



Board of Examiners Newsletter Winter 2020

Dear Examiners, Educational Supervisors & Specialty Advisors

Welcome to the Winter 2020 newsletter for the Board of Examiners, from the Officers of the Board of Examiners (OBoE).

Dip Pharm Med Exam 2020

The results of the DPM for 2020 were ratified at the Board of Examiners (BoE) annual general meeting on 11th December. This year's results were:

- * Part 1 (the MCQ paper) – 54.2% (26 out of 48 candidates) passed and were awarded the Certificate of Pharmaceutical Medicine
- * Part 2 (the Short Answer Questions and Critical Appraisal Paper) – 79.4% (27 out of 34 candidates) passed the SAQ and 83.8% (31 out of 37) passed the CAP. Overall, 26 candidates (79%) took both SAQ and CAP and passed both, so therefore passed the DPM
- * Distinctions were awarded to 2 candidates. Congratulations to candidates 11619 and 9010 for their outstanding performances.

Changes to the DPM from this year:

Introduction of remote electronic exams:

- The COVID-19 pandemic impacted this year's examination, making the usual format unfeasible so the GMC approved converting examinations to online assessments for 2020. The Faculty's long-term goal was already to implement electronic exams, so due these circumstances this was expedited. The CPM/ DPM and DHP/CHP exams were all held remotely. The implementation of electronic assessments was brought forward as a matter of urgency to allow the exams to go ahead in 2020. The CPM/ DPM exams were held on the planned dates in September and October, but the DHP/CHP exams were postponed from March to October.
- TestReach had already been identified as a potential provider and was confirmed for this year, in line with some other Royal Colleges or Faculties. GMC approved in principle the on-line format and issued detailed guidance for colleges and faculties to do their own self-assessment of the process. An exam protocol was created, based on the TestReach template. This document describes the minimum computer requirements, the set-up/testing process that candidates must follow, the monitoring protocol, definitions of infringements and provision of assistance on the exam day. Comprehensive FAQs were put on the FPM website and the exam regulations were also amended.
- The MCQ, SAQ and CAP papers were created initially as Word versions, then once final they were transferred into the electronic system by TestReach. QC review and approval of the papers were done in the TestReach system by the paper convenors.
- Candidates registered and verified access to TestReach system in advance and were able to do a test question to familiarise themselves with the format. On the day, they could sit the paper at a place of their choosing (work or home) and the option to sit at FPM using paper was also



offered; just one (DHP) candidate availed themselves of this option. TestReach have various physical exam centre locations, which is a potential alternative to candidates logging on remotely.

- Invigilation was done remotely by TestReach, including a secure and robust identification process, and live monitoring via webcam and microphone which involved checking the candidates' environment for materials, phones, etc and monitoring during the exam. One 5-minute break was allowed during each 2.5h paper. TestReach provided technical support on-line or by phone. Details of the experience with the system is included within the individual reports for each paper.
- After the exams, the MCQ was marked in TestReach system, and TestReach provided written scripts as pdf files which were then provided via email to markers.
- The FPM sent a detailed questionnaire to all candidates who sat the exams. Feedback will be included in a report which is required to be provided to the GMC. Learnings from the feedback, and from our experience with the TestReach system will be considered and, where applicable, incorporated in our exam processes for next year.

Part 1 results

- The MCQ paper was held on 16th September 2020. This year the pass mark was 73.3% and 26 out of 48 passed (54.2%).
- A 73.3% pass mark was a little higher than the average of the last 6 years (72.6%), but similar to last year (73%)
- One candidate did not answer the majority of questions, so recorded an extremely low mark. No violation or related IT issue was reported. No complaints or other communications were received by the faculty for this candidate.
- One candidate failed by 1 mark only. Historically we have tended to give the benefit of the doubt where a candidate fails by this margin. It was decided to round the pass mark to a final figure of 73%, resulting in a pass for this candidate

Part 2 results

- The CAP/SAQ paper was held on 12th October 2020.
- The Critical Appraisal Paper (CAP) was generally well done this year. Overall, 31 out of 37 candidates (83.8%) passed the paper, with a few people performing very well. The individual marks ranged from 22.25 to 46.5 out of 50 (median 32.78). This is the highest pass rate since 2010, being slightly higher than 2018 (83%)
- The Short Answer Question paper (SAQ) was also well done; 27 out of 34 (79.4%) of candidates passed. The individual marks ranged from 45.25% to 85.75% (median 60.5%). Out of the 37 candidates, two (from India) were unable to take the paper due to outages and one (from UK) was unable to access the test reach application despite professional IT support. 34 candidates completed the SAQ paper.
- Overall, 26 candidates (79%) took both SAQ and CAP and passed both, so therefore passed the DPM
- 3 candidates sat the CAP paper only and all 3 failed
- 2 candidates passed the SAQ, but failed the CAP resulting in failure of the DPM overall
- 1 candidate passed the CAP paper but failed the SAQ paper resulting in failure of the DPM overall



Feedback from this year's examination

MCQ paper

For the first time, the MCQ was done online, with remote invigilation. Delivery of the online exam by TestReach was not faultless, but there were no critical problems and no complaints were received from candidates. Any technical issues were taken into account, in particular for borderline fail candidates. In setting a pass mark, OBoE took into account that this was the 1st online exam, and that (as has been recognised by the GMC) doctors' progression through training - including the ability to plan and prepare for exams - has been disrupted during the current pandemic.

Overall, given the circumstances and the introduction of something new in a short time period, OBoE was satisfied with how it went, the robustness of the invigilation and the results and the appropriateness of the pass mark. The issues arising have been communicated to TestReach.

Despite our confidence in the process, in line with GMC guidance OBoE propose that this year should not count toward the maximum number of MCQ attempts, given the unprecedented circumstances.

The MCQ pass rate of 54.2% is low compared with the mean of the last 6 years (67.8%). However, the mean candidate score of 72.6% was lower than that in 2019 (77%) and lower than the average of the last 6 years (74.9%)

SAQ paper

This year the overall results were good for the SAQ paper, being just slightly lower than in 2019. Questions 3 and 6 on drug safety and PV were particularly well-answered, with median marks of 8.0 and 7.9 respectively. Question 8 on discovery of medicines / non-clinical was generally poorly answered, with median mark of 5.3. This was a question concerned liver enzyme induction and the expectation of the Board was that this would be well answered. Question 9 on statistics and data management (with a focus on sensitivity, specificity, predictive values) was considered difficult in standard setting and the pass mark was set at 4 during the standard setting process. It was answered better than expected with a median pass mark reached 5.

A higher pass mark was set for question 2 (exploratory development) and question 10 (statistics and data management), i.e. 6.5 and 6 respectively during standard setting, because graphs were provided and candidates were asked to label the graphs. The technology in TestReach did not allow candidates to draw graphs. The expectation was that not having to draw out the graphs, rather just requiring to label them would lead to higher marks. In fact, the median mark was lower than the pass mark in question 2, and the same as the pass mark in question 10. In other words, it appears that candidates in general did not do better despite being given the graphs.

Candidates were still missing out on marks by not fully reading the question or not providing clear and systematic responses to questions. This was particularly evident for questions 8 and 9. There was much greater concordance between examiners in their scoring this year. This was attributed to a combination of not having to interpret handwriting and a tighter focussed marking scheme developed this year.



CAP paper

The manuscript provided for the CAP this year described the Effects of preconceptional paternal drug exposure on birth outcomes: cohort study of 340 000 pregnancies using Norwegian population-based databases (Engeland E, Bjørge T, Kjersti A, Daltveit AK, Skurtveit S, Vangen S, Vollset SE & Furu K), published in the British Journal of Pharmacology 75;4: 1134 – 1141.

Candidates were not expected to have detailed knowledge on the therapy area, and more general principles of the key considerations in design of studies would warrant full marks. No specific therapeutic knowledge was required to score full marks. In general, candidates answered the descriptive questions well; there was variation in the quality of answers for the critique questions, with a number of candidates who did well in the descriptive questions but then performed badly in the critique questions.

There were a few minor variations in the questions asked this year. Comments on trends in candidate answers are summarised below.

- There was a question asking about objectives and rationale of the study. Many candidates were unable to list the objectives of the study and struggled to describe the study rationale.
- Candidates were asked to summarise the key results: A number of candidates were unable to list the key results which were fully described in the paper
- There was a question on the significance of the odds ratio in Table 4. A number of candidates gave the OR but did not comment on the significance of the OR. Candidates are reminded to read the question carefully and answer accordingly.
- There was a question asking what the cohort was in this study; a number of subjects did not list all 4 criteria asked for.
- Candidates were asked to give advantages and disadvantages of a cohort study design. Several did not give sufficient answers for the marks allocated.
- Candidates were asked about the limitations of the prescribing database and the study. Most candidates did well in these questions.
- Candidates were asked about the external validity of the study; several candidates incorrectly answered this.
- The final question of the paper asked what could be done to further investigate the effect of paternal use of diazepam. Many said an additional study but struggled with the rest of the question.

The structure of the CAP and the choice of questions and answers are intended to achieve a fair paper which can be attempted within the allocated time. The examiners feel that steady progress is being made in this regard, as shown in the higher pass rate this year. It was noted that candidates seemed to be preparing better for this paper.

At the exam, candidates are given general instructions including allocation of time to questions, and some specific advice, for example that where a question asks for a listing of X features, that they may list more than X to maximise their chance to score the available marks.

No specific issues of contention were raised in relation to the exam.



It should be noted that candidates cannot print the manuscript in TestReach. They can view the manuscript on one side of the screen and have the questions on the other to complete their answers. The TestReach technology allows the manuscript to be annotated and to cut and paste portions into the answer. It is recommended to have a good-sized computer monitor and that candidates fully utilise the TestReach 'test' paper to familiarize themselves with the setup.

We will aim to rotate among common areas of pharmaceutical medicine and to vary the style of study or trial featured.

Planned changes to the DPM

In 2021, we will continue with the electronic examination, allowing flexibility to candidates in the location they attend and to accommodate overseas candidates too. To mitigate risks of technology failure during the examination, it is planned to prepare one -off 'back-up' papers for 2021. These could potentially be used if the electronic examination fails, but the questions have been compromised. The 'back-up' papers, if unused, would become the following year's examination and a new 'back-up' prepared. This process would continue as we move forward. The OBOE would much appreciate the support of the BOE members to develop these back-up papers by submitting additional questions next year.

DHP, CHP and DET examinations

At the BoE AGM on Dec 11th, updates on the Certificate and Diploma in Human Pharmacology (CHP and DHP) and the Diploma in Experimental Therapeutics (DET) were given. Details of these qualifications can be found on the FPM website.

Dates for 2021

Examiners' training day: 5 March 2021

DPM Part 1: Wednesday 15 September 2021 (tbc)

DPM Part 2: Monday 11 October 2021 (tbc)

BOE AGM: Friday 10 Dec 2021

Officers of the Board of Examiners

Ruth Dixon (Chair)

Sanjay Patel (Secretary)

Rene Van Der Merwe (Critical appraisal paper convenor)

Jon Sisson (MCQ paper convenor)



Eric Teo (SAQ paper convenor)

Chris Brearley

Darren Wilbraham

Tim Crossman

Marianne Whitelam (Examinations and Standards Manager) has returned from maternity leave. Many thanks to Dawn Brady and Sarah Davies for their support during this period.

Changes to the OBOE in 2020:

Tim Crossman has agreed to join OBoE and we welcome him to the group.

In 2020 seven new examiners completed all training activities, including an induction training day and shadow-marking SAQs. At last year's AGM, the BoE agreed to delegate approval of new examiners to OBOE so that they can be invited to the AGM. Therefore, OBOE approved the following as BOE members, and we welcome: Hanna Sodatonou, Shilpa Govindra, Hamzah Baig, Swati Mukherjee, Rajan Bajracharya, Andrea Spezzi and Tim Crossman

Resignations this year were: Chris Millwater, Alan James Lenox-Smith, Stuart McIntosh, John Pears, Mitra Vahdati-Bolouri, Andy Webb, Ekaterina Anokhina. We are very grateful to these examiners for their contribution and thank them all for their valuable contributions throughout the years.

I also want to thank all the BoE members who in any way contribute to the exams. BoE members are welcome to submit MCQ or SAQ questions, or a paper you think would be good for the CAP at any time, to any member of OBOE or the FPM.

Sanjay Patel, Examinations Secretary