

Intercollegiate Committee for Basic Surgical Examinations (ICBSE)

Standard Setting in MRCS Part A Examinations

The standard for the MRCS Part A paper is set using the Angoff procedure, where a team of practising surgeons, specialist basic scientists, trainers, trainees and a patient representative consider each question of an assessment and estimate the performance of a notional benchmark candidate. An observer from the regulator, in this case the GMC, may additionally oversee the process.

The Angoff process is completed on a regular basis particularly where there has been a notified change to the assessment process. However, it is not completed before each examination diet.

A number of 'marker' questions - 20% of the total questions - taken from a previous examination are included in each Part A paper and are used to maintain the standard and consistency of the examination, recognising the standard defined by the Angoff procedure.

Following every examination, the performance of candidates on each question is scrutinised together with their performance on the test overall. A range of statistical measures are used to evaluate the quality of the examination.

It is at this stage that candidate feedback on the examination is considered and taken into account, along with statistical analysis of individual questions to identify any outlying performance statistics. The panel then review every identified question in detail and decide whether or not to exclude that specific question from the overall examination.

The performance of candidates on the marker questions is reviewed together with other statistical data from the present and previous examinations, and considered in relation to the benchmark Angoff exercise. After consideration of all the available data, the panel set the pass/fail cut-off mark.

In practice, this means that:

- As each MRCS Part A exam is different, the pass mark will be different each time.
- As different cohorts of candidates take each MRCS Part A exam, the pass rate will be different each time.
- The process to set the pass mark for the MRCS Part A is the same for every exam.
- The standard required to pass the exam remains constant for all MRCS Part A exams.