

1. INTRODUCTION

This is the fourth 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. The procedures observed are first outlined and then followed by discussion.

2. PROCEDURE

A. WRITTEN EXAMINATION

- (a) The written papers and their marking schemes were seen by the Moderator prior to the written examination. Questions were checked for their compliance with the contents of the recent RHAD syllabus. 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 15th Sept 2005. All candidates took their written papers in the National Hockey Stadium and no extra arrangements were made for any candidate.
- (c) There were 3 borderline fails and 2 borderline distinctions. These were remarked and monitored. A further 12 candidate’s scripts were sampled to assess the spread of marks across Distinction, Pass, and Fail. Therefore, approximately 20% 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 by the Moderator continues to be more consistent (and easier) than previous exams as examiner’s marking schemes continue to improve in clarity and precision. All examiners followed a clear and traceable marking method, which allowed easy and understandable remarking.
- (e) The Moderator closely scrutinised scripts from two randomly selected examiners. Particular attention was paid to consistency of the examiner’s marking between candidates scripts using the same marking scheme. This is discussed later in the report.
- (f) A Moderation exercise took place on the first morning of the Practical exams. Each examiner remarked two papers from another examiner using only the marking scheme for that question. This is discussed later in the report.

B. PRACTICAL EXAMINATION

- (a) Before the practical examinations took place at Leicester in Nov 2005, 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 a Moderation Exercise on 16 exam scripts from the written exams on the morning session of 22nd Nov. All examiners attended.
- (c) During the practical examination, the Moderator observed all 8 examiners on Monday 22nd, Tuesday 23rd, and Wednesday 24th Nov 2005. A total of 9 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 5 of these 9 candidates at the end of their practical examination. A further 6 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) Six candidates were able to resit parts of the practical examination. These partial resits took place on 19th Jan 2005 at the same venue.
- (b) Three 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. As mentioned in detail in the last Moderator's report, all systems and processes seemed to be efficient and delivered with efficiency, courtesy and probity. The written examinations followed the same pattern as before. A noticeable change was the introduction of candidates examination packs which contained all the utensils needed for the written exam. No personal belongings were allowed in the examination room. This produced the need for some cloakroom facility for coats and valuables. Staff from the Council efficiently provided this facility. A check was carried out on all the entrances, exits and toilet facilities with a particular emphasis on security.

- (b) At one point, a complete stranger walked through the examination hall, despite the signs on the door stating that an examination was in progress. The senior invigilator recommends that additional **NO ENTRY** signs are used in future exams.
- (c) The Moderator was introduced to 2 out of 3 invigilators and remained anonymous to the 3rd invigilator. At the beginning of the distribution of written papers, the Moderator occupied a vacant candidate table and 'acted' as a candidate. The third invigilator efficiently and courteously challenged me.
- (d) Contingency plans are now in place for the written exams should untoward events take place. (E.g., a fire alarm or other security situation)
- (e) Helpful written comments have been received from the Senior Invigilator on the general running of the written examinations and the success of the candidate's stationary packs. Additionally, candidates are now checked against their trainee identification cards and the invigilators thought that this worked well.
- (f) No comments have been received from candidates about the written exams.
- (g) No comments have been received from trainers about the written exams.
- (h) Candidates with hearing aids had their hearing aids checked by the Moderator before the start of the written exam.
- (i) The Moderator looked very closely at the scripts from two examiners to try and assess the level of the internal consistency for marking across candidates. Most examiners would feel uneasy and insecure about such scrutiny of their marking consistency so anonymity is crucial.
- 10 scripts/questions were scrutinised from each of two examiners
 - the original marking scheme was used
 - 11 discrepancies were noted from one examiner and 5 from the other.
 - These discrepancies were all minor, involved partial marks and did not have any consequences on the final outcome.
 - One examiner was marking a question that lended itself to a tight, matrix type marking grid while the other question was an essay/note type.

This close scrutiny by the Moderator was very reassuring and suggests that there is considerable internal consistency of approach during marking by these two examiners.

B. PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS

- (a) During the morning session of the first day, all the examiners were able to take part in a **Moderation Exercise** on the scripts from the Written exam. A remarking exercise took place in which other examiners remarked scripts using the same marking schedule as the original marker. They had no knowledge of previous marks and were given copies of the candidate's original scripts. 16 scripts were remarked by these second markers. Of these, 10 (62%) were within 1 mark of the original mark and 4 scripts were within 1.5 marks. 2 scripts differed by more than 3 marks. This exercise needs to be repeated following the next written exams in March 2005.
- (b) All examiners now use quite detailed marking schemes and recording grids for the practical examinations.
- (c) Marking schemes and record sheets are the same for each examiner and are very detailed. General approach between examiners appears to be similar and each pair of examiners used questions and case studies from an agreed pool.

(d) Medical Aspects

There is considerable consistency between both examiners.

(e) Aural Impressions

The standards set by both examiners appears to be similar.

(f) Audiometry

Layout and assessment procedures are common between the two examiners. It remains 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. Over-running in any section causes significant disruption to the other sections and produces a logistical nightmare for the two invigilators.

(g) Hearing Aid Technology

This section has continued to introduce some more practical aspects into its schedules. Standards for both examiners appear to be very similar.

C. PARTIAL RESITS - PRACTICAL EXAMINATIONS

This was the second time that partial resits have been organised as a separate examination day. 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. The number of candidates was small (N=6).

The apparently relaxed and informal approach of the previous partial resits was not so evident during these partial resits. Examiners were more aware of the need for a formal approach with the same mind-set as full practicals. This was

clearly obvious for these resits. Marking schemes and procedures were similar to the recent exams.

4. CANDIDATE INTERVIEWS.

- (a) Eleven candidates were interviewed. The Moderator had observed at least one of their practical sessions for 5 candidates out of the 11. 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. Examiners seem to have done everything they can to clarify what is expected. It may be the essential nature and stress of a practical exam that produces this uncertainty and confusion.
- (c) The usual range of comments was made from candidates interviewed.
- (d) Candidates coming to the partial resits were specifically asked if they preferred to be re-examined by the same examiner or a different examiner. Half preferred the same examiner "*because they already know what I did wrong and I know them*" and the other half preferred a fresh examiner.

5. SUMMARY and RECOMMENDATIONS

- (a) Hearing Aid Council would seem to be doing everything possible to provide a quality-assured examination process within the nature and type of examinations it offers trainees. This must be reassuring to both trainers and candidates.
- (b) 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 would be stopped after 30 minutes.
- (c) 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.
- (d) During the recent months, consideration has been given to the use of Objective Structured Clinical Examinations (OSCE's) as an alternative to the existing traditional, simulated practicals. Advice has been sought and given by those currently using OSCE's. Some preparatory work has been done by the HAC examiners. The amount of work and resources needed to introduce OSCE's should not be underestimated but may produce long-term improvements in assessing candidate's practical competence. It is recommended that further work should be done to evaluate and explore the use of OSCE's within the HAC examination process.