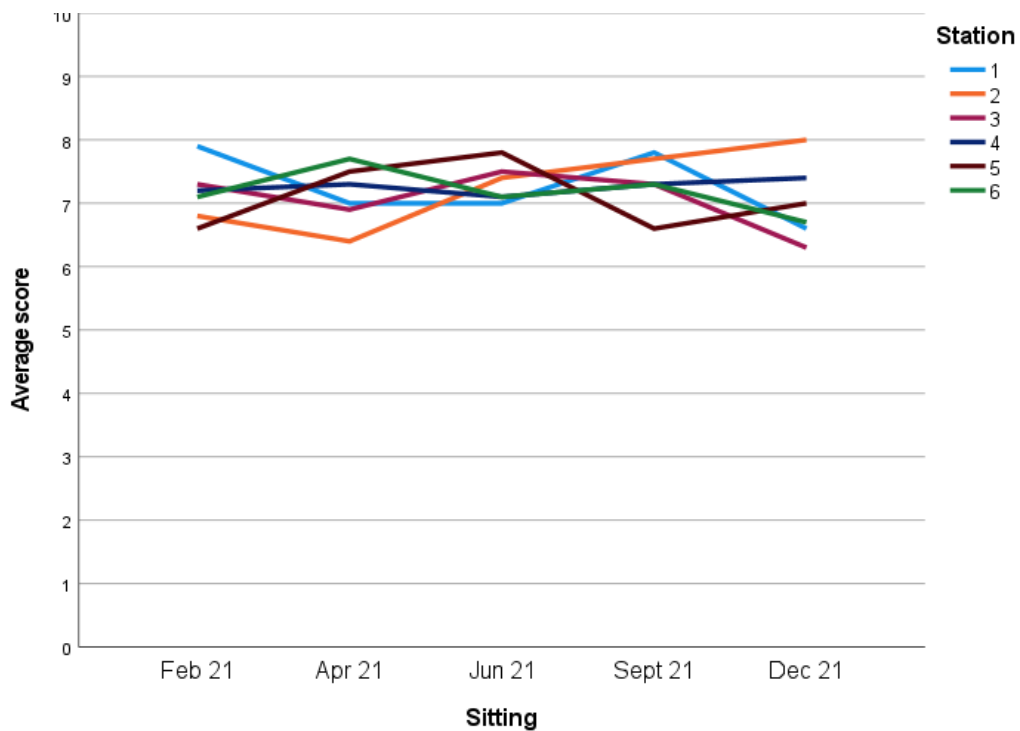
During 2021, we delivered five online sittings of the OSPHE as a consequence of the continuation of COVID restrictions, learning from the online exams first delivered in November and December 2020. An Examiners Board was convened to meet following each sitting as part of the governance and sign-off process. The feedback on this new initiative has been positive as Examiners are able to reflect on the examination and assessment, to provide further assurance on the outcome for candidates. Feedback from examiners and candidates continued to be used to inform delivery of the OSPHE using an online platform. The continued offer of the OSPHE enabled our Specialty Registrars to progress with their training and career development. A review of the lessons learned from the online OSPHE is included in Appendix A.

Examiners provide their time freely and their contribution to the exam sittings and to MEDC is invaluable. There continues to be interest amongst Public Health Specialists to become new examiners and in 2021, we were able to provide training for six shadow examiners.

Summary of the performance of the OSPHE examinations in 2021

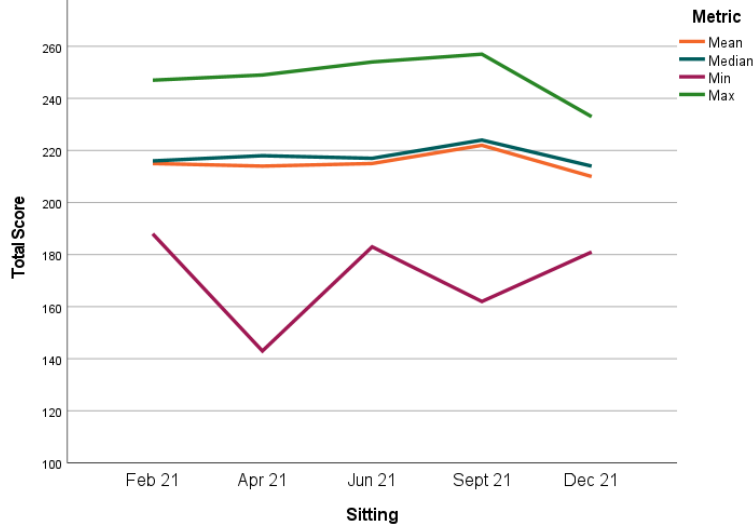
Figure 1 below shows that there is little variation in the average station score across stations and sittings, thereby reflecting similar levels of difficulty between the six stations and across sittings.

Figure 1 Variation in the average score for each station across sittings



The very small variation in the mean and median of the total scores across sittings in Figure 2 also indicate a similarity in the level of difficulty across sittings, with a wider variation in the minimum scores due to variation in the number of candidates failing.

Figure 2 Variation in key metrics across sittings

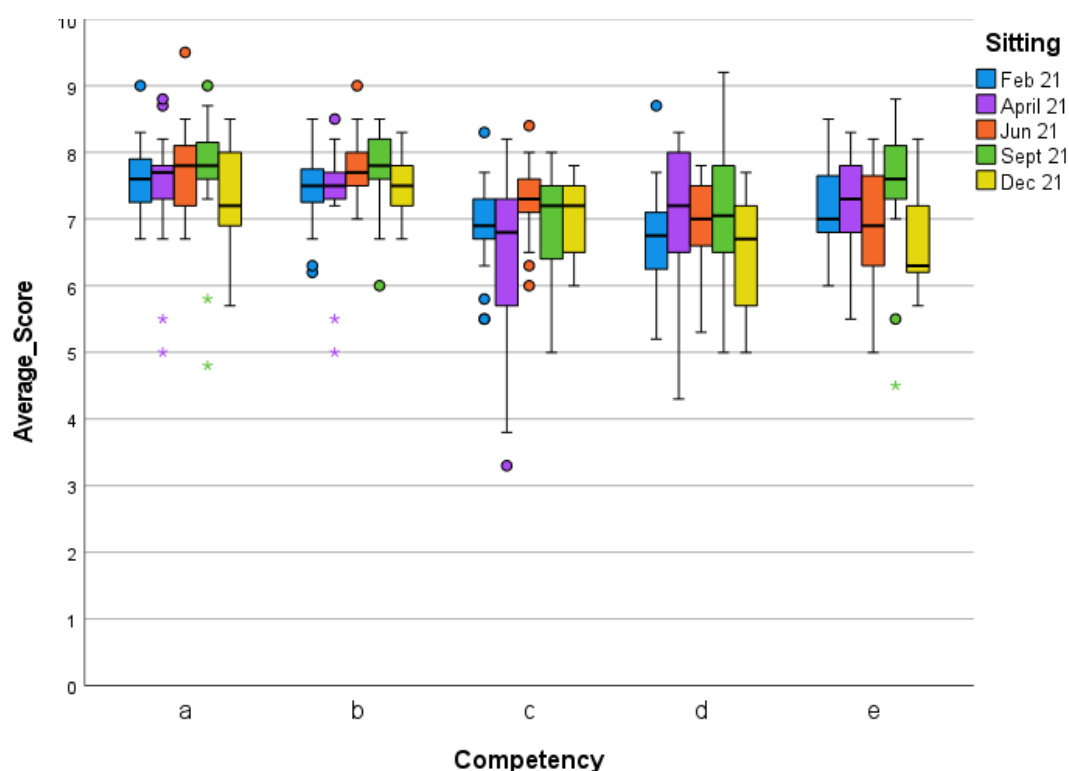


Each station assesses the following five competencies:

- A. The ability to demonstrate **presenting communication skills** (verbal and non-verbal) appropriately in typical public health settings: presenting to a person or audience
- B. The ability to demonstrate **listening and comprehending communication skills** (verbal and non-verbal) appropriately in typical public health settings: listening and responding appropriately
- C. The ability to **assimilate relevant information** from a variety of sources and settings and using it appropriately from a public health perspective
- D. The ability to demonstrate **appropriate reasoning, analytical and judgement skills**, giving a balanced view within public health settings
- E. The ability to **handle uncertainty, the unexpected, challenge or conflict**

Analysis has shown that a candidate's performance for any competency is highly dependent on its context i.e. the setting. For example a candidate may be better at communicating with fellow professionals than with lay people. Therefore variation in the average scores for competencies will vary across sittings, as shown in Figure 3. The box plot also shows that generally competencies C, D and E are more discriminating than A and B, with B being the least discriminating.

Figure 3: Box plot of the average score for each competency across sittings



2021 Exam in numbers

Exam	Candidates	RA Candidates	Pass	Fail	Pass %
26 February	16	2	16	0	100
23 April	22	2	19	3	86
25 June	20	2	20	0	100
24 September	20	3	18	2	90
3 December	23	1	22	1	97
Totals	101	10	95	6	94

Summary of Feedback from Examiners

On the whole, the feedback from examiners has been positive. Examiners particularly valued the training provided by the Faculty team on the use of the online platform, and it helped build their confidence on the use of the software during the examination. Adjustments were made to provide examination material in advance and sufficient preparation time provided – this was welcomed by examiners. Technical difficulties were not uncommon, however the exam regulations provided details on levels of tolerance and mitigations in the event of a significant technical failure. We established the examiner board to discuss whether these had a detrimental impact on performance and compared assessments with previous exams as part of our monitoring. Please see Appendix A for further details.

Summary of Feedback from Candidates

Final MFPH candidates provided feedback on five sittings of the online exam, that took place in 2021. Using the response to the first question as the proxy there were a total of 81 responses to the five surveys. Most candidates appreciated the support provided by the Faculty of Public Health Staff and Examiners in making the online exam work but felt that unless the Practique system could be significantly improved then a return to a face-to-face format would be preferable. A few candidates mentioned how an online format could support the sustainability agenda. Appendix B is a summary of the feedback from Candidates.

MEDC Workplan 2021

The Membership Examination Development Committee (MEDC) workplan sets out the committee's aims and objectives for each calendar year. The focus of the workplan in 2021 was to continue to deliver the OSPHE examination through the online platform, which was successfully delivered across five sittings during the year. We also undertook a comprehensive review and revision of the FPH website in relation to the MFPH examination to ensure consistency and accuracy of the content.

We have contributed to the Curriculum review to ensure that OSPHE competences are reflected in the learning outcomes. We have established standards for Examiners and will begin to monitor compliance against them. An Examiner Performance policy has been drafted with a view to piloting and implementation in 2022.

We continue to provide training and development for MFPH Examiners, underpinned by a training needs assessment.

Owing to the pressures of COVID, we made slow progress on the work to improve the quality of our OSPHE question bank, focussing instead on ensuring that the question set for each sitting of the OSPHE was peer-reviewed prior to use. With the appointment of a new Question Lead and Deputy Question Lead, this will be a priority for 2022.

The workplan included:

1. Question Bank update

Workplan objectives:

To increase the pool of OSPHE scenarios and identify gaps in the question pool in terms of subject matter and settings:

This process has begun with the update of the question spreadsheet. We have categorised all existing questions and removed or modified those that are not currently fit for purpose. The next step will be more detailed scrutiny of the existing questions. We are pairing all examiners for this purpose and plan to use the same pairings for new question development.

Ensured good range of scenarios in keeping with contemporary public health practice.

This will proceed with the process described in 1 above.

Successful exams in 2021:

We can note that we had successful exams in 21/22 and hope for a successful transition to face to face in 2022.

Ensure alignment of assessment with the curriculum wherever possible:

Again, proceeding in line with process described in 1 above.

2. Website development

All pages on the OSPHE were reformatted and rewritten. Both the examiner and the candidate guidance were updated. Six new questions were rewritten for use in exam preparation. The process was co-managed by a specialty registrar with involvement of the SRC at a number of points. Positive feedback has been received from registrars and Educational Supervisors.

3. CPD

An annual review of training needs now takes place. The Deputy Chair makes contact with all examiners at the beginning of each calendar year to confirm their training needs for the year to come. This was introduced in 2021 and repeated in 2022. It informs the training plan for the year. For 2021, continuing support was provided to examiners with regard to the on line OSPHE. This is monitored through feedback at the Exam Board .

A review of CPD arrangements for examiners took place in 2021 with a paper presented to the MEDC in September 2021. This reconfirmed the expectations of examiners and also the planned training activities for 2022 which include the recording of scenarios for training and further work on question development lead by the Question Lead.

4. Examiner Standards

The expectation of examiners was reviewed in 2021. Discussions were held on aspects of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion with the Deputy Chair of the Diplomate Examination. These aligned the expectations for examiners for both the Diplomate examination and the OSPHE and confirmed that no exam specific training was necessary. A paper outlining expectations was presented and agreed at the MEDC meeting in September 2021.

One aspect noted in the paper is the maintenance of accurate records on a number of aspects. The spreadsheet which holds the data is now being regularly updated and will form part of the annual review on a regular basis. Ways in which to enable this to happen in a timely manner continue to be explored.

Examiners in training and retiring during 2021

The MEDC would like to thank Examiners who have retired for their often long-standing contribution to the MFPH. We thank Examiners in Training for their commitment to train and develop into the role and to all Examiners for their dedication and support to continue to deliver the Final Membership Exam to a high standard and to ensure excellence in the specialty.

4. Examiner Standards (Continued)

- **Examiners who have retired:** Dermot Gorman, Catherine Chiang, Rashmi Shukla.
- **Current Examiners:** Bharat Pankhania, Bharat Sibal, Celia Shohet, David Ross, Gerry Waldron, Isabel Oliver, Josephine Pravinkumar, Judith Richardson, Kevin Smith, Margot Nicholls, Meng Khaw, Sara Davies, Vicky Hobart
- **New Examiners:** Matt Day (Sept 21) Christopher Williams (Apr 22), Elizabeth Griffiths (Apr 22), Suzi Coles (Feb 22)
- **Examiners in training:** Jennifer Yip, Rob Howard, Sarah Stevens

Final Membership Exam Development Committee:

Meng Khaw, Chair
Annette Wood, Deputy Chair
Sara Davies, Devolved Administration Lead
David Ross, Logistics Lead
Gerry Waldron, Question Lead
Kevin Smith, Deputy Logistics Lead
Matt Day, Deputy Question Lead
Gay Fagan, External Educational Advisor

July 2022

Lessons learned from online delivery of the MFPH exam

(June 2022)

BACKGROUND

In June 2020 FPH took the decision to migrate all examinations to a fully remote, digital environment in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the impossibility of running face-to-face exams. The Faculty's first online exams were held in the autumn of 2020 and the change of format has been largely successful.

In the summer of 2021, the Faculty conducted an evaluation of the migration and concluded that the Diplomate (DFPH) exam should stay permanently online, but the Final Membership (MFPH) exam should, when conditions were entirely safe to do so, move back to a face-to-face format. The final remote sitting of the MFPH was held on 28 April 2022 and the next sitting (21 September 2022) will be held in-person in London. The reasoning behind the move back to face to face exams was largely around the limitations of the platform (Practique) and the frustrations of candidates in the way the platform operated.

SUMMARY

Since the move to online delivery, nine sittings of the MFPH examination were held between November 2020 and April 2022, with nearly 200 candidates sitting in total. Delivery of the nine exam sittings (involving two sessions per day) has involved candidates, examiners, role players, actors, 'shadow' examiners, and online invigilators between them making over 9,000 successful navigations to more than 2,500 online preparation and assessment rooms, with the correct resources and personnel available in each and every station. Registrars have suffered no major disruption to their training programme and the experience, even given the intensity and pressure of the set-up and familiarisation process in late 2020, has been successful. This success is due in a large degree to the work of Vicki, Gareth and Laura in the exams team, working alongside registrars and senior Officers in the Faculty to ensure a smooth transition.

The Faculty has learned much from the switch to digital delivery and it is helpful for the MEDC to briefly reflect on some of this learning.

LESSONS LEARNED

The MFPH exam board

One of the notable successes of the last 18 months has been the introduction of the MFPH exam board held one week after the exam has taken place. The primary tasks of the exam board are to:

- To consider the analysis of the scores from the exam
- To confirm the results from the exam
- To review the performance of the questions in the exam
- To consider any extenuating circumstances relating to any candidates
- To review the overall delivery of the exam sitting.

The introduction of the exam board, and particularly the use of the exam psychometrician (Gay Fagan) and the comprehensive, detailed analysis that she provides on the results, has deepened the Faculty's knowledge and learning on the delivery of the exam, and the performance of candidates, questions and examiners. The exam board will continue to be run remotely.

Provision of questions to examiners 1 week in advance

Another supportive development that has been introduced with the migration to remote delivery is the provision of the question material to the examiners and role players in advance of the exam (usually one week). Rather than simply providing examiners with the packs on the day of the exam, as was the practice when the exam was delivered face-to-face, this allows examiner to study the question materials thoroughly to be as prepared as they can be for the exam. We will continue this practice when the format changes in September 2022.

Accessibility of the exam

The online provision of the increased the accessibility of the exam for those who might have had to travel a long way (for example, overseas candidates), had caring or other commitments or found travel challenging for other reasons. This is something to consider in the Faculty's longer term strategic thinking around the provision of online MFPH exams.

Results capture and analysis

Another key benefit has been the improvement in the way the Faculty captures, processes and analyses the marks from the exam. Instead of taking a week and couriering hard copy results sheets across the country, marks are now downloaded, processed and provided within a couple of hours of the exam finishing, without the data ever leaving the Faculty's servers or control. This is certainly a process we will continue in September 2022 and work is underway to decide the best method to do this.

Reducing carbon footprint

A major strand of the Faculty's work – now and for the foreseeable future – is the need to improve the sustainable of everything we do and reduce the carbon footprint of the Faculty' operations. While keeping the exam online would be the 'greenest' approach to delivery, this is simply not possible given the limitations of the exam platforms currently available. The Faculty will therefore move the sittings around the UK, seeking accessible venues with strong 'green credentials' and minimising travel for candidates and, where possible, examiners. We will also look at the use of materials and all other aspects of the exam in order to ensure minimal environmental impact.

Links with specialty registrars

Slightly more intangibly, the move to remote exams has improved the links and relationships between the Faculty and the specialty registrars. In every medical specialty, exams are a source of debate, often around their precise value and the costs of the exams. While these debates have not disappeared in public health, our registrars have at least been able to see more clearly the effort that has been provided to keep the training pathway open and relatively smooth, and the feedback on the exam team, notably Laura and Vicki, has been uniformly excellent.

Reasonable adjustments for candidates

Online delivery of the MFPH has imposed limitations on the types of adjustments the Faculty can offer for candidates with different needs, and this has led to a high number of candidates splitting the exam over two sessions. Moving back to F2F will allow a broader canvas of options although it remains to be seen what candidate preference will be.

Challenges of online delivery

The use of Practique has also exposed some of the challenges to online delivery, though these are not unique to that particular system. Examiners have noted that it is harder to distinguish and assess the levels of presentation and listening skills online; we also lost the opportunity for candidates to show a variety of presentation skills by being online. Some question formats have also had to be jettisoned (such as the phone call) and question choice was sometimes limited because some scenarios are simply too difficult to run effectively online. Going back to face-to-face delivery will negate these issues.

Examiner motivation

Finally, a note of caution. Alongside everyone else who has made the transition to remote delivery a success, examiners deserve a special note of thanks. They have been resilient in the extreme, adaptable and open to new technology, willing to experiment and unfailingly supportive to the exams team, particularly during significant challenges, of which there was not a shortage.

Examiners do this work voluntarily and free of charge, in addition to their day jobs as senior professionals, and they have done this during the worst public health crisis for 100 years. This goodwill and generosity of spirit cannot and must not be taken for granted and the Faculty should consider new ways to maintain engagement with existing examiners and make the role attractive to new and potential examiners in the future.

Julian Ryder, Director of Education, Standards & Advocacy

June 2022

Appendix B

Summary of Candidate Feedback

Question	Question Summary	Majority Grading	Significant Comments
1	Pre-exam communication	Very Helpful	Links to practice before training session would be helpful.
2	Pre-exam training access difficulty	No	You Tube link helpful.
3	Training Sessions	Very helpful	
4	Confidence in using Practique	Somewhat confident	Clunky and difficult to navigate. More challenging to read in preparation station than F2F. Counter-intuitive system.
5	Additional training required	No	It is not the training that is the issue!
6	Type of additional training		Opportunity to do a mock exam would be useful. Access to system through Deaneries.
7	Is Practique easy to use?	No	Clunky!! Harder to use resources. Scrolling and panning very challenging.
8	Effective communication with role player	Yes	Difficult to maintain eye contact. Unable to use material and see role player.
9	Technical Difficulties	Yes/No	WiFi outage and connection issues. Background noise. Computer and memory size important as system seems to use a large amount of memory.
10	Further Feedback		Checking of name discrepancies. Scenarios very different to those available on FPH site. Vicky and Gareth very helpful.

Question	Question Summary	Majority Grading	Significant Comments
			Truly horrendous exam experience! Being observed during lunch break very restrictive. Beneficial for northern candidates. If a better system, then fits with public health values around climate change. Credit to invigilators.
11	Overall organisation of the day	Good	Lot of hanging around especially at the start.
12	Overall pre-exam briefing	Good	Better to be done live rather than pre-recorded.
13	Overall view of role-players	Good	Script reading. Some were too confrontational.
14	Time allotted for preparation at each station	Too short	A lot of reading material. Unrealistic set up. Too much information to digest.
15	Time allotted at each station	About the right length	Not realistic for any professional meeting.
16	Time allotted for examination	About the right length	Need for break/s because of "hanging around time"
17	Additional comments		Staff kind. In general, negative comments relate to technical challenges and length to get through whole process.
18	Comments on scenarios		Unfair to give incorrect data. Health protection heavy. Too much data to analyse and difficult to do using Practique. One scenario was in the public domain.
19	Suggestions to improve future sittings		Return to face to face.

Question	Question Summary	Majority Grading	Significant Comments
			Limitations of Practique.
20	Other comments		Thank you (to Vicki et al)