

FICM Examination Report – October 2019

Background

The fourteenth sitting of Fellowship of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine examination took place in Summer-Autumn 2019. This examination is part of the assessment system for UK Intensive Care Medicine, and trainees are required to pass this before entering stage 3 training.

The FFICM Multiple Choice Examination (MCQ)

72 candidates appeared for the MCQ in July 2019, of which 79 % were successful. This paper now consists of both multiple true/false questions and single best answer questions. The pass mark was set by the sub-group of examiners responsible for this paper, using Angoff referencing, and adjusted downwards using the standard error of measurement. Candidates are required to pass the MCQ before entering the OSCE/SOE examinations.

The FFICM Objective Structured Clinical (OSCE)/Structured Oral (SOE) Examinations

Candidates

97 candidates appeared for the oral section, held over 2 days in October. Candidates are required to attempt both components on the first occasion, but if they are successful at one component, are required to resit only the failed component. Of the 97 candidates, 13 had a prior pass in the OSCE section and 15 had a prior pass in the SOE section.

OSCE

The OSCE had 84 candidates, of which 54% passed. Of the 15 candidates who had previously passed the SOE, 33% passed the OSCE. The pass mark for this section is set by the OSCE sub-group of examiners, using Angoff referencing for each question. The pass marks for each of the OSCE papers were 163, 163, 160 (each out of a maximum of 240).

SOE

82 candidates appeared for the SOE, with a pass rate of 74%. Of the 13 candidates who had previously passed the OCSE, 85% passed the SOE on this occasion. The pass mark was set using borderline regression, with the Hofstee method used to cross-reference the result. The pass mark was 25/32.

Overall

Overall, 51.6% of 97 candidates passed the examination and achieved the Fellowship of Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine. This compares to a 60% pass rate in March 2019.

Questions for each paper were selected from the relevant question banks, each of which contains a large number of items and covers a wide range of the FICM training curriculum, including all domains, up to the end of stage 2 training. Question selection is reviewed to ensure minimal overlap in curriculum areas for those candidates sitting both the OSCE and SOE on the same day.

A large-scale trial of a proposed new marking scheme for the SOE was undertaken. This scheme awards marks individually for each of the five stems in each SOE question, rather than marking the question as a whole. The data from this will be analysed before a decision to change the mark scheme is taken, and candidates will be informed on any such proposed change via the FICM website. The proposed marking scheme will not change the candidates' exam experience.

There were 13 visitors to the exam over both days of the SOE and OSCE, all UK ICM consultants. The visitors' feedback included positive comments on the fairness and equity in the way examiners treated candidates. They felt that the standard of the questions being asked met their expectations for end of stage 2 training, and that some of the questions seemed rather easier than they had expected but were badly answered by a number of candidates.

During examiner call-over, examiners noted that a number of candidates appeared to present themselves for examination with either inadequate experience or preparation; the examination standard is that of end of stage 2 training (as described in the FICM curriculum) and therefore, can include questions on cardiothoracic ICM, neurosurgical ICM and paediatric ICM topics, as well as general ICM topics and applied basic sciences as relevant to ICM.

Particular areas where a number of candidates scored badly included ECG and radiology questions in the OSCE, with a number of candidates failing to be systematic in their approach (eg not describing heart rate on an ECG, or not commenting on the name and date, or not commenting on areas such as the visible skeleton or abdomen of a chest radiograph) so lost marks. This has been noted in previous reports.

While some candidates did very well on the ECG questions, others missed important findings such as acute myocardial infarction or atrial fibrillation.

The use of a 'scattergun' approach by some candidates to questions such as, 'what is the most likely diagnosis?' was noted, with a large number of (unlikely) answers being given; candidates should be aware that the OSCE marking scheme does not credit one correct answer given in a string of incorrect answers in questions such as this.

In the SOE section, both visitors and examiners noted that where a good answer contained a number of items, some candidates seemed unable to structure or classify their answers. The SOE questions on weaning from ventilation and heart-lung interactions were noted to be answered very poorly by a number of candidates and in the simulation station of the OSCE, a number of candidates appeared to be 'task-focused' and lost marks by not taking an overview of the situation and integrating all the information available. The communication station of the OSCE on breaking bad news was also noted to be answered badly by a number of candidates.

The successful running of the exam relies upon support from the Faculty Examinations Department and the hard work of the Board of Examiners who have many responsibilities relating to the exam such as question writing, revising and standard setting, as well as examining the oral section. I would particularly like to thank the examiners who retired over the last year, and welcome the 6 new examiners that have joined us this October. My thanks also go to the senior examiners who have additional responsibilities: Jerome Cockings (Deputy Chair and Audit), Gary Mills and Barbara Philips (SOE), Jeremy Cordingley (OSCE) and Jeremy Bewley (MCQ) as well as all of the Board of Examiners and the Exams Department.

**Vickie Robson – Chair, FFICM Board of Examiners
October 2019**