Examiners' comments – Feedback to Candidates

October 2023

This feedback gives general points to support candidates preparing for each section of the exam in the future. Comments are intended to provide helpful guidance rather than be prescriptive. Feedback is based on comments received from all the examiners who marked the October 2023 sitting, and therefore covers all papers and questions. Comments from the Chair of Examiners are also included. These indicate general points to support candidates preparing for the exam in future sittings.

All questions included in the October exam were marked according to pre-agreed mark schemes.

Candidates should be aware that mark schemes will always be used with discretion by examiners, so that answers that do not fully fit the model answer or mark schemes are judged in terms of their relevance and overall fit with the question asked.

Candidates are encouraged to review the Frequently Asked Questions on the Faculty website (particularly the section that deals with preparing for the DFPH examination) and pay particular attention to the examination syllabus.

Summary statistics for the October 2023 sitting are also published on the FPH website

Paper I

Q1 & Q2: Performance was consistent across the questions. Very few candidates excelled but very few poor answers. Most had some idea about the major topic of the questions, suggesting that they were topics that they knew about/had revised. Candidates had a good attempt at writing something for each question, even if it was not necessarily what was asked. Care is needed to answer the specifics of the question especially where a question requires candidates to apply the knowledge to a specific example not just provide a generic response. It is also important when providing definitions to ensure that they are not basically a rearrangement of the words in the question. Candidates are advised to re-read the question after they have answered it to make sure they have addressed the task requested especially if examples or context is asked for.

Q3 & Q4: Question 3 related to elimination of an infectious disease. Some candidates had a heavy focus on a behavioural risk factor when a better answer would have had a broader and more inclusive recognition of the risks. It is important that candidates have a sound theoretical knowledge of prevention including which diseases are vaccine preventable. Question 4 related to an environmental public health issue. On contentious issues candidates should try to give a balanced answer recognising that there are both positive and negative impacts in scenarios. Better candidates did not jump straight to what actions were required without considering whether action was in fact appropriate. Across both questions better performing candidates structured their answers well, using headings and bullet points rather than giving prose-style answers.

Q5 & Q6: Q5 related to policy options and indicators for a scenario. The candidates who performed best on, provided several distinct policies rather than providing different examples of the same policy. Candidates who repeated the same indicators for different policies did not gain marks for listing these more than once. Some candidates also provided interventions not policies.
Q6 related to data linkage and was quite poorly answered with generally weak examples. Candidates are also recommended to follow the instructions e.g. providing multiple examples when asked for only one does not improve the chances of gaining marks.

Q7 & Q8: Candidates generally answered Q7 and Q8 well. Candidates had a tendency to repeat material across part A and part B of the questions. Whilst we understand there was potential for cross over, candidates should not expect to score marks twice for the same information. Candidates are unlikely to score full marks for a list of terms when asked to 'outline' or 'describe'. In Q8 section B candidates who did not relate their answers to the context requested limited their ability to gain full marks.

Q9 & Q10: Candidates generally performed reasonably well on Q9 which related to clinical guidelines. Candidates using examples were able to draw out better responses than those who simply listed criteria. There was also the use of frameworks and theory which helped to elevate the marks because of the structured approach. Candidates performed poorly where they listed members a team rather than considering the breadth of organisations that may be required in a to contribute to a process. Candidates generally performed very well on Q10. There was some evidence that candidates had left inadequate time to answer the question, however, in some instances there was evidence candidates lost time by providing more than was asked for in the question. Where candidates did perform poorly, they listed those areas that are the responsibilities of individual countries and didn't focus on what international agencies could achieve when asked.

Paper IIA

Candidates generally performed well on this paper, and performed showed that they could identify the strengths and weakness of the paper. When undertaking the critical appraisal task candidates performed poorly if they just listed some points without explanation better candidates gave a good critical assessment of why they selected the strengths and weaknesses. Most candidates were unable to correctly calculate the measure requested. The question asked for a framework to be used and better answers identified one and used it to frame their answer. In the letter task better answers explained the context of situation to the recipient rather than focus the letter solely on appraisal of the paper provided.

Paper IIB

Performance on Paper IIB was generally of a good standard. However, candidates struggled with interpretation of some statistical techniques in a real-world context but were generally able use formulae appropriately to undertake the calculations required. Candidates had a more difficult time undertaking non-standard calculations that required extrapolating from the information provided. Often questions would ask for a sentence of interpretation. In a notable minority, these sentences were inaccurate so care should be taken when translating numbers into words (e.g. interpreting a ratio of 0.75 as 75% less, instead of 25% less).