

The Intercollegiate Committee for Basic Surgical Examinations (ICBSE) and the four Royal Surgical Colleges of the United Kingdom and in Ireland are aware of concerns regarding the pass mark that has been communicated to candidates for the September 2020 MRCS Part A examination, which was conducted online. We are also aware that the delay in releasing the MRCS Part A results was distressing to candidates.

Candidates should be assured that the delay releasing results was caused by additional checks being performed to ensure full confidence in the results to be communicated to candidates given the new method of examination delivery

The standard for the MRCS Part A paper is set using a modification of the Angoff procedure. In order to ensure that standards are set at an appropriate and realistic level, the panel included in the Angoff procedure were practising surgeons, specialist basic scientists, trainers, trainee representatives, a patient representative, and an observer from the GMC.

The Angoff procedure is not carried out on every examination. Instead, a number of 'marker' questions taken from a previous examination are included in each Part A paper and are used to maintain the standard of the examination across different examinations.

The performance of candidates on each question is scrutinised together with their performance on the test overall. The performance of candidates on the marker questions is reviewed together with other statistical data from the present and previous examinations to set the pass/fail cut-off mark.

The same standard setting process detailed above was used for the September 2020 MRCS Part A to ensure that the outcomes could be as comparable as possible. Thus, the September 2020 MRCS Part A was compared to the September 2019 exam.

On this occasion, the calculations following the exam resulted in a pass mark of 230, or 76.9%. While this is the highest the pass mark has been for the MRCS Part A, analysis of the common and non-common items revealed that, while the candidature was of a higher quality than before, this was outweighed by the exam as a whole being easier than in previous diets, which will have raised the mean score across all candidates separately to the standard of the candidature.

Accordingly, the pass rate (the proportion of candidates who passed the exam) for the September 2020 MRCS Part A was **42.2%**; this is the highest pass rate for the MRCS Part A in its current format. The pass rate of the September 2018 exam was 33.2%, and the pass rate for the September 2019 MRCS Part A (to which the September 2020 exam was directly compared for standard setting purposes) was 36.3%.

Candidates may also be aware that some candidates will be taking a specially-organised re-sit of the MRCS Part A on 3 November 2020. All candidates were offered the opportunity to take this on condition that their initial attempt at the September 2020 exam be annulled. A small number of candidates directly affected by a technical issue on the online exam provider's servers on the day of the exam, which prevented these candidates from being able to take all sections of the MRCS Part A, are taking part in this 3 November re-sit. No candidates who have received a fail result for the September 2020 MRCS Part A will be able to take the re-sit exam on 3 November. Instead, these candidates should apply for the January 2021 sitting of the MRCS Part A.