

Professional Qualifications: Case Study No. 2

Synopsis

This case study illustrates some of the issues common to all examination-based qualifications. It also considers the implications of:

- Reporting candidates' results using a single, summary grade;
- One or more components failing to discriminate adequately between candidates.

Ways to investigate potential component failure are discussed in the following session.

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A principal of a college has made a statement to the media that the final examination organised by a professional body generates too few distinctions. The Chief Executive treats such comments seriously and has asked you to investigate. The awarding body has provided the following information.

Management of the examination

The final professional examination involves six components:

1. Professional practice – reports on three pieces of work, assessed by the candidate's training manager, college lecturer or a mentor appointed by the Institute;
2. Specialist topics 1 - candidates answer five questions from a total of 8;
3. Specialist topics 2 - candidates answer five questions from a total of 8;
4. Professional issues and ethics - questions on contemporary professional issues, candidates answer five questions from a total of 8;
5. Simulated case study - candidates choose one study from a choice of three;
6. Synoptic paper – candidates answer 10 short answer questions from a total of 12.

All components are graded Distinction, Credit, Pass 1, Pass 2, Pass 3 or Fail. Results for components 1 to 5 can be banked over up to two years but the Synoptic paper must be taken (and passed) immediately prior to an award.

To be awarded an overall pass in the examination, a candidate must achieve at least pass grades in all six components with no more than two results at the Pass 3 level. The final award is calculated by converting all pass grades into numerical equivalents (Distinction = 5, Credit = 4 to Pass 3 = 1), totalling the numbers and rounding the mean to the nearest whole grade.

The table of awards for the current year is attached together with a correlation table and other statistics from the Summer 2008 examinations.

It is suggested that you consider:

1. The value of reporting candidates' results using a single, summary grade;
2. The reliability and discrimination of the final grade;
3. Whether all of the individual components have functioned correctly and how they might be investigated further.

MK

August 2008

*A paper collating the issues inherent in the complaint and actions available to the CE, in the short and middle terms, will be posted on the **regulatory-landscape.co.uk** website within 3 weeks of the end of the conference.*