Examiners' comments – Feedback to Candidates

October 2021 sitting

This feedback gives general points to support candidates preparing for each section of the exam in the future. Comments are intended to provide helpful guidance rather than be prescriptive. Feedback is based on comments received from all the examiners who marked the October 2021 sitting, and therefore covers all papers and questions. Comments from the Chair of Examiners are also included. These indicate general points to support candidates preparing for the exam in future sittings.

All questions included in the October 2021 exam were marked according to pre-agreed mark schemes.

Candidates should be aware that mark schemes will always be used with discretion by examiners, so that answers that do not fully fit the model answer or mark schemes are judged in terms of their relevance and overall fit with the question asked.

Candidates are encouraged to review the Frequently Asked Questions on the Faculty website (particularly the section that deals with preparing for the DFPH examination) and pay particular attention to the examination syllabus.

Summary statistics for the October 2021 sitting are also published on the FPH website

Paper I

Q1 & 2: Most candidates provided a reasonable answer to Q2, but answers to Q1 were disappointing. For Q1, many candidates did not display basic knowledge of the key features or approach to analysis for an important study design; revision strategies must include all elements of the syllabus. In addition, some candidates lost marks in Q2 by not linking their answers across different sub-sections of the question.

Q3 & 4: These questions were generally answered well. Candidates who scored highly typically adopted a clear and relevant structure or framework in their responses, which helped ensure that their answers were easy to follow and that no key issues were omitted.

Q4 & 5: Again, most candidates produced reasonably answers to these questions, but again better answers adopted a clear structure in their responses. For Q4 in particular, those who set their answers explicitly in the context of the question and illustrated their answers with appropriate examples generally achieved higher marks that those who answered in a generic fashion only.

Q7 & 8: Most candidates answered these questions well, with some showing a good understanding of sociological theory and applying this clearly to the question asked. In Q8, some candidates repeated material across question sub-sections, which did not attract extra credit. Candidates should read each sub-question carefully and be sure they answer the specific question asked.

Q9 & 10: Performance on these questions was mixed. Those who answered Q9 well demonstrated understanding of a range of frameworks and tools and were able to apply these directly to the context set out in the question. Some candidates had limited understanding of the issues in Q10, despite them being highly topical across multiple health systems. Some candidates struggled to differentiate the question sub-sections, being unable to separate overarching aims of the policy development from aspects of its implementation.

Paper IIA

The answer to Q1 has a word limit, so candidates should pay special attention to answering the specific question set rather than waste words on a more generic answer, or on summarising the paper. In general, this question was answered well, though some struggled more in articulating the paper and study's weaknesses and relate these to its Public Health implications.

Generally, Q3 and Q4 were poorly answered. Those who scored better had a clear understanding of the different audiences, strengths and limitations of communication via different media, and were able to draw on a broad understanding of Public Health issues rather than focusing on the detail of the paper. Candidates must think carefully about the purpose of any communication and answer with this in mind, seeing these as opportunities to promote health in a variety of settings. The language used must also reflect the intended audience.

Paper IIB

Most questions were answered reasonably well in this Paper, though candidates appeared to struggle more with questions that drew on knowledge from across the syllabus. Candidates who performed well were able to go beyond simple descriptions of data when asked to interpret findings, recognising the Public Health implications of the data they were presented with. In addition, some candidates failed to answer all sections of some questions or did not address the specific questions being asked, and a small number lost marks by not including details of their calculations.

Generic advice for the examiners:

- Read the question and sub-questions carefully and answer each part.
- Good answers often apply the example in the specific question to illustrate required definitions and explanations.
- Candidates should ensure that they focus on specifically answering the question rather than spending time on including a broad introduction to the topic, which is unlikely to attract many marks.
- Well-structured answers are usually more comprehensive and thus score higher marks.
- If the question asks for an example, please provide one.
- If a question asks for a specific number of features/examples/stakeholders, candidates should be aware that providing any above that number will not be considered, for example, if a question ask for THREE benefits, only the first three listed will be marked.
- Look at the marks associated with a question. If a question that asks for two examples is associated with 4 marks, candidates are usually expected to describe/discuss the relevance of the example to the concept it illustrates, rather than simply providing a brief list of examples.
- Practice performing calculations when the data are presented in a variety of different ways and in different formats. Preliminary steps may be needed before the calculation can be carried out, and it is important to show these.
- When asked to interpret findings (e.g., a table), ensure you consider the broader implications of the data presented (relevant to the question scenario).