Examiners' Comments – Feedback to Candidates

March 2024

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 March 2024 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 March 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 March 2024 sitting are also published on the FPH website

Paper I

Q1 & Q2: Candidates on the whole performed well on Q1, particularly on interpretation. Candidates could improve their performance by referring explicitly to the context of the question in answers, particularly where this is specifically asked for in the question. Candidates also performed well on Q2. However, some candidates may have lost time providing background information that the question does not seek instead of answering the specific question. Substantive knowledge of the question's subject was also an issue for some candidates.

Q3 & Q4: Q3 answers were strong, though they relied on specific knowledge of the subject of the question. Candidates could have improved performance by offering specific actions rather than general principles where this was required. Q4 answers tended to be adequate, with relatively few high-scoring answers, and candidates' responses tended to be uneven within the question. Answers would have been improved with a focus on concision and use of a clear structure.

Q5 & Q6: Q5 answers were generally of a good standard, but would have benefited from clearer outlines, as with other responses in this sitting. In addition, use of specific examples was often lacking in lower-scoring answers. Q6 answers were satisfactory, though responses tended to be short to the detriment of completeness, especially of requested definitions.

Q7 & Q8: Q7 answers were stronger on average than answers in this section for previous sittings. A concrete link between theory and examples relevant to the question subject distinguished the highest performing answers. Q8 answers followed a similar pattern.

Q9 & Q10: Q9 answers reflected the breadth of knowledge about the substantive areas referenced in the question. The strongest answers linked substantive knowledge to public health implications. In contrast, Q10 answers were mixed, and answers often suffered from a lack of core knowledge on concepts relevant to public health.

Paper IIA

The critical appraisal was generally done well but presentation let some answers down. Wordy, imprecise answers were often a challenge, perhaps as a result of the greater permissible word count for this paper.

Paper IIB

Performance on this paper was highly variable. Unsurprisingly, poorer answers reflected misunderstanding of basic epidemiological concepts and of statistical tools. In many cases, candidates did not 'carry through' statistical tools to appropriate interpretations, even where this was specifically requested. Candidates would also benefit from more 'finger practice' running calculations.