



The ROYAL COLLEGE of  
OPHTHALMOLOGISTS

18 Stephenson Way  
London, NW1 2HD  
T. 020 7935 0702  
exams@rcophth.ac.uk

rcophth.ac.uk  
@RCophth

## **RCOphth Statement on Part 2 FRCOphth Written Exam – July 2019**

The first computer-based Part 2 FRCOphth written examination took place on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019. There are advantages to computer-based examinations: they increase the venues available to candidates, facilitate prompt analysis of results and remove the risks inherent in transporting volumes of papers across the globe.

The July Part 2 was presented using Ripley Systems, a software provider whose client base includes several royal medical colleges, and they were hosted by Prometric, which has a multinational network of examination centres.

Like any new venture, things can go wrong and the College apologises for any distress that the delivery of the July Part 2 has caused.

We have taken serious and prompt notice of the candidate correspondence received since the examination and we carefully analysed the data available. We need to find a balance between protecting patient safety and recognising that exams are a very stressful time for candidates.

This statement summarises the process adopted by the Examinations Team and the recommendations approved by the Trustee Board; a full report will be produced in due course:

- We followed our standard practice of reviewing the results and we have removed six questions (from the original 180 questions) which were either ambiguous or had a low facility.
- We investigated candidates' concerns with the system of flagging questions, i.e. the means to identify or "flag" questions that candidates could return to for review and potentially change their answer. The software instructions did not make it clear that if a candidate altered their initial answer, the change would only be saved if the continue button was clicked.

The data available to the College includes information on the number of questions that a candidate had flagged and we used this to calculate the maximum candidate mark possible. This increased the pass rate.

Patron  
HRH The Duke of York, KG

Charity registered in England and  
Wales (299872) and in Scotland  
(SC045652)

- We understood that the process of answering the final question in both papers was unclear. We can confirm that every candidate who failed had answered the final questions in both papers and therefore were not disadvantaged by this lack of clarity.
- Two candidates did not receive the total agreed additional time awarded to them and adjustments were made where appropriate.
- Candidates raised some issues with the hosting centres and we are working with Prometric to resolve these.

Candidates who passed the examination are now eligible to sit the Part 2 oral examination. The Trustee Board has taken the unusual step of agreeing that candidates who failed the July 2019 Part 2 may sit the December 2019 Part 2 written examination or the July 2020 Part 2 written examination with no charge for one future attempt and the July 2019 Part 2 sitting will not be recorded as an examination attempt.

Looking to the future, we have received assurances from Ripley Systems that they will resolve the short-comings in the software that affected the first computer- based examination.

### **Statement from Ripley Systems**

This was the first run through of this new delivery of the exam and although, on the whole, it ran well, there was one issue we had not anticipated, this was to do with the Flagged questions where an error occurred.

As you progressed through the exam you would have clicked the Continue button to move to the next question. This Continue button ensured that your answer was saved and the question number on the bottom of the screen would have turned green. You also had the option to Flag the question, in which case the number at the bottom would have changed to yellow. If you had answered the question at that time, even if you Flagged it, the mark would have saved because you had to click Continue to move onto the next question.

If you decided to return to your Flagged questions, changed your answer, then moved directly to another question without clicking Continue then the number at the bottom would have remained yellow and your new answer would not have saved, but your first answer would still have remained. This would only have been the case if the Flagged questions remained yellow and you did not click Continue.

### **Changes implemented post-exam**

The programmers have taken this issue very seriously and have changed the fundamental way in which the marks are saved. In future you will see that the marks are saved immediately the check box is marked and will no longer require any buttons to be clicked. You can change the answer as many times as you wish and it will always save it immediately, keeping the last answer as your chosen one.

When you Flag a question it will still show the question number in the bottom bar as yellow to allow you to navigate back to them and you can unflag them as and when you are ready. When they are unflagged the number will turn green. The Continue button will now be called NEXT and there will be a PREVIOUS button too. The saved mark is no longer dependant on any button being clicked.

Other changes being made are that when you reach question 90, the last question in the exam, the button will still show NEXT rather than FINISH and you will be taken to a Summary screen which will show you clearly how many questions have been answered and how many are still Flagged. You can then decide to go back to your Flagged questions or not.

With regard to the **extra time issue**:

Extra time additions had to be registered with Prometric no later than 5 days before the exam. Although the exams team did everything they could to allow for the extra time, there unfortunately was a misunderstanding by the account manager and this was not communicated to the programming team in time.

### **Changes implemented post-exam**

The extra time issue will not occur in future due to a direct communication from the exam administrators system, through the exam delivery system and the testing centre. This was not the case in the first roll-out of the exam.

Ripley Systems apologise for the errors that occurred in this inaugural electronic examination and can assure, that with the changes that we have now put in place, that no such error will reoccur for future exams.



Mr Dylan Costello  
Head of Examinations