Expert Review into Part 2 MRCOG Examination

1. Introduction

1.1 Shortly after results letters for the January 2018 Part 2 MRCOG exam were issued to candidates on Friday 2 March 2018, the RCOG became aware of a significant error affecting the results. After investigation, it was discovered that 183 candidates had received incorrect results. It was also discovered that more than one issue had affected the accuracy of the results. Remedial action was taken, which included a communication plan and support arrangements. Corrected results were communicated to affected candidates on Tuesday 6 and Wednesday 7 March 2018.

1.2 The RCOG President and Chief Executive established an external led review of the administration of the Part 2 MRCOG examination to consider the events which led to the issuing of incorrect results. The review was to establish the cause(s) of the incident, to evaluate the response to the incident and to recommend preventative action for the future. The review panel members and terms of reference are detailed below.

1.3 Review panel members
Stephen Hills Executive Director, Learning and Quality at RCS (Chair)
Rhona Hughes FRCOG RCOG Council Member
Matt Prior MRCOG Past Chair of the Trainees’ Committee
Rosemary Harris Member of Women’s Network and Lay Representative
Kim Dawson RCOG Employee (Secretary)

1.4 The terms of reference of the review
1. Investigate the preparation, delivery, marking, assessment & results communication of Part 2 MRCOG in Jan-Mar 2018.
2. Report on problems, issues and errors in the running of this Part 2 examination and any errors reported in the past, relevant to this Review.
3. Assess the contribution of software and outsourced data support services to Part 2 errors.
4. Assess the College’s response in addressing the problems identified, including the adequacy of communications to candidates and the effectiveness of internal communications.
5. Undertake a root cause analysis of all problems revealed and develop a risk profile of the Part 2 Examination.
7. Publish final Report and Recommendations.
2. **Background**

2.1 The RCOG membership exam is aimed at those who wish to specialise in obstetrics and gynaecology, successful completion of which leads to eligibility to become a member of RCOG and forms part of the requirements for entry on to the Specialist Register. MRCOG is also a requirement to progress to ST6 year of training.

2.2 The exam has three components:

- Part 1 MRCOG which is a written paper consisting of two papers each containing 100 objective testing questions, each with a single best answer (SBA). This exam assesses basic and clinical sciences.
- Part 2 MRCOG which is a written paper consisting of two papers each containing 100 objective testing questions, 50 single best answer and 50 extended matching questions (EMQs). This exam assesses application of knowledge.
- Part 3 MRCOG which is a clinical skills exam requiring completion of 14 tasks. This exam assesses communication skills, information gathering, patient safety and applied clinical knowledge.

2.3 The two sections of each paper for the part 2 MRCOG exam, SBA and EMQ sections, carry equal numbers of questions but have a weighted contribution to the overall score - SBA sections 40% and EMQ sections 60%.

2.4 The MRCOG exam is core activity for RCOG and an important part of a trainee’s journey. Often, potential members’ first interaction with RCOG will be when they enter for the exam. It is vital that the examinations operate smoothly and that trainees and other stakeholders have trust in the outcomes of the exam process.

2.5 The MRCOG examinations are administered by the exams team working closely with the Examination and Assessment Committee, its sub committees and examiners.

2.6 The administration of the examinations relies on both RCOG IT systems and software for scanning and processing supplied by Speedwell, who are also contracted to provide user support for their software.
3. Review Process

3.1 The review panel met in late April to establish the process for undertaking the review. The following approach was agreed and implemented.

a. Define the factors to explore in order to establish the causes of the exam incident.
   The review panel identified the four likely sources of error – the people involved, the processes utilised, the supporting software systems and organisational factors.

b. Define the criteria against which the RCOG response would be evaluated.
   The review panel identified three criteria against which to evaluate the effectiveness of the RCOG response to the issuing of incorrect examination results – timeliness, quality of communication and the support arrangements put in place.

c. Identify the information required by the panel and methods of collection.
   The panel identified and called for a range of written documents (listed in Appendix A). Some of the documents requested (highlighted in Appendix A) either did not exist or could not be traced, and their non-availability informed the review process.
   As the review progressed, further documentation was supplied to the panel and a full list of the documentation the panel consulted is provided in Appendix B.
   The panel also identified a number of individuals to interview to aid their understanding of events (listed in Appendix C). The interviews took place between 16 May 2018 and 30 August 2018, with two people interviewed twice.
   These documents and interviews formed the evidence used to support the findings and recommendations.

d. Carry out the review and report outcomes.

3.2 It should be noted that as a result of staff turnover, no experienced exam administration staff working at the time of the exam incidents, including the Head of Exams, were available to meet with the panel. This had an adverse effect on the review as they would have information the review panel would have found useful. The review panel endeavoured to obtain as much of this information as possible through documentation and interviews with others who had been involved in the administration of the exams and/or the managing of the incident.
4. **Impact on Candidates**

4.1 The review panel interviewed four candidates who had received an incorrect result for the Part 2 MRCOG examination and the Chair of the Trainees' Committee, who had received feedback from affected candidates. Their experience informed the panel's evaluation of the RCOG's response to the incident.

4.2 It is important to acknowledge the detrimental impact the issuing of incorrect results had on affected candidates, who were upset by the error and embarrassed at having to advise people of their change of result. The exam is a significant milestone in trainees' careers and other life plans were contingent on their results. This incident has undermined the trainees' trust in the exams process and the reputation of RCOG. Extracts from the interviews with affected candidates are reproduced below to illustrate some of the impacts experienced.

**Candidate whose results changed from Pass to Fail**

She was at work and became very upset and remembers calling her head of department in tears. She did not feel like working and took emergency leave from work and travelled back to her family in London. She did not feel that staff at the College understood the impact this could have on her life. Passing the MRCOG part 2 was important to this candidate as she was recently married, had sacrificed many parts of her life to study for the exam and wanted to move to the UK to be with her husband. This would be facilitated by membership of the RCOG.

**Candidate whose results changed from Fail to Pass**

The most frustrating part for me was the next day. The College website was closed for us to book our Part 3, therefore those with a change of result could not register for the exam. It was extremely difficult to get in touch with the College...An e-mail outline there was an intention that the College would organise places for us to sit Part 3. I was telephoning the helpline for an hour before getting through; ultimately, they were dismissive of my concern at not being able to get a place on the Part 3. When I said that I thought we were ensured of a place, he said although there was a mistake with the Part 2 there was nothing that could be done about this now.
5. **Findings**

*Investigate the preparation, delivery, marking, assessment & results communication of Part 2 MRCOG in Jan-Mar 2018.*

*Report on problems, issues and errors in the running of this Part 2 examination and any errors reported in the past, relevant to this Review.*

5.1 **Validity of recalculated results following correction of data error.**

5.1.1 The software used to process the candidate answer sheets and the response data, Speedwell software, accurately produced candidate scores by paper and paper section (SBA and EMQ sections). This was confirmed through auditing and spot checking candidate answer sheets. The aggregated scores for each candidate have been verified with no errors identified.

5.1.2 The pass mark for each exam is set during a standard setting process which includes a psychometric analysis of exam and candidate data. The pass mark of the recalculated results was based on the original standard setting process adjusted with input from a psychometrician to ensure standards were maintained and candidates’ results accurately reflected their performance.

5.1.3 The recalculated results were checked for accuracy before being communicated to candidates. The results were verified. In addition, the results were recalculated outside of the systems from raw data and checked to ensure each candidate result was accurate and associated with the correct candidate. No errors were identified with the results of the 1440 candidates who sat the examination.

5.2 The review considered the period leading up to the administration of the Part 2 MRCOG exam in addition to the administering of the examination itself. A mix of eight significant factors, issues or problems were identified as relevant to the review. In outline, they are:

5.2.1 the amount of change within the exams team that took place in the period leading up to the Part 2 MRCOG exam, and how the team was managed;

5.2.2 the concerns raised by clinicians about the operation of the exams team and the tensions between clinicians and senior staff, and how they were handled;

5.2.3 late preparations for the delivery of the Part 2 MRCOG exam in January 2018;

5.2.4 failure to properly process a late entry for a London candidate leading to 16 London candidates being sent results with an incorrect candidate number;

5.2.5 an issue with up-loading candidate scores into the result calculation system;

5.2.6 one of the four sets of marks (two sections of each of two papers) for the Part 2 MRCOG exam was incorrectly imported into the results calculation system leading to incorrect results being communicated;
5.2.7 two candidate numbers were inverted leading to these candidates each being given the others’ result information;
5.2.8 eight candidates who were absent from the exam were sent results at the same time as the corrected results were communicated.

Detailed findings concerning these follow in sections 5.3 to 5.10.

5.3 Changes within the exams team and how the team was managed.
5.3.1 In the period leading up to the error that led to the issue of incorrect results, there had been significant change to the exams team:
- a new Head of Exams had been appointed in January 2017;
- the organisational development change programme was implemented within the exams team in quarter 4 of 2017, leading to structural change;
- all experienced exam team staff, with the exception of one junior team member, had left the organisation by early April 2018, the majority by December 2017;
- a number of temporary staff were employed in the exams team pending recruitment to permanent roles.
5.3.2 No evidence of a risk analysis of the effect of these changes, nor a plan to manage these, was identified.
5.3.3 No induction or training was provided to the temporary members of staff. They were asked to complete discrete tasks with no sense of the overall process and therefore no understanding of the potential consequences of their actions on other parts of the process.
5.3.4 No process maps, operating procedures or operating guidance documents, to which staff members and temporary staff could refer, were identified.
5.3.5 Handover notes were available to staff, which while useful were insufficient in isolation.
5.3.6 No schedules of activity, timetables or operational plans, either at an individual exam diet level or an annual plan level, were identified, although empty templates to produce such plans were provided.
5.3.7 There was no evidence of capacity planning to confirm required staffing levels and ensure workloads were appropriate. The exams team complained of being stressed and overloaded.
5.3.8 The exams team were working in crisis mode for much of the time supported by IT systems which needed some development. Staff were expected to ensure exams took place but often without a clear understanding of what was required.
5.3.9 The Head of Exams had a very high workload and by necessity was focussing on operational issues with no time for planning and improvements.
5.3.10 Morale in the exams team was low and longer serving staff were disgruntled at the result of the organisational changes applied to the exams team.

5.3.11 There was no evidence of an incident management process within exams or records of previous incidents from which lessons could be learned.

5.3.12 There was no evidence of a risk register within exams nor any evidence process risks had been identified and mitigating action taken.

5.4 Concerns raised by clinicians

5.4.1 A number of clinicians, who were sincerely concerned to ensure the highest standards for the exams, had raised concerns about the exams team and the way it was operating. A letter from the Chair of the Examinations and Assessment Committee dated 27 November 2017 raised concerns about the implementation of the organisation change as it applied to exams and the risk to the January exams due to experienced exam staff leaving the organisation. Other concerns raised included:

- whether the staff were sufficiently experienced for the role;
- whether the changes introduced through the organisational development programme were appropriate;
- the lack of consultation with the exam committee members about operational aspects of the examinations;
- the loss of organisational memory and failure of the exams team to make use of the experience and expertise of clinicians supporting the exams.

5.4.2 The issues raised by the Chair of the Examinations and Assessment Committee were subject to an independent review instigated by the President and Vice President Education and conducted by David Farquharson. The review reported back on 22 January 2018 with a detailed analysis and recommendations to address issues identified during the review. Of particular note for this review, the report high-lighted both:

- the risk of loss of organisational memory within the exams team and the need to manage that risk;
- the disruption to the team had led to it no longer acting in a cohesive manner.

5.4.3 There had been a close working relationship between the clinicians supporting the examination and the exams team for some time. This relationship had deteriorated in recent months, with some clinicians feeling sidelined. Some of the clinicians felt the risk they had identified with the administration of the January MRCOG exams had not received the attention it deserved.
5.5 Late Preparation for the January 2018 Part 2 MRCOG exam.

5.5.1 The MRCOG examination is delivered in both the UK and overseas. The materials for the exam need to be prepared in good time to allow for the distribution of papers to the overseas centres, taking account of the risk of delays in customs or in transit.

5.5.2 The preparation for the January exam was late to the point at which there was a risk some overseas centres would not receive the materials in time for the exams.

5.5.3 There were a number of factors which contributed to the preparation delay, but all were manageable and the lateness of completing the materials and logistic arrangements was avoidable.

5.5.3 The exams team put in place a strategy to mitigate the risk of non-delivery of exam materials which resulted in the need for invigilators to transport the papers personally to seven overseas centres and at five overseas centres the need to securely email the question paper for local printing.

5.5.4 All the examinations took place to schedule and a thorough investigation into events by centre took place to ensure the integrity of the examination. This investigation reported no major concerns but did identify the need to add further clarity to the invigilation instructions.

5.6 Late Entry Administration – January 2018 Part 2 MRCOG exam

5.6.1 Candidates entered the examination online. Their entry details were stored on RCOG IT systems. After the closing date had passed, candidate numbers were allocated and details sent to candidates. The entry details, including candidate number, were then transferred to the result processing software in preparation for scanning of candidates’ answer sheets.

5.6.2 One candidate at the London centre was allowed to enter after the closing date. They were placed on the candidate list held on RCOG IT systems in alphabetical order and the candidate numbers reallocated. It was normal practice for late entries to be added to the bottom of the list to avoid the need to reallocate candidate numbers.

5.6.3 The candidate details on the results calculation system was not up-dated with the revised candidate entry details. This resulted in the 16 candidates on the candidate list sited below the candidate entering late receiving notification of a candidate number one digit higher than the details held on the result calculation system.
5.6.4 When the results were calculated and communicated to candidates, the speedwell software used the details imported originally, which meant the 16 affected candidates received a result notification quoting a candidate number one digit below the number they had been advised. It also led to 8 candidates who were absent from the exam receiving a result.

5.6.5 This resulted in enquiries to the exam team after the results had been issued on Friday, 2 March 2018. The exams team was staffed by temporary staff at the time, with the senior staff out of the office on annual leave.

5.6.6 The executive director with responsibility for examinations was out of the office on business and was contacted by exam staff by phone to escalate the issue. The executive director contacted the director who in turn contacted the head of exams.

5.6.7 Candidates who sat in London were sent a communication advising that there was an issue with the results that was being investigated and they would be contacted again the following week.

5.6.8 The exams management team did not fully understand the nature of the error at the time it was discovered and did not know whether or not the affected London candidates had received the correct result with an incorrect candidate number quoted, or whether the result received was for a different candidate than the one who received it.

5.6.9 Believing this was an incident contained to a small number of candidates who sat the exam at the London centre, and also believing the error required the speedwell support team to correct, the decision was made to conduct the investigation into the error and take remedial action on Monday, 5 March 2018, which was the earliest time support from the speedwell support team would be available.

5.7 Up-loading candidate scores issue

5.7.1 When answer sheets have been received back from the exam centres and have been checked, they are scanned and the data saved and imported into the bespoke results calculation software.

5.7.2 There was difficulty with this process for the January exam data, and the operator needed to request support from the speedwell support team.

5.7.3 The speedwell support team responded to the request and provided support to complete the procedure, including remotely logging in to the system and helping with the importing of data, but the operator remained responsible for ensuring the correct data files were imported.

5.8 Incorrect processing of results
5.8.1 The RCOG made use of both standard speedwell software and bespoke software for processing of results. Speedwell support both sets of software. Speedwell had raised concerns about the use of the bespoke software to the previous head of exams and wrote to RCOG in March 2018 to advise they would be withdrawing their support of the bespoke software in March 2019. The reasons provided included the old technology on which it relied and the departure of the RCOG staff member who had written some of the code for the software to communicate with RCOG systems (Integra).

5.8.2 The result processing process required data to be exported between the standard speedwell software and the bespoke software. The operator needed to conduct an export of data requiring the naming and saving of four individual results data files (the SBA and EMQ sections of both the papers that constituted the Part 2 MRCOG exam). These then had to be up-loaded individually by the operator into the next software module. The operator for the January exam diet was not experienced with the software and process and needed help from the speedwell support team (see 5.7 above).

5.8.3 On Monday 5 March 2018, the results needed to be corrected for the late entry processing error. In doing so, the exams department identified that there had been an error with the original processing of results.

5.8.4 On investigation it was discovered that during the transfer of data between the results processing software when the original results had been calculated, an error had been made. Three of the data files had been imported correctly, but the fourth data file, containing Paper 2 Part 2 EMQ data, was not imported, being erroneously substituted with a second importing of the data file containing Paper 2 Part 1 data (SBA data). The software processed the data as expected using the data that had been imported.

5.8.5 In the handover notes of the previous head of exams, the risks of error during the results calculation process were high-lighted and a quality assurance process described. The review panel are unable to determine whether staff were aware of the handover notes, or had referred to them or had ensured that quality assurance process was carried out. It is the opinion of the review panel that had the quality assurance process been carried out, the error would have been detected.
5.8.6 The effect of this error is that candidates who performed well in the Paper 2 SBA section relative to their performance in the EMQ section were credited with a higher score than they had achieved and those who performed less well in the SBA section relative to their EMQ section, a lower score. When the results were corrected 183 candidate results needed to be changed from Pass to Fail or vice versa.

5.8.7 Candidates are supplied results performance distribution graphs for each paper section, with their results. The graphs sent with the original incorrect results were also incorrect. They only contained data of failed candidates (the graphs should contain data of both pass and fail candidates).

5.8.8 The results were recalculated (including confirming the pass mark. see section 5.1.2) and results verified before distribution to candidates from Tuesday 6th March, together with an explanatory communication.

5.9 Inverted Candidate Scores
5.9.1 Following the re-issuing of the corrected results, it was discovered that two candidate numbers had been inverted leading each of the two candidates receiving the others results.

5.9.2 This was corrected by the head of exams but the cause of the error could not be determined.

5.10 Absentee candidates
5.10.1 On Friday 9 March, it was discovered that eight candidates who were absent from the exam were sent results at the same time as the corrected results were communicated.

5.10.2 This was investigated with the help of the Director of IT but the cause of the error could not be determined.

5.10.3 The director of IT then recalculated all the results using the raw data outside of the system and each was checked against the results that were sent to candidates. No errors were identified.

5.10.4 The head of exams corrected the absentee results and contacted the eight absentee candidates on Monday 12 March.

5.11 Errors reported in the past.
A number of the people with which we spoke referred to rare issues in the past affecting limited numbers of candidates which they believe were appropriately managed but for which we could identify no record. Without records or organisational memory of the details, the review panel could not investigate or consider these.
Assess the contribution of software and outsourced data support services to Part 2 errors.

5.12 Contribution of software operation to the Part 2 errors
   5.12.1 The processing of results required the transfer of data between different software and systems. This approach makes the processing of results unnecessarily complex and susceptible to error. The operator needs to understand the stages in the process and how to transfer the data in the correct form.
   5.12.2 The operator for the result processing of the Part 2 MRCOG January examination was inexperienced and did not have a written procedure, requiring them to call upon the speedwell support services.
   5.12.3 We found no evidence to suggest that the software performed other than in the expected manner.

5.13 Contribution of speedwell support services to the Part 2 errors
   5.13.1 The speedwell support services were called upon to assist with the importing of data. They responded with a detailed process that included screen shots to make it easy to follow.
   5.13.2 They also offered to assist with the importing of data at the time it was being actioned, including an offer to login remotely and perform the importing process.
   5.13.3 The importing process requires the operator to identify and manually choose the file for importing into the system.
   5.13.4 It is our understanding, though we have been unable to confirm this with staff, that the offer of remote support was accepted. We cannot be sure whether the speedwell support services operator or the RCOG operator conducted the importing of data. In either event, the RCOG operator was the person who knew the file location and file name of the data files that needed to be imported and so would either have identified and imported the data files themselves or directed the support operator to these files. The RCOG operator would have been responsible for ensuring the correct data files were imported.
   5.13.5 The availability of the speedwell support services was known to RCOG. It was RCOG’s decision to issue results on a Friday afternoon in the knowledge that they could not call upon support over the weekend.
Undertake a root cause analysis of all problems revealed and develop a risk profile of the Part 2 Examination.

5.14 Proximate cause of the Part 2 result processing error.
The review panel have concluded that the proximate cause of the issuing of incorrect results for the Part 2 MRCOG examinations was due to human error in transferring data between the software components, compounded by the failure to carry out, or effectively carry out, the quality assurance process to confirm accurate processing of results data.

5.15 Root cause of the problems identified.
5.15.1 The review panel have concluded that the root cause of the problems identified stem from a senior management failure to mitigate the risk associated with exam administration at a time of significant change and loss of experienced staff and organisational memory.
5.15.2 Some specific factors that exacerbated the risk were the failure to:
- induct and train staff;
- document processes and procedures (both operational and for quality assurance);
- effectively undertake required quality assurance processes;
- record and plan examination diet activity (which inhibited the ability to monitor progress);
- formally identify and manage the risks associated with change and high levels of staff turnover;
- implement a formal risk management process for regular exams activity;
- develop the IT systems to better support the exams processing activity;
- draw on the experience of clinicians with a history of supporting the examination.

5.16 Since there were no process descriptions or procedures, it has not been possible for the review panel to develop a risk profile for the examinations.

Assess the College’s response in addressing the problems identified, including the adequacy of communications to candidates and the effectiveness of internal communications.

5.17 The review panel identified three criteria against which to evaluate RCOG’s response to addressing the issues identified: timeliness, quality of communication and support arrangements for affected candidates.
5.18 Timeliness

Error Investigation and remedial action

5.18.1 The first error identified, the incorrect processing of a late entry, was discovered on the afternoon of Friday, 2 March 2018. Investigations and remedial action began on Monday, 5 March 2018 as the Speedwell support services team were not available at the weekend and it was considered the impact was contained to a small number of London based candidates.

5.18.2 Given the potential impact of a results issue error, the review panel would question the decision not to investigate fully immediately. The unavailability of Speedwell support should not have been a barrier to this, even if their support might be needed later. In the event, this would have detected the second error earlier and remedial action taken sooner.

5.18.3 The second error, resulting from incorrect transfer of data, was identified late morning of Monday, 5 March. That was investigated immediately and remedial action completed the following day. The review panel concluded this was given the appropriate priority and the response was timely.

Notifications to Candidates and Stakeholders

5.18.4 All internal and external notifications of the result issue were made in a timely manner, however, there were two sets of stakeholders who were not initially included in the notifications:

- the officers of the Trainees’ Committee;
- Examinations and Assessment Committee Chair
- the heads of schools.

The review panel believe this is likely to have been an oversight, as we found no evidence other than RCOG were handling this incident in an open and transparent manner and had made a concerted effort to communicate the issue appropriately widely.

Responses to Candidate Enquiries

5.18.5 The review panel found that RCOG was initially unprepared to handle the volume of enquiries and complaints related to the results incident. The email inbox accrued a backlog and many phone calls were not answered to the detriment of affected candidates.

5.18.6 In response:

- dedicated phone lines to handle enquiries were established;
- a dedicated email account to better manage enquiries was established;
- the pool of staff to whom enquiries were directed was expanded;
- Council members generously gave of their time to support candidates on an individual basis;
- The President and Chief Executive attended the March Trainee Committee meeting to discuss the incident, which was much appreciated.
5.18.7 The co-ordinated approach achieved more timely responses and it would have been beneficial to have instigated this approach earlier.

5.19 Quality of Communications

Communication with Candidates and Stakeholders

5.19.1 The affected candidates have expressed a general distrust in the results. Some do not have confidence in the corrected results and are generally not content with the quality of the communication from RCOG. The issues which cause them concern include:

- the perception that some of the staff responding to telephone enquiries did not appreciate the impact of the error upon them;
- the tone of the responses from some RCOG staff when handling their enquiry which made some candidates feel like their enquiry was an unwanted irritation;
- the sense that some of the RCOG staff answering enquiries were at a junior level;
- the written explanation of the cause of the error received by candidates was insufficient for candidates to fully understand what had happened and how this had affected their result;
- the distribution graphs accompanying the results were difficult to interpret and understand.

5.19.2 The initial explanation of the error provided to both affected candidates was limited and would have benefited from greater clarity. In particular, including an explanation of the graphic feedback issue would have saved much confusion. The written responses the review panel reviewed to enquiries, complaints and appeal requests were full and clear. The review panel did not hear the responses supplied to telephone enquiries, but feedback from candidates suggests there was some inconsistency and lack of clarity.

5.19.3 Candidates who had direct contact with the President, the CEO and supporting Council members, such as the Chair of the Trainees’ Committee and regional representatives, expressed their appreciation and valued the information supplied.

Internal Communication

5.19.4 Initial communication from the exams department to inform on the issues discovered were made in real time and the information provided changed as their understanding grew. As the investigation progressed and understanding grew, the reports on the incident became fuller and more reliable.

5.19.5 The presentation to Council concerning the incident provided a full summary of the main issues and impacts of the incident.
5.20 Support Arrangements

5.20.1 The support/compensation provided to affected candidates included:

- pass to fail candidates were offered a free resit;
- fee waiver for affected candidates submitting an appeal;
- affected candidates were offered support from Council members;
- the CEO and President attended a trainee committee meeting to provide information which could be used to help them respond to enquiries they received concerning the incident.

5.20.2 This represents good support provision demonstrating RCOG’s commitment to mitigate the impacts on affected candidates.

6. Recommendations

6.1 In order to provide the focus and capacity required for the management of the exams function, the panel would recommend that consideration is given to splitting the Head of Exams role into its two component parts and appointing to a director level role with overall responsibility for exams supported by a strong operational manager at Head of Exam level. The director role should be filled by someone with experience and a good understanding of education and assessment principles and how they apply to an exams function. This would ensure appropriate focus and support of both operational and strategic activity.

6.2 It is important to recruit permanent staff into the exams team as quickly as possible and support their development to effective performance through a structured induction and training process. Given the experience of candidates affected by the results issue incident, the panel would recommend the induction and training process included awareness raising of the wider training process to build understanding and empathy, most usefully by hearing direct from a trainee.

6.3 The panel strongly recommend that all the processes and procedures required to undertake exams administration is fully captured at both a high level and a detailed level, both to ensure operational activity is effectively carried out and to allow for appropriate oversight. This will also mitigate the risk associated with loss of experience through staff turnover.

6.4 The review panel were unable to produce a risk profile for the exam because of the lack of information available. We would recommend such a profile is produced and used to inform the development of a quality assurance framework for the examination. The requirements of the quality assurance framework should be embedded within processes and procedures where appropriate.
6.5 The tools for effective annual planning and individual exam diet planning are available within the exam department and these should be used as an active part of the planning and monitoring process.

6.6 It is important to introduce a formal risk management process within exams, overseen and monitored by the examination and assessment committee with appropriate risks escalated to the wider College risk management as necessary.

6.7 Any process is subject to failure and error and so it is vital risk is effectively managed and processes are continually improved and made more robust. A common management tool to help embed a continuous improvement culture is to adopt a formal reflective lessons learned process and the panel recommend the adoption of such a process in the exams department.

6.8 The initial response from RCOG to the incident and the initial communications could have been better co-ordinated and clearer. When the senior executive team took responsibility for managing the incident, the response and support to affected candidates improved significantly. To be more prepared in case of any future incident, the panel recommend an incident management process for exams is introduced which aligns with any College wide incident management process.

6.9 The results determination process relies on IT systems that are complicated by the need to hold multiple copies of data in different places and the need to transfer data a number of times during the process, both of which are sources of error. These processes should be reviewed to streamline, simplify, remove the need for human intervention wherever it is sensible to do so and to establish the best systems/software to support the process.

6.10 It is important that administrative exams staff and clinicians supporting the exam recognise and value the important contribution both make to ensure high standards of exam delivery. It is vital both constituents work well together. This can be aided by ensuring both understand their role in the process and the examinations and assessment committee have clear and appropriate oversight of activity.

6.11 It would be prudent to ensure a senior member of the examinations team is in the office on the day of results release and to consider releasing results on an earlier day in the week to avoid delays in dealing with any enquiry that might arise.

6.12 It is important to restore trust and confidence in the RCOG examination administration process. Publishing the cause of the error together with details of preventative actions would be a useful first step.

The review panel would like to thank RCOG for the unfettered access allowed to records and individuals, and the people interviewed for their time and the candid discussions that took place. The panel are especially grateful for the first-rate support provided by Kim Dawson.