

Training and Assessment Newsletter June 2019

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The Royal
Australian &
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College of
Psychiatrists

Essay-style Examination Communiqué to Trainees and SIMGs

The College will be undertaking a comprehensive review of the College examination processes and methodologies used. In particular, some immediate attention is being given to the Essay-style Examination in light of the continuing low pass rate relative to the other examinations, and centrally administered assessments.

The College acknowledges that a low pass rate for any examination is a source of significant anxiety for candidates (trainees and Specialist International Medical Graduates (SIMG)). Hence, it is important to highlight the key issues to ensure candidates are fully informed, and can sit the ensuing examinations with confidence in the process.

The College is committed to giving candidates the opportunity to demonstrate they have the skills required to pass the Essay-style Examination. The MEQ component of this examination has shown that candidates are able to demonstrate these skills on some questions but not others. The College is taking a number of steps to support candidates to demonstrate their skills on all parts of this examination. These steps include, reducing the length of the MEQ component and releasing additional previously used examination questions with the corresponding score criteria. In addition, the College will be undertaking a rigorous analysis of the cut score post-exam to ensure fairness in the marking and standard setting.

Review of the Essay Examination, and the centrally administered assessment process

The College takes the matter of examinations extremely seriously, and under the auspice of the Education Committee (EC) a Working Group has been formed to guide the review. The Working Group is comprised of the EC Chair and the Chairs of the Committees for Examinations (CFE), Training (CFT) and Trainee Representative Committee (TRC).

The Working Group has received feedback from the TRC, CFT and Directors of Training (DoTs), as to what might be needed for consideration for a review of the Essay-style Examination and its processes going forward.

The above-mentioned review will have two components:

- The immediate focus of the review is driven by the poor pass rates from the February 2019 Essay-style Examination. The pass rate of 36.8% was lower than that achieved in recent examination cycles.
- Looking forward longer term, the EC and the Board agree there is a need for a review of all College examinations.

The CFE will consult with Committee for Specialist International Medical Graduate Education (CSIMGE), DoTs, CFT, and engage a SIMG representative in the project scoping discussions and particularly in the consideration of training supports for the examinations. The TRC will be central in this consultation process, and any longer-term strategic changes to the conduct or methodology of the examinations will have appropriate and timely notifications.

It is important to note that a range of College assessments are performing well, with consistent and high pass rates for the OSCE, Scholarly Project, Psychotherapy Written Case, and the MCQ Examination. This highlights the commitment and capacity of the College, and in particular the CFE. Every College examination outcome (OSCE, Scholarly Project, MCQ, etc.) is scrutinised at cohort level in explicit detail, and with the application of a consistent standard as a pass mark.

Components of the Essay Examination: The Critical Essay Question

To provide some background information, the CEQ pass rate for the February 2019 Essay-style Examination was 48.4%. This is slightly lower than usual, but on balance, the performance in the CEQ has been significantly better over recent examination cycles which leads the CFE to believe that training and preparation by candidates has generally improved, although not quite the pass rate seen in other assessments.

The CFE has made some recent changes to achieve more consistent CEQ marking. The CEQ markers are College Fellows predominantly in day to day clinical practice. The calibration conducted with the CEQ markers prior to every examination explicitly focusses on flexible marking to ensure that the markers (members of the CFE) are actively looking for every available mark for each candidate. There is a focus on consistency both within and between markers, and as a result inter-marker variability has reduced markedly.

The College has a number of online support resources on CEQs, including the past questions, and marking templates:

- [Learnit course: 'Guide to the Critical Essay Question'](#)
- [Previous exam questions](#)

Components of the Essay Examination: The Modified Essay Question

The MEQ results from the February 2019 Essay-style Examination present a different issue. The overall pass rate was relatively lower compared to other assessments. We are confident that the lower pass rate is not due to a different standard being set, as we are using a consistent methodology across examinations. We have observed some differences in the standard of responses to the MEQs within the examination.

The majority of MEQ sub-questions were answered reasonably well, with 11 out of 17 sub-questions answered to a level aligned with the national and local standard. This indicates that the low pass rate is not primarily an issue with preparation or understanding by the candidates. Typically lower quality responses and missing responses were more evident towards the last MEQ in the exam. This suggests that the number of tasks may be too great for the allocated time.

What is the College doing to address this issue in the short term, i.e. for August 2019?

As a consequence, the August 2019 MEQ Essay-style Examination will have a lower total response load. This will be achieved by having fewer questions/items that require a response. No other changes are expected for the August 2019 Essay-style Examination.

Thus, candidates for the August 2019 Essay-style Examination can be confident that there are no different or new styles of preparation required: the format and content nature of the exam remains exactly the same.

MEQ related online resources, including seven existing full MEQs, each with multiple sub-questions and marking templates can be viewed on the College website - links are below:

- [Previous exam questions](#)

Other available resources

There was an examination related workshop at the College Congress in May 2018 where a presentation on both CEQ and MEQ was given. This is available on the College Website:

- [CEQ exam presentation](#)
- [MEQ exam presentation](#)

The feedback from these workshops consistently highlighted that attendees find these sessions really useful. Also, there have been some recent articles published in Australasian Psychiatry from the perspective of a CEQ marker – they are not a formal RANZCP resource, but candidates may find them helpful.

- ['Thinking on writing a critical essay' by Lillian Lywan Ng](#) [PDF; 430 KB]
- ['Reflections of a CEQ Examiner' by Rob Selzer](#) [PDF; 80KB]

Additional past MEQ paper release

In addition, the CFE have released six additional past MEQs with marking templates. These can be found at:

- [Previous exam questions](#)

Show Cause process for trainees

It is acknowledged that 'Show Cause' (SC) can be a stressful process which is intended as a supportive vehicle to deliver progression through training. The CFE and CFT encourage trainees to familiarise themselves with the [show cause process](#) [PDF; 204 KB], and the [communiqué to trainees from the CFT Chair](#) [PDF; 112KB]. A case vignette is highlighted in the communiqué and this may be helpful in demystifying SC.

Further inquiries and help can be sought from the Directors of Training and Supervisors, and to make inquiries regarding this process please contact trajectory@ranzcp.org.

Show Cause process for SIMG candidates

The CSIMGE and CFE encourage SIMG candidates to familiarise themselves with the show cause process as outlined in the [communiqué](#) [PDF; 117 KB] published on the College website. It is important that all Partially Comparable candidates familiarise themselves with the process. Any queries should be directed to simge@ranzcp.org.

Help Line

The College is deeply committed to the welfare of candidates. If there are any welfare related concerns more information on the College's Support for members process can be found on our [Support for trainees and SIMGs web page](#) and the Member Welfare Support Line is 1800 941 002 (Aust) and 0800 220 728 (NZ).

Conclusion

As always, we encourage candidates to continue to work closely, and with confidence, with their DoT or delegate, their Supervisor, their Examination Groups, and their regular examination preparation supports.

The important message to candidates is that the College is committed to reviewing the examination with the view to provide the best opportunity to demonstrate they have the skills at the required level that the required level is being demonstrated by many and there is a rigorous continuous improvement process for all College examinations.

By releasing the MEQs, candidates will get a valuable opportunity to practice the MEQs in the preparation for the MEQ component of the examination.

We trust that the reviewed processes applied to the August 2019 Written Examination will address the feedback arising from the February 2019 Essay-style Examination.

We wish candidates the very best for the examinations going forward.

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