
**HEARING AID COUNCIL – EXAMINATIONS 2004(1)
MODERATOR’S REPORT – JULY 2004 – G R Kirk**

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the third formal report to the Hearing Aid Council on all parts of the HAC examinations and the report is presented in the same format as previous examinations. Procedures carried out were also similar to the Moderator’s report for previous examinations with some additional work done by the Moderator.

2. PROCEDURE

A. WRITTEN EXAMINATION

- (a) The written papers and their marking schemes were seen by the Moderator prior to the written examination. All questions were assessed for their difficulty and the marking schemes assessed for their clarity and consistency.
- (b) Moderator attended the written examinations held at Milton Keynes on 10th March 2004. Most candidates took their written papers in the National Hockey Stadium. Two candidates sat their written papers in the offices of the Hearing Aid Council as special arrangements had been made for them.
- (c) There were 3 borderline fails and 3 borderline distinctions. These were remarked and monitored. A further 10 candidate’s scripts were sampled to assess the spread of marks across Distinction, Pass, and Fail. Therefore, approximately 18% of written examination scripts were seen by the Moderator. A full report has been prepared by the Chief Examiner showing the spread of marks for each question and includes individual examiner’s comments.
- (d) Remarking was noticeably easier and more consistent than previously as examiners were more obvious in their allocation of marks for various aspects of questions. Simple techniques, such as indicating proposed mark in the margin, make remarking and checking considerably more efficient. 7 out of 8 examiners followed a clear and traceable marking method which allowed easy and understandable remarking.
- (e) A simple analysis of the written exam marks and the practical exam marks is shown in Appendix 1. A more complete analysis is contained within the Chief Examiners report.

B. PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

- (a) Before the practical examinations took place at Leicester in May 2004, the Moderator had seen copies of the Protocol for Conducting Practical Examinations, Practical Exam Marking Schemes for the four practical examination sections and the corresponding Recording Sheets.
- (b) The Moderator prepared and led an Examiners' Education and Awareness Workshop on the morning session of 17th May. All examiners attended.
- (c) During the practical examination, the Moderator observed all 8 examiners on Tuesday 18th and Wednesday 19th May 2004. A total of 12 candidates were observed undertaking their practical examination in Medical Aspects, Aural Impressions, Hearing Aid Technology and Audiometry sections.
- (d) In order to sample the views and experiences of candidates, the Moderator interviewed 6 of these 12 candidates at the end of their practical examination. A further 7 candidates were randomly selected from the rest of the candidates and interviewed at the end of their practical examinations.

C. PARTIAL RE-SITS - PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

- (a) For the first time, candidates were able to resit parts of the practical examination. These partial resits took place on 16th June 2004 at the same venue.
- (b) Three examiners and candidates were observed during the partial resits.
- (c) Four candidates were interviewed during the day.

3. COMMENTS and DISCUSSION

A. WRITTEN PAPERS

- (a) The Moderator was present at the written examination and observed the entire process of preparing, distributing and invigilating the morning and afternoon sessions. The systems and processes seemed to be efficient and delivered with efficiency, courtesy and probity. An inspection was carried out on all the entrances, exits and toilet facilities with a particular emphasis on security.
- (b) Clocks were synchronised, clear instructions were given and assisted by the use of a small public address system. Papers were delivered to desks face down and there was no evidence of candidates turning over their papers before being allowed to. Warnings were given out near the end of the examination and the examination was concluded efficiently. Similar instructions were given out at the beginning of the afternoon session when the aptitude candidates joined the examination.

- (c) The room was rather cluttered with personal effects being left at the rear of the room. Individual desks occasionally had a surplus of personal effects and this situation needs to be reconsidered by the Council as to what personal effects should be allowed in the examination room and on examination desks.
- (d) Concern was raised about the contingency plans should scripts not arrive, one or more invigilators becoming ill, safe despatch and collection of completed scripts to the council and to the individual examiners. Further concern was raised about the procedure for the written papers if, having started the examination, a fire alarm or other security situation resulted in the evacuation of the building. Helpful comments have been received from the Senior Invigilator on the general running of the written examinations and on some of the concerns raised above. Additionally, comments have been received on the security checks of candidates before any examinations. Although the systems would appear to work well there is scope for improving the candidate checking procedure.
- (e) Some comments have been received from candidates (seated at the back of the examination room) mentioning the amount of noise from time to time coming from a food preparation area. Other comments received included the inconvenience of having to leave the building during the lunch break.
- (f) One comment received from a trainer mentioned candidates lack of choice in paper 2 as two questions in the hearing aid section required knowledge of Real Ear Measurement techniques thus forcing candidates into answering at least one question on REM's.
- (g) The Moderator visited the HAC offices to see the arrangements made for two candidates who required either the use of a PC or a scribe. These two candidates were examined in separate rooms and the flexibility of the HAC was very acceptable while maintaining security and consistency.
- (h) The remarking and scrutiny of marked scripts was made easier as most examiners were more clear as to how they awarded marks and the actual mark awarded. Examination scripts appeared to be marked with considerable attention to detail and no obvious signs of inaccuracies or inconsistencies were noted.

B. PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS

- (a) As has been pointed out before, it is acknowledged that having two sets of examiners examining the same sections could give rise to inconsistencies. The role of the Moderator is to identify any such inconsistencies and reassure candidates, examiners, supervisors and trainers that the practical examinations are fair. Therefore, attempts were made to sample the views of candidates as well as observing their practical examinations.
- (b) During the morning session of the first day, all the examiners were able to take part in an **Education and Awareness Workshop** prepared and run by the Moderator. A remarking exercise took place in which other examiners remarked scripts using the same marking schedule. They had no knowledge of previous

marks but did know who the original marker was. It was pleasing for all current examiners to note that the remarked scripts were within 1-2 marks of the original marks. Further exercises included assessment and scoring of video sessions showing practical examinations in Audiometry and Impressions. Discussion took place on how to improve marking schemes for practicals and how to make the practical examinations focus more clearly on the practical aspects of each of the four examination sections.

- (c) All pairs of examiners were able to observe their team member on the first afternoon session (Monday) of the practicals. This produced incremental improvements in marking schemes for the practicals and led to greater accuracy and consistency between pairs of examiners.
- (d) All examiners established rapport rapidly and successfully and showed good listening skills, took control of the situation and encouraged candidates by giving further information when appropriate. Although the atmosphere in the practical examination rooms necessarily involves stress, the examiners did their best to minimise this and put candidates at their ease. As expected, some examiners were more successful at this than others. Questioning styles varies between examiners and this might be reduced by some formal awareness raising of the need for consistent choice and use of question styles.

(e) Medical Aspects

As in previous practicals, both examiners followed same examination procedure with very similar marking schemes and record sheets. Much of this section comprises an oral examination. There is considerable consistency between both examiners.

(f) Aural Impressions

Marking schemes for this section are becoming increasingly detailed which will increase consistency between examiners. The supplementary questions were agreed daily. The standards set by both examiners appears to be similar.

(g) Audiometry

Layout and assessment procedures are common between the two examiners. There remains a difference in personal approach and technique between the two examiners. As this section of the examination lends itself well to being a good and valid practical, it is a challenge to get candidates to stick to time. It was pleasing to see some of the newer technology being brought to the practical examination. In an effort to cover all the required aspects of this section it is easy for the examiner to appear to be rushing the candidate and appear to have a "perfunctory manner". Over-running in any section causes significant disruption to the other sections and produces a logistical nightmare for the two invigilators.

(h) Hearing Aid Technology

This section has introduced some more practical aspects into its schedules. Marking schemes and record sheets are the same for each examiner and are very detailed. General approach was also very similar and used questions and

case studies from an agreed pool. Both examiners were always patient and constructive. Standards for both examiners appear to be very similar.

C. PARTIAL RESITS - PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS

This was the first time that partial resits have been organised as a separate examination day. In this case, it was one month from the first practical examination. The Moderator attended to see if the venue, organisation, marking schedules and recording forms were all the same as before. Candidates were observed and interviewed, if appropriate. As the number of candidates was small (N=5) and the examiners were mentally prepared for just one day's work, the general atmosphere was quite relaxed compared with the May 2004 practicals. Despite this, timings for certain sections were still quite variable. In addition, there may be a danger in just examining partial resits in isolation as it may be difficult for examiners to maintain the broader perspective and establish more clearly defined standards that come with a larger cross-section of candidates. Interviewed candidates (4) also noted the more relaxed atmosphere and were very pleased to be able to resit so quickly. One candidate interviewed said that the reason for failing first time was due to the examiner pointing out mistakes during the first practical.

4. CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS.

- (a) Thirteen candidates were interviewed. The Moderator had observed at least one of their practical sessions for 6 candidates out of the 13. The role of the Moderator was explained to all the candidates before their interview. All candidates agreed that the venue was good, the organisation was good and the examination rooms satisfactory. All admitted that they had been very stressed on arrival but the practical examinations themselves were more relaxed than they had been led to expect.
- (b) There still remains some confusion in candidates' minds of what is expected of them during practical examinations. Comments included:
- I. *"I was told to carry on as if the examiner wasn't there and then was asked questions while I was working. Puts you off a bit not knowing what was going to happen"*
 - II. *"Most of the examiners were really, really nice "*
 - III. *"I was put into a room to wait for the examiner for that section and waited there on my own for over 45 mins.. Felt like solitary confinement"*
 - IV. *"..were very helpful and patient. I had no idea when I left the room whether I had passed or failed".*
 - V. *"The examiner told me"No, no, you don't need to do that"...and that really put me off my train of thought"*

5. SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) Once again, there seems to be an incremental improvement in the Hearing Aid Council's attempt to provide a quality-assured examination process. This must be reassuring to both trainers and candidates.
- (b) The HAC should prepare contingency plans for illness and emergencies during examinations, particularly the written examinations.
- (c) Further consideration over the timing and validity of partial resits as a separate examination.
- (d) Ensure that all pairs of examiners observe their opposite team colleague before the start of the scheduled practical examinations and continue the development of increasingly detailed and consistent practical marking schemes
- (e) Ensure that all sections of the practical examination keep to time. This may mean that trainers and candidates should be advised that the practical examination will be stopped after 30 minutes.
- (f) Discuss the value of some further awareness and training in the variety and usefulness of listening skills and interview skills with particular reference to the viva aspects of all the practical sections.

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APPENDIX 1 Table of written exam marks & practical grades by Examiner

Examiner	Question	Type	%Fail	Practical Grades	
Examiner 1	1A1	MA	6		
	1A2	MA	25	1F	3B
Examiner 2	1A3	MA	35		
	1A4	MA	12	3F	2B
Examiner 3	1B1	PTA/AC	36		
	1B2	PTA/AC	59	4F	2B
Examiner 4	1B3	PTA/AC	19		
	1B4	PTA/AC	12	2F	2B
Examiner 5	2A4	HAT	13		
	2B1	CoP	13		
	3B1	CoP	0		
	3B2	CoP	11		
	3A4	CoP	13	1F	1B
Examiner 6	2B3	Rehab	17		
	2B4	Rehab	17	0F	5B
Examiner 7	2A2	HAT	64		
	2A3	HAT	59		
	3A2	HAT	20	1F	3B
	3A3	HAT	71		
Examiner 8	2A1	HAT	53		
	3A1	HAT	50		
	2B2	HAT	22		
	3A5	HAT	68	1F	5B
TOTALS				13F	23B