

Equating MRCP(UK) Part 2 Written examination

Equating was introduced for the MRCP(UK) Part 2 Written examination in April 2010. Similarly with MRCP(UK) Part 1 examination, this process brought significant changes in the way candidates' results were processed and reported. Equating was introduced to enable the accurate comparison of candidates' results between all MRCP(UK) examinations in future diets.

Instead of a percentage overall score, candidates are given an 'overall scaled score'. This score is a number between 0 and 999, which is calculated from the number of questions a candidate has answered correctly (out of the maximum possible) **and** takes into account the relative difficulty of the examination. Since no two examinations contain the same questions, it is inevitable that some papers may be slightly harder (or easier) than others, and equating is a statistical process that addresses this.

The scaled ability score which was applied as the pass mark from April 2010 and was agreed by the MRCP(UK) Part 2 Standard Setting Group was 425. In November 2015, after 5 years of using 425 as the pass mark, the MRCP(UK) Part 2 Standard Setting Group has reviewed the equating standards and recommended **454** as the new pass mark to be introduced from December 2016.

This new pass score will remain constant for a number of diets until the MRCP (UK) Part 2 Written Board determines that an adjustment is necessary.

All candidates attaining a score of **454** or greater will pass, and the remaining candidates will fail.

The MRCP(UK) Part 2 candidate results letter will therefore be revised to reflect these changes and will include the following:

- An overall examination result of **Pass** or **Fail**
- A candidate's **Overall Scaled Score** based on their performance (between 0 and 999).
- The **Pass Score** – the minimum scaled score needed to pass the examination.

We will not provide details of the actual number of questions a candidate has answered correctly. However, as we are committed to providing feedback on performance in exams, and to help unsuccessful candidates prepare for future exams, details of performance will be provided for all specialties included in the published blueprint, expressed as a percentage. This information is provided to assist candidates in identifying areas of relative strength and weakness; however, passing or failing the Examination is based **ONLY** on the scaled score.

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MRCP(UK) Central Office

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Frequently Asked Questions

Candidates for the MRCP(UK) Part 2 Written examination may find the following information helpful:

Q: What is 'equating'?

A: Equating is a method of ensuring candidates receive comparable scores for comparable performance in different examinations. It works by an approach called Item Response Theory. This process uses statistical software which establishes the difficulty value of every question in the exam, and from this each candidate's individual level of ability can be accurately calculated.

Q: Why did the MRCP(UK) introducing equating?

A: To enhance the quality and standards of the examination, and so that it is possible to measure candidates' ability accurately and consistently between different diets.

Q: Who else uses test equating?

A: In the United Kingdom, the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate uses test equating in assessing the KS3 English and Science exams. Worldwide, test equating is in well established use for the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE).

Q: Why are my results presented on a three digit scale?

A: Equating changes the way the results are calculated. Rather than just getting a mark for every correct question (and then this simply being converted into an overall percentage), the marks are instead adjusted to take into account the varying difficulty of each question. A candidate's scaled score is therefore based on their ability, rather than the percentage of correct questions they achieved in an exam, and to avoid confusion this is best expressed in a 0 to 999 score range.

Q: If I've failed the Part 2 Written exam, how will my score for this exam be comparable with my score for a future diet?

A: Candidates' scores are adjusted to make them directly comparable across diets by taking the exams' difficulty into consideration.

With equating, the variations in difficulty between exams in different diets are accurately calculated with statistical software, so we are able to say that a candidate having a score of 545 in 2016/01 is more able than a candidate with a score of 540 in 2016/02.

Q: Is my score going to be higher if I answer all the ‘hard’ questions?

A: The Equating process determines the overall examination’s difficulty, then adjusts the candidates results to take this into account and make each paper directly comparable to past and future examinations. Therefore each candidate’s overall score depends on how many correct answers were given in total and not on how many ‘hard’ questions a candidate believes they answered correctly. ‘Hard’ or ‘easy’ are subjective terms and are based on a candidate’s own knowledge, and what is ‘hard’ for one candidate may well be ‘easy’ for another.

Q: How do I find the percentage score I achieved?

A: The overall percentage score will not be reported to candidates. This is because it will create uncertainty and confusion for candidates in seeing that, for example, a score of 545 was achieved in 2016/01 based on 189 (70%) correct answers out of 270, but exactly the same score was achieved in 2016/02 with just 185 (68.5%).

However, to give candidates useful feedback, performance by speciality (expressed as a percentage) will still be included in the result letter.

Q: What my negative equated score means?

A: Candidates with very little knowledge of the subject material are likely to get a certain proportion of answers correct by chance alone. In the one-correct-answer-from-five-options that figure is 20% and the equivalent equated score will be somewhere around 100. When the marking sheets are incorrectly filled in by not highlighting one of the five options, the percent of correct answers could be lower than 20%. In this case candidate’s ability is perceived by the equating software as being lower than ‘guessing’ and therefore the resulting equated score has a negative value.

For further information contact: Equating.Queries@mrcpuk.org