

Freedom of information request about the March 2021 registration assessment sitting- 20 April 2021

This request was considered under the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Please find below our response to your requests. We have responded to each request directly below each question (numbered for clarity) as well as provided some background information:

Setting the pass mark and then agreeing the pass rate is a balance between psychometrics – in this context, the statistical analysis of individual candidate and cohort performance for a given sitting - and professional judgement. It begins with pharmacists writing and reviewing suitable questions, then by pharmacist standard setters setting the standard of each question – this is a matter of expert judgement and can be informed by psychometric data. Once a paper has been set, the Board of Assessors, which comprises mainly pharmacists with expertise in academia, pharmacy practice and assessment, evaluates anonymous candidate performance unique to a given sitting.

- 1. Please provide a copy of your INTERNAL policy and procedure documents (as well as other documents such as emails if necessary) which show exactly how the pass mark and pass rate for the registration assessment are determined.**

Please find attached a document regarding the mark awarding algorithm. Other documents within the scope of this request are Board of Assessors minutes and standard setting panel notes.

The standard required for each part of the assessment is arrived at using evidence-based standard setting process. A standard setting panel of pharmacists assesses the difficulty of each question in each of the papers and estimates what proportion of barely passing candidates would correctly answer the question. Panel members all have current experience of working with recently qualified and/or preregistration trainee pharmacists. Members work in all sectors of pharmacy and are based in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland and receive comprehensive training before contributing to a panel. The standard setting panel reviews each question in relation to difficulty and this process produces a provisional pass mark for each paper.

Item Response Theory (IRT) is a statistical method used to maintain a standard – in this case, for the registration assessment.

Before agreeing pass marks for each paper, the Board of Assessors undertakes a full review of the performance of the questions, and the papers, alongside any other relevant factors.

The pass rate is the percentage of candidates who have passed the assessment. The pass requirement is achieving the pass mark or greater in part 1 and achieving the pass mark or greater in part 2.

The Board of Assessor minutes and any standard setting panel notes are exempt from disclosure under section 36(2)(b)(ii) and 36(2)(c) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. The below was considered for this decision:

The argument in favour of disclosure is:

- Transparency of the GPhC as a public authority
- To contribute towards the public's understanding of and transparency of the GPhC's activities around the registration assessment

The argument against disclosure is:

- Release of any Board of Assessor's minutes or standard setting panel notes would compromise the integrity of the standard setting process and evaluation of the assessment before and after it has taken place. These meetings must be kept confidential in order for the registration assessment to remain an effective testing tool
 - Judgements made and advice provided by the Board of Assessors and standard setters recorded within any minutes or related notes would identify elements essential to this process that are confidential in order for the registration assessment to be effective
 - A large amount of material around the registration assessment is already available in the public domain on the GPhC's website and the pre-registration training manual Overall, we find that the balance is in favour of not disclosing this information. It is important that disclosure does not prejudice our ability to engage effectively with the Board of Assessors and standard setting panels, and this would likely happen if by disclosing information we compromise the integrity and expected confidentiality of the process. It is necessary for us to be able to engage with our Associates and Partners, and work with them to carry out our regulatory functions and duties as a public authority.
- 2. Please ensure that the documents you disclose show all of the factors that the standard setting panel takes into account when setting a provisional pass mark for the papers, including exactly how it assesses the difficulty of the questions.**

We use a modified Angoff methodology which involves making professional judgements on the difficulty of individual questions for barely passing candidates. Our standards setters, who are recruited based on their experience of pre-registration trainees and/or newly registered pharmacists – and including having a substantial patient-facing element to their own practice – receive comprehensive training before undertaking this role. Factors that our standard setters consider include: the number of steps required to calculate an answer, frequency of encountering a topic in practice, the degree of judgment and application of knowledge required to answer and the complexity of information in the question, their experience and knowledge of barely passing candidates.

- 3. Please ensure that the documents you disclose show exactly how the Board of Assessors determines what percentage of candidates who sat the exam will pass it, including all of the factors they will take into account.**

The Board of Assessors set the passing standard, not the percentage of candidates who pass the assessment.

For clarity, this means that candidates are not being measured against each other or selected to pass or fail according to where they sit in the cohort of all candidates.

Candidates who pass, irrespective of how many of them there are, may apply to register as a pharmacist. Candidates who fail, again irrespective of how many of them there are, have to re-sit or time out, depending on their circumstances.

The pass requirement is achieving the pass mark or greater in part 1 and achieving the pass mark or greater in part 2.

Compensation between papers is not permitted. The pass mark or greater must be achieved in both parts of the same sitting.

The Board of Assessor's mark awarding algorithm (attached) outlines the multistep processes followed.

- 4. Please ensure that the documents you disclose explain why the pass rate is not just determined by the provisional pass mark itself (set by the standard setting panel), and all of the factors that the Board of Assessors will take into account in deciding the number or proportion of candidates who pass the assessment, including those factors it takes into account in deciding to set a different pass mark (if any) from the provisional one set by the standard setting panel.**

The pass rate is determined by the pass mark or passing standard. The passing standard is derived through a modified Angoff process with the addition of one Standard Error of Measurement (SEM) and maintained using IRT. Only candidates who meet the passing standard will pass the assessment.

The pass requirement is achieving the pass mark or greater in part 1 and achieving the pass mark or greater in part 2.

- 5. Please also disclose documents to show what plans (if any) the GPhC or its Board of Assessors has to compare the prospective pass marks and pass rates for the registration assessment on 17 March this year with those for the registration assessment on 18 March this year, and how (if at all) the pass rate for one set of registration assessment papers on one of those dates will be adjusted in light of the pass rate for the other set on the other date, before the results of the registration assessment are released to the candidates who sat it.**

The Board of Assessors follow the process outlined in the mark awarding algorithm.

The pass marks and pass rates for the registration assessments held on 17 March and 18 March will not be compared and will not be adjusted in the way outlined in your question.

The standard to pass will be the same on 17 March and on 18 March. The mark required to pass each part of the assessment on each of 17 and 18 March may vary and this is to be expected.

- 6. As part of this, please state explicitly whether there are any plans to ensure that the pass rate for the registration assessment is set at the same percentage for candidates who sat it on 17 March as for candidates who sat it on 18 March.**

There are no plans to ensure that the pass rate for the registration assessment is set at the same percentage for candidates who sat it on 17 March as for candidates who sat it on 18 of March. As stated above, the standard to pass will be the same on 17 March and on 18 March. Separate sets of candidates sat each of these assessments, and while pass rates might vary between the cohorts through differing individual performance, the pass standard remains the same for both cohorts.

7. Please also disclose the target and expected pass rates for the registration assessments on 17 and 18 of March.

We do not have target or expected pass rates for any sitting of the registration assessment.

More information around the registration assessment can be found on the GPhC's [registration assessment page](#) as well as in the [pre-registration manual](#).