

the chances of success of overseas graduates at the MRCPsych exam:

- (1) There should be access to videotaped interviewing skills teaching, as well as access to a mock examination, with videotaping where appropriate. The Working Party believe this to be the most important recommendation.
- (2) Psychiatric tutors should strongly encourage failed candidates to apply for feedback and provide advice and counselling regarding examination failure. Where a candidate is very unlikely to succeed at the exam, he

or she should be given advice to that effect as early as possible.

- (3) An *opting out* rather than *opting in* scheme for feedback, which would otherwise be automatic after a third failure, might overcome the reticence of candidates in applying for feedback.

REFERENCE

- ¹Cox, J. L. & BHATE, S. (1983) *Overseas Trainees in Psychiatry*. Leaflet available from Overseas Trainees' Sub-Committee, Royal College of Psychiatrists.

Overseas Graduates and the MRCPsych

R. H. CAWLEY, Chief Examiner

Between 1977 and 1984 the pass rates for the Preliminary Test for UK/Eire candidates varied between 64% and 84% whilst those for overseas candidates were in the range 23% to 42%. Corresponding figures for the Membership Examination were 61% to 70% and 25% to 43% respectively. During those years overseas candidates were in the majority, comprising 60–65% of those taking the Preliminary Test and 50–55% of those taking the Membership Examination. Over the last two years the proportions have fallen to 40–50%.

This paper presents: (i) a detailed analysis of the results of one Preliminary Test (September 1984) and one Membership Examination (November 1984); and (ii) a comparison of parallel cohorts of home and overseas candidates

who made their first attempts at the Membership in 1974–79.

The Autumn 1984 Examinations

As always the largest numbers of overseas candidates came from the Indian Sub-Continent (Table I). Hassall and Trethowan grouped the Arabs with the Indians in their analysis,¹ but examination of current figures suggests that it is now more appropriate to compare the three main sub-groups of candidates according to whether their basic medical qualification was in the UK or Eire, in the Indian Sub-Continent, or elsewhere. UK/Eire trainees fare best and the Indians worst with the others from overseas taking an intermediate position (Table II).

Number of attempts

Of the candidates in the Preliminary Test, 64% were making their first attempt, 18% second, and 18% third and subsequent attempts. Corresponding figures for the

TABLE I
Medical schools of graduation of candidates

Graduated in medical schools in:	Number of candidates (%)
A. Preliminary Test: September 1984	
UK/Eire	191 (52)
Indian Sub-Continent	114 (31)
United Arab Republic	16
Europe	15
Far East	13
Africa	10
N. America, Australasia	9
Total	368
B. Membership Examination: November 1984	
UK/Eire	198 (55)
Indian Sub-Continent	97 (27)
United Arab Republic	21
Europe	15
Far East	7
Africa	15
N. America, Australasia	9
Total	362

TABLE II
Pass rates among British and Overseas candidates

	Number of candidates	Pass
A. Preliminary Test: September 1984		
All candidates	368	45%
UK/Eire	191	66%
Indian Sub-Continent	114	18%
United Arab Republic	16	25%
Other countries	47	32%
	63	30%
B. Membership Examination: November 1984		
All candidates	362	53%
UK/Eire	198	68%
Indian Sub-Continent	97	28%
United Arab Republic	21	48%
Other countries	46	41%
	67	43%

Membership Examination were 59% first attempters, 13% second and 21% third. The proportions taking second or third and subsequent attempts is higher for overseas students than for UK candidates, and particularly so for those from the Indian Sub-Continent (Table III). Pass rates tend to fall with later attempts, particularly with the UK/Eire candidates (Table IV).

TABLE III
Number of attempts by British and Overseas candidates

	No. of candi- dates	1st attpt.	2nd attpt.	3rd or sub. attpt.
A. Preliminary Test:				
September 1984				
UK/Eire	191	80%	14%	6%
Indian sub-Continent	114	42%	28%	30%
Other countries	63	54%	14%	32%
B. Membership Examination:				
November 1984				
UK/Eire	198	73%	14%	14%
Indian sub-Continent	97	39%	29%	32%
Other countries	67	48%	27%	25%

TABLE IV
Pass rates for first, second and subsequent attempts

	Attempts:		
	1st n(Pass)	2nd n(Pass)	3rd or more n(Pass)
A. Preliminary Test:			
September 1984			
UK/Eire	153(70%)	26(54%)	12(50%)
Indian Sub-Continent	48(27%)	32(6%)	34(18%)
Other countries	34(41%)	9(40%)	20(15%)
B. Membership Examination:			
November 1984			
UK/Eire	169(73%)	21(48%)	8(13%)
Indian Sub-Continent	37(32%)	31(32%)	29(17%)
Other countries	32(53%)	18(33%)	17(24%)

TABLE V
Number of attempts at Preliminary Test of candidates for Membership Examination, November 1984

	Number of candidates	Attempts:		
		1	2	3 or more
UK	198	85%	11%	4%
Indian Sub-Continent	97	38%	32%	30%
Other countries	67	48%	27%	25%

TABLE VI
Pass rate in Membership Examination according to number of attempts at Preliminary Test

	Attempts at Preliminary Test:					
	1		2		3 or more	
	n	Pass	n	Pass	n	Pass
UK	169	73%	21	48%	8	13%
Indian Sub-Continent	37	32%	31	32%	29	17%
Other countries	32	53%	18	33%	17	24%

Number of attempts at Preliminary Test for Membership Examination candidates

In the Membership Examination candidates from overseas had a history of one or more failures in the Preliminary Test more commonly than UK graduates (Table V). Again the 'other countries' group occupied an intermediate position between UK and Indian graduates. As would be expected there is an association between success in the Membership Examination and earlier success in the Preliminary Test, though this is less apparent for overseas than for UK graduates (Table VI).

Reasons for failure: Preliminary Test

Overall, 64% of those who failed did so in both papers, 24% on the 'multiple choice question' paper alone and 12% on the essay paper alone. These percentages differ between the three sub-groups (Table VII) only to a small extent. UK/Eire candidates who fail tend to do worse in the MCQ paper than in the essay, but there is no evidence that overseas candidates perform strikingly worse in either part.

Reasons for failure: Membership Examination

Only 17% of unsuccessful candidates in the Membership Examination failed in one part only (Table VIIIa). Among these, the MCQ and the clinical were the most frequent causes of failure. Differences between the three groups are small. Analysis of larger numbers would be necessary for reliable inferences.

Sixty-one per cent of candidates failed in one or two parts of the examination and 39% in three or four parts (Table VIIIb). Those who failed did so more completely among the overseas candidates than in the UK/Eire sub-group. Table VIIIc shows the failure rates in each component of the examination for the 171 candidates who failed overall. Failed candidates in each of the three sub-groups performed equally badly in the MCQ paper. Overseas candidates were more likely to have failed in the other parts, particularly the essay paper and the clinical.

Cohort studies: Membership Examination

I am indebted to Dr Christine Hassall for providing data relating to successive cohorts of candidates for the Membership Examination. In what follows, candidates from the

TABLE VII
Preliminary Test: Reasons for failure

	Number of candidates who failed	Failed in both papers	Failed only in MCQ	Failed only in essay
All candidates	201	129 (64%)	48 (24%)	24 (12%)
UK/Eire	64	36 (56%)	22 (34%)	6 (10%)
Indian Sub-Continent	93	66 (71%)	17 (18%)	10 (11%)
Other countries	44	27 (61%)	9 (20%)	8 (18%)

TABLE VIII
Reasons for failure: Membership Examinations

A. Candidates who failed in one part only						
	No. of candidates who failed	No. who failed in one part only	MCQ	Failed only in:		
				Essay	Clinical	Oral
All candidates	171	29 (17%)	12	2	14	1
UK/Eire	63	12 (19%)	4	—	8	—
Indian Sub-Continent	70	10 (14%)	6	1	3	—
Other countries	38	7 (18%)	2	1	3	1

B. Number of parts in which candidates failed			
	No. of candidates who failed	Percentage who failed in:	
		1 or 2 parts	3 or 4 parts
All candidates	171	61	39
UK/Eire	63	71	29
Indian Sub-Continent	70	54	46
Other countries	38	58	42

C. Failure rates in each part of Examination for candidates who failed overall					
	No. of candidates who failed	MCQ	Percentage who failed in:		Oral
			Essay	Clinical	
All candidates	171	70	65	58	40
UK/Eire	63	71	59	51	37
Indian Sub-Continent	70	71	67	63	46
Other countries	38	66	74	61	37

TABLE IX
Membership Examination: Follow-up of cohorts

	n	Outcome by 1983			
		Pass at first attempt	Pass eventually	Drop out before fifth attempt	Fail at fifth attempt
A. Cohort of November 1974 to November 1976 (n = 606)					
UK/Eire	415	60%	95%	4%	< 1%
Indian/Arab	139	35%	75%	18%	7%
Other countries	52	44%	81%	17%	2%
B. Cohort of May 1977 to May 1979 (n = 651)					
UK/Eire	440	74%	95%	4%	< 1%
Indian/Arab	156	26%	81%	15%	4%
Other countries	55	45%	84%	13%	4%

Indian Sub-Continent are grouped with those who qualified in the United Arab Republic.

Candidates are allowed five attempts at the Membership Examination. If they do not pass in five years they are required to re-sit the Preliminary Test. Thus if we go back a few years and identify a cohort of those taking the examination for the first time during a given period, we can follow their subsequent fate. Table IX shows the outcome of events, as reviewed in 1983, among two cohorts each comprising all those who took the Membership Examination for the first time over a two-year period in the 1970s. For each of these cohorts the ultimate pass rate for UK candidates was 95%, and for Indian/Arab candidates 75%–81%, with others from overseas taking the intermediate position of 81–84%. From the data in Table IX, it is striking that considerable numbers of overseas candidates dropped out without making the five attempts allowed. Numbers who proceeded to a fifth attempt were correspondingly small.

Summary

- (1) Overseas candidates do considerably less well in the College examinations than those from UK and Eire.
- (2) Candidates who graduated in medicine in the Indian Sub-Continent fare worse than those from other countries.
- (3) These discrepancies are consistent through both parts of the Preliminary Test and all four parts of the Membership Examination.
- (4) It is not possible to pinpoint specific causes of failure. The MCQs are not specifically to blame, nor are the essays; nor, in the Membership Examination, is the clinical.
- (5) Cohort studies of the Membership Examination show

that up to 18% of candidates from overseas (compared with 5% of those from UK) drop out before the fifth attempt.

Increasing pass rates

Pass rates in a professional examination may be increased in the following ways (for all candidates or a subgroup): (1) More appropriate selection of trainees; (2) Early identification of those not suited; (3) Improve education, training, etc; (4) Review the examination—(i) *Validity* of the component parts and of the balance between them; (ii) *Reliability* (consistency of examiners); (iii) Are the *standards* appropriate?; and (iv) Minimise causes of 'accidental' failure.

Comments

- (1) With any examination, in any country, indigenous candidates do better, as a group, than those coming from other countries. This is to be expected.
- (2) The Royal College of Psychiatrists is a UK College, not an international body. It is not right to say, as I have heard it said, that the examination is specifically geared to UK graduates. But it has to take its bearings from UK practice. It has to be expected that a successful candidate in the MRCPsych would, after a period of approved higher training, be a suitable person for appointment as a consultant psychiatrist in the UK.

REFERENCE

- ¹HASSALL, C. & TRETHOWAN, W. H. (1974) Analysis of the results of the three examinations for the Membership. *News and Notes* (supplement to the *British Journal of Psychiatry*), April, 2–4.