



2021 Australasian Faculty of Occupational and Environmental Health Medicine (AFOEM) Stage B Written Examination

Feedback to Candidates

Overview

The 2021 AFOEM Stage B Written Examination Paper 1 was held on Saturday, 11 September and Paper 2 on Sunday, 12 September 2021.

The examination is a summative assessment that tests a trainees' knowledge with several short answer questions. It is made up of two papers (Paper 1 and Paper 2), which are sat separately on two (2) consecutive days. Each paper has five (5) questions that are weighted equally in marking. Each question is a scenario and includes a different number of sub-questions (parts). The scenarios are sampled from the RACP AFOEM [Occupational and Environmental Medicine Training Curriculum](#).

This document provides feedback for candidates, outlining the characteristics of responses that achieved high marks and the areas for improvement in responses where lower marks were achieved.

Overall, candidates who performed well in the examination provided responses that demonstrated they had read the question and ensured that their responses were targeted to what was being asked. Candidates who performed poorly gave incorrect or inadequate answers.

Candidates are reminded that only the first responses are marked, and there is nothing to be gained by providing more responses than the question has requested. Poor handwriting can result in a loss of marks for answers that are not legible. These candidates need to improve their handwriting generally and under exam conditions to do better in future examinations.

In 2021, the overall pass mark was determined to be 60.3%. The pass mark is initially set using the Modified Angoff method, followed by post-examination analysis.

Seventeen candidates sat the examination and the pass rate was 76.5%.

Paper 1

Question 1

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- The concept of a randomised controlled trial and the issue of blinding – although some candidates gave general answers rather than answers specific to the study in the question and to occupational and environmental medicine

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Relating the questions to occupational and environmental medicine, especially when specifically asked to do so
- Understanding the concept of sample size (or power) and failing to recognise the importance of such a calculation
- Interpreting a 95% confidence interval (CI) – some candidates gave rote answers

Candidates seemed to understand a 95% CI in terms of an odds ratio or relative risk but were not able to translate this understanding to an effect size. Therefore, they did not recognise that the null hypothesis was $d = 0$ and tried to interpret the effect size as an odds ratio.

- Understanding clearly the difference between statistical significance and clinical significance

Other comments

- Overall, this question was done quite poorly.
- Candidates should take the time to read the question and answer what is being asked. They should remember that the exam is trying to test understanding and not just recall, therefore rote answers may not be what is required.

Question 2

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Study design

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- An understanding of sensitivity, specificity, positive predictive value (PPV) and negative prediction value (NPV), and the ability to interpret the information provided
- How to complete a 2 × 2 table, which is core knowledge

Other comments

- Some candidates showed a poor understanding of a 95% confidence interval – this was not examined but some candidates focused on this and provided incorrect interpretations.
- A few candidates did not read the questions fully, especially the second part of the question that asked for an explanation.

Question 3

Overall, candidates did well in this question. The marks were good to high.

Other comments

- The handwriting was at a low level in some cases.
- Candidates should at least attempt to answer the question.

Question 4

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Knowledge of workplace factors contributing to work stress
- Advising the worker about their obligations to self-report to a driver licensing authority

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Obligations as a medical practitioner and jurisdictional requirements in regard to dealing with a worker who may have a condition impacting on their safety to drive

Most candidates did not identify their jurisdiction or the correct obligations under their jurisdiction

- Providing detailed answers – some candidates appeared to be simply remembering lists of facts

Other comments

- Some candidates' handwriting was extremely poor. Marks cannot be awarded if examiners have to guess what candidates have written.
- Candidates generally had learned lists of principles; however, some had difficulty applying these principles to the scenarios.
- Poorly set out answers required examiners to search through the answers to allocate marks.

Question 5

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Identifying the workplace environmental hazards
- Possible health effects of the hazards
- Identifying concerning medical conditions when assessing an individual's suitability for work in a particular setting and providing good reasons for this concern
- Community engagement and relevant health education

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Categorising a worker according to provided guidelines and a medical justification for this categorisation
- Defining the principles of risk assessment
- Understanding the key elements of a risk management policy

Other comments

- Candidates should read the question properly to answer it correctly.
- In answering the question, candidates should try to keep on message and provide appropriate detail.
- Responses can be brief but candidates should write enough to make their point in answering the question. Many candidates wrote far too much for 2-mark questions and not enough for 4-mark questions.
- Candidates should write as clearly as possible, label their responses as per the question and not jumble up their responses, as this may cost them marks.

Paper 2

Question 1

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Identifying the factors that increase post-traumatic seizures after head injuries
- Identifying the barriers to return to work (RTW) (i.e. medical, psychosocial and work factors)

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Identifying specific recommendations for duties that were suitable and duties that were not suitable, for clients with epilepsy
- Knowledge of the specific recommendations in the Health Benefits of Good Work document (RACP, AFOEM)

Other comments

- While some candidates wrote lengthy notes, they did not actually achieve the correct answers.
- Candidates should read the question thoroughly and focus on what is required rather than providing generic answers.

Question 2

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Recognising significant physical and psychological aspects of the role and the workplace hazards that exist
- Appreciating how the comorbidities of diabetes and hypertension, and the relevant medications, would impact on the client's rehabilitation and return to work
- Recognising the potential for substance abuse to affect work performance and social functioning
- Seeing the GP's overview as pivotal in the holistic management of the client, particularly in regard to the mental health issues in the non-work context
- Understanding the importance of multidisciplinary management in a case of this nature

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Appreciating the contribution of pain and pain medication (as opposed to the comorbidities) to the client's work capacity, including his getting to and from the workplace
- Considering the adverse effects of any medication that might be prescribed for low mood, given the likelihood of this occurring
- Recognising that the support of management and colleagues for a worker is very important in the rehabilitation process
- Acknowledging the need for a worksite visit to address a worker's pre-injury role, and for an occupational therapist or rehabilitation coordinator to monitor their progress

Question 3

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Basic principles of heat stress assessment and management
- Audiometry assessment of noise
- Structuring answers and attempting to answer the question

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Classification of hazards (biological, physical, chemical, etc.)
- Answering the question directly – some candidates clumped their answers under a single heading rather than using specific headings for each point
- Structured responses (e.g. using basic headings for a risk management program)

Other comments

- Candidates should avoid vague answers.
- If a question asks for four responses, candidates should provide four distinct responses.
- Responses need to be structured and clearly written.
- Candidates should choose the most common answers for an infectious cause of hearing loss (i.e. syphilis versus measles or otitis media).

Question 4

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Issues with consent withdrawal
- Defining Acts and Regulations
- Principles of ethics

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Applying the specific legislation relevant to their state/jurisdiction

Question 5

Candidates performed well in the following areas:

- Clinical history
- Identifying health and safety training challenges in diverse workforces

Candidates performed poorly in the following areas:

- Structural approach to health and safety management systems
- Identifying organisational strategies to address cultural issues/bullying

Other comments

- Candidates who performed better were able to apply the question to the specific situation, rather than provide generic brief answers.