

Guidance Notes for Supervising Examiners

Intercollegiate MRCS Part B

OSCE Examination

May 2018

These guidance notes should be used by the Supervising Examiner in conjunction with the latest version of the Examiner Guidance Notes.

1. Appointment of Supervising Examiner

Before and during the running of each OSCE examination, a Supervising Examiner will be appointed for each College centre running the OSCE. They will oversee the running of the examination, liaise with examinations staff, intercollegiate MRCS Assessors and deal with any problems that may arise for each centre. They will also communicate with the other centres running the examination as necessary to ensure that uniformity of the examination is maintained. They will be at the centres throughout the examination days and the individual Colleges will decide for how many days each individual supervisor will be responsible.

Where possible, it is appropriate that the Supervising Examiner should be part of the examination committee of the College and play or have played a senior role in the College's examination department. They, together with the senior examination administrator, will be responsible for all aspects of the conduct of the examination. These responsibilities are described below.

2. Before the examination

2.1 Types of examiner

Normally the examinations staff will provide, in advance, the Supervising Examiner with a list of examiners scheduled for each day of the OSCE. This will enable the Supervising Examiner to plan the allocations of examiners to specific stations. There are now three categories of examiner.

- 1 Surgeon examiners:
 - May examine in any of the stations requiring a surgeon examiner and in their own nominated basic science,
- 2 Basic scientists and anaesthetists:
 - May examine in their own basic science,
- 3 Lay examiners:
 - Three required per circuit paired with surgeon examiner in double-manned communication skills and history-taking stations.

2.2 Examiner allocation

Within the four broad content areas for each circuit the examiner requirements are as follows:

Anatomy and Surgical Pathology (ASP)

Five basic science examiners (anatomy/pathology) for the manned generic and speciality defined stations (ASP G A x 2, ASP G P, ASP H, ASP L, ASP N, ASP T)

Communication Skills (CS)

Giving and receiving information (CSI)

Three surgeon examiners and three Lay examiners for patient/relative communication skills station (CSI G P) and History taking (CSH).

One surgeon examiner for communication skills station with colleague (usually on telephone) (CSI G C).

When a surgeon examiner and basic scientist are examining together the surgeon examiner will always be examiner 1 and the basic scientist examiner 2.

Applied Surgical Science and Critical Care (SSC)

Three basic scientist (physiology) examiners for the three stations

Clinical and Procedural Skills (CP)

Physical Examination (CPE)

Four surgeon examiners, to cover the clinical bays. Note that examiners should not be placed in clinical bays that correspond to their specialty interest.

Procedural Skills (CPS)

Two examiners plus two assistants (CPS G P and CPS G T). Please note that only one examiner should mark and examine this station even if a spare examiner is used as an assistant.

This gives an ideal total of 21 examiners to fully cover each circuit of whom 10 must be surgeon examiners, 3 Lay examiners and 8 basic scientists (5 anatomy/pathology and 3 physiology). All OSCE examiners are regarded as generic within the categories outlined above. Supervisors should resist any attempts by examiners to persuade them to allocate them to stations that they favour or which they claim they do not have the necessary expertise to examine.

Notes

Although the Colleges will normally have allocated examiners for the OSCE well in advance these will often change during the run-up to the examination. Therefore do not try and allocate examiners to specific stations more than a few days before the start of the exam. Ideally there should be more examiners allocated for each day than actually required (particularly on the first day) to cover for any unexpected 'no shows'. Spare examiners in the morning can be allocated to the afternoon circuits. Spare examiners can be released after the circuit starts but should ensure that the Supervising Examiner has their mobile phone number and that they remain available in case of unexpected problems.

Examiners do not need to be allocated to the same station for both of the daily circuits (with the exception of the Lay examiners), however for practical reasons with time being short during the lunch break it may not be possible for them to learn new stations. If examiners are free in the morning and allocated to a station in the afternoon then they should sit in with that station at the end of the morning circuit to learn it.

The procedural and skills stations are designed to be examined by only a single examiner. For most of these scenarios it is desirable and often essential to have assistance to turn the station around between candidates. It is very important that **only** the designated examiner takes part in the marking process. If two examiners have been allocated one should be the examiner for the duration of the circuit and the other purely assist and not play any part in the marking. These roles can be reversed for the second circuit of the day.

The Supervising Examiner should liaise with College examinations staff before each diet to ensure they are familiar with the geography of the centre and the exact location of each station within the centre.

The planned examiner allocations for the day should be communicated to the examination administrative staff.

2.3 Examiner briefing

As early as is practical all examiners involved in the OSCE circuits for that day should be briefed. All examiners should have a complete briefing and reorientation using the slide set before examining. This full briefing does not need to be repeated daily but all examiners must receive it prior to examining. If any examiner misses the full briefing they will need to have a separate briefing from the Supervisor prior to examining. Although it is hoped and expected that all the examiners will have read the "Examiner Guidance Notes" document, there are a number of important points that the Supervisor should cover in their briefing:

- Station allocations for the day (both circuits) and their location
- Timing arrangements
- Action to be taken in the event of alarm sounding and evacuation arrangements
- Emphasise that following the briefing examiners should move to their designated station and:
 - read through all the supplied paperwork:
 - check that candidate instructions outside the bay match those within
 - check the marks total is correct on the paperwork (adds up to 20)
 - raise any ambiguity with the allocation of marks with the Supervising Examiner
 - check that any props/instruments required are available
 - check that simulated patients are familiar with their script and clarify any areas of uncertainty
 - check that real patients have the correct condition and appropriate physical signs (this should be done for all patients allocated to a specific station) and liaise with the examination administrators over arrangements for patient substitution during the circuit
 - notify the Supervising Examiner of any perceived problems as soon as possible
 - mobile phones or tablet computers should not be visible to the candidates at any time during the examination

- Emphasise the following points regarding conduct of the examination:
 - Switch off their mobile phones.
 - Examiners must follow dress code appropriate for the specific stations.
 - Examiners must follow and not deviate from the instructions provided at each station. They must not attempt to modify or rewrite the scenario either before or during the circuit. If an examiner notices a mistake or is uncertain about any aspect of a station or any part of the documentation they must notify the Supervising Examiner immediately.
 - Candidates must be moved on immediately at the end of each station. If a candidate finishes early they should be kept in the station until the time to move on.
 - If a candidate starts a station incorrectly the examiner should ask them to re-read the instructions (these will be inside as well as outside each station).
 - The examiner should read the questions as stated in the script in the first instance. If the candidate fails to respond, one attempt can be made to re-phrase the question if there is sufficient time remaining. The re-phrasing should be made in a manner that does not lead the candidate.
 - Make sure that examiners are aware that they do not have to be substituted if a candidate is known to them in any capacity.
 - Make sure that examiners read and understand the station-specific mark sheets. These will normally total 20 and be awarded in up to four domains. In addition to the domain marks the examiner will make an overall global judgement. In stations with two examiners, in addition to their own global judgement, the two examiners should agree a single overall rating, and must provide this even where their individual ratings are identical.
 - Reiterate that the domains are different and examiners should try and mark them independently in accordance with the station-specific guidance provided.
 - Mark sheets should remain out of the view of the candidate at all times.
 - Mark sheets will be collected regularly and exam administrators will notify and request correction of any missing or incorrectly filled in sheets.
 - Candidate note paper from the Communication Skills stations should be retained by the examiners
 - Examiners must remain at the centre until all the mark sheets have been collected and checked.
 - Encourage examiners to fill in the station-specific feedback forms at the end of each circuit.
 - Inform examiners that Assessors may be present and provide feedback to them.
 - Inform examiners if a candidate with special learning differences (such as dyslexia) is attempting the circuit accompanied by a reader.

At the end of the examiner briefing, please provide the intercollegiate Assessor with the opportunity to address the examiners as they may wish to highlight good and bad examining practice.

2.4 Use of Tablets

There may be up to a maximum of five stations per circuit that use tablet computers to show a candidate a particular image. Tablets computers allow candidates to zoom in to an image and provide better quality imaging.

Emphasise the following points regarding the use of tablets during the examination:

- Examiners should read the scenario in advance to ensure they are aware of exactly what is being asked of the candidate and what may be required of the Tablet
- Examiners will be provided with two hardcopies of the image. One for their own reference and one as back up for the candidate in case of malfunction of the Tablet
- In the event of a malfunction to the tablet you should provide the candidate with the hard copy image you have been provided with as a contingency.
- Candidates should be reassured they will not be disadvantaged if any malfunction occurs to the Tablet computer.
- If the candidate is disadvantaged time-wise they should be allowed to sit the entire station again at the end of the circuit
- You should notify a member of the Exams Staff of any malfunction or anomaly to the tablet
- If the candidate minimises the screen by mistake then you will need to select the image again by clicking on to the image
- The Tablet should be replaced back on to stand when the candidate has finished ready for the next candidate.

2.5 Candidate briefing

After briefing the examiners the Supervising Examiner will normally be required to brief the candidates. The briefing for candidates instructions have been developed by the exam centres and should be the same at each centre. The briefing document is shown here:

Briefing for candidates (V9) January 2018

- Introduction and Welcome
- Explain the structure of the examination:

The OSCE will normally consist of 18 examined stations. These stations will be divided into four broad content areas as follows:

- Anatomy and surgical pathology (5 stations)
- Clinical and procedural skills (6 stations)

Note: you will be expected to demonstrate generic practical skills

- Communication skills (4 stations)
 - Giving and receiving information
 - History-taking
 - Applied surgical science and critical care (3 stations)
- All of the 18 examined stations are 'manned'. Some of the manned stations will have two examiners and some one. In stations with two examiners, each examiner will normally be examining different aspects of your performance.
 - There may be an observer/examiner assessor present they will not be involved in your examination.
 - You will be examined and marked across four domains which are:
 - Clinical Knowledge and its Application
 - Clinical and Technical Skill
 - Communication
 - Professionalism

Thus, for example, your communication skills will be assessed in stations other than just the Communications Skills stations.

- This examination uses Apple iPad electronic devices for the purpose of viewing images only.
 - In the event of a problem please notify the examiner in your station. If a problem does arise a hardcopy of the image will be made available to you
 - All functions of the tablet have been disabled so that you are only able navigate the image(s) on the screen and use the zoom function
 - Any candidate caught tampering with any other function on the tablet will have their results withheld pending investigation.
- Two of the examination stations will have a 9-minute preparation station. So, with the examined stations, the preparation stations and the rest stations the total number of stations will be about 20.

The stations have been divided into 2 circuits.

On completion of the first circuit you will have an interval (about 15-20 minutes) during which time you will still be under examination conditions. You may not leave the designated areas during this period.

You will be directed to the next circuit in a different part of the College by a member of the examination team.

Candidates who commence with a preparation station will start the examination 9 minutes before the other candidates.

- Explain the timing of each station (9 minutes + 1 minute).

When released from a station you should move swiftly to the next station. If you finish a station early you must stay in the bay until the end of the 9 minutes; if you finish a station early, the examiner will not talk to you during the time that you are waiting for the station timing to end.
- Explain timing in physical examination and history-taking stations.

You will receive a signal after 6 minutes of the 9-minute exam. At this point you should present your findings. If you are ready to present your findings before 6 minutes let the examiner know.

- Explain the dates specified in the Communication Skills scenarios
Within the communication skills scenarios, the date you should assume the scenario is taking place has been specified in bold and underlined and you should assume, for the purpose of the scenario, that this is today's date.
- Some examiners may use an electronic timer in order to monitor the time of each station.
- You will have been given a badge detailing your candidate number. The badge must be worn at chest height and not clipped to waistbands.
- You will be directed to the station at which you will commence the circuit by a member of staff. The circuit moves in a clockwise direction.
- Explain the role of actors, simulated patients and real patients.
- Remind candidates that hand gel must be used at clinical bays.
- No collusion between candidates is to be emphasised.
- Water will be available at various points in the examination hall.
- If you require a comfort break, please inform a member of staff who will escort you to the toilets. A comfort break can only be taken during a rest bay and in the interval at the halfway point.
- All candidates must comply with the dress code described in the Instructions to Candidates and Regulations.
- **(AM candidates only)** Morning candidates must regroup in the designated area after the examination. On completion of the examination circuit you will remain under examination conditions and will be given a time whereby you may leave the building. This will be at the start of the afternoon session.
- **(AM candidates only)** A light lunch shall be provided for candidates prior to release.
- Evaluation forms will be handed out at the end of the examination and we would appreciate if you could take the time to complete the form. We do value your feedback. In addition, the Supervising Examiner shall meet with you after the examination for an informal discussion and you will have an opportunity to give your views.

- Mobile phones and electronic devices are not permitted in the examination, if you have not done so already please handover any devices to the Registration Administrator.
- Please do not have any pieces of paper with you during the examination. In stations with a preparation bay you are allowed to make notes to take into the question bay, but these notes must be left in the question bay. There is no need to have any paper with you for any other part of the OSCE circuit.
- Candidates are reminded that seeking to gain prior knowledge from, or provide knowledge to, other examination candidates, on the content of the examination, is deemed as misconduct and will be dealt with appropriately.
- Date when results will be available
- FIRE EVACUATION - Please inform candidates of the action to take in case the fire alarm sounds (i.e. leave with examiner. Do not interact with other candidates. Exam will restart at beginning of last station if possible.)
- Any questions?
- Good Luck!

Circumstances may mean that the Supervising Examiner is unable to deliver the candidates briefing at the appropriate time. It is acceptable for the briefing to be given by either a suitable senior examiner or a member of the examinations administrative staff using the “Briefing for Candidates” document reproduced above.

3. Final preparations

After briefing candidates the Supervising Examiner should walk through the stations, checking that the examiners and administrative staff are happy with all the arrangements. They should double check that instructions outside the stations correctly reflect the content. If significant mistakes are noted the Supervising Examiner and the Senior Exam Administrator will decide how they should be dealt with. If the mistakes require immediate correction of paperwork this should be discussed as soon as possible with the other centres so that appropriate corrections can be made the same for each. Minor mistakes noted should be logged for future correction. If there are concerns about questions and interpretation of answers then the Supervising Examiner should try and contact the relevant Editorial Lead for the Broad Content Area concerned. Contact details will be available at the exam centres.

4. Practicalities

In practice the OSCE circuit for each day will be set up the evening before and it will usually be possible for the Supervising Examiner to have a walk around the circuit at this time to try and spot any obvious mistakes. If possible the examiner allocations for the following day’s morning and afternoon circuits will have been made and examiners should familiarise themselves with their stations. They should not do this until the examination staff has completed the setting up of the circuit.

Most problems tend to arise in the short period of time before the start of the circuits. These will normally only involve minor corrections and may be ignored (but logged for future correction) if they have no obvious significant effect on the station. If an insurmountable problem arises with a particular scenario that cannot be resolved in a timely fashion the Supervising Examiner has the authority to replace the scenario with one of the same type that has been used previously. If the problem is likely to affect all the centres it should be discussed with the Supervisors and senior examinations staff at the other centres and a suitable substitute agreed. If it is a problem that affects one centre only (e.g. the failure of a major prop) the substitution should be logged and the decision communicated to the other centres as soon as is practical.

In the event of a candidate being disadvantaged in a station by circumstances beyond their control (e.g. failure of a prop, disruption of environment due to temporary partition walls between stations falling over) it is possible, at the discretion of the Supervising Examiner, for the candidate to be given an appropriate amount of extra time at the end of the circuit to compensate.

Local arrangements at individual centres mean that parts of the circuit may be conducted in parts of the centre remote from each other. In this situation the Supervising Examiner may delegate either a spare senior examiner or one who is examining in that part of the centre to be the first point of contact for the examination administrators in the event of any problems developing. The Supervising Examiner will usually try and walk around the whole circuit as soon as is practical after it has started and subsequently at their discretion. It is important that they communicate their whereabouts at all times to the exam administrators.

The Supervising Examiner should, for each circuit, check that the examiners are following their written instructions about conducting the examination. This is particularly important for stations in which the candidate is observed for part of the process.

5. Mark sheets

Administrators will normally pick up mark sheets regularly and these marks will be input in to the computers. Minor omissions by the examiners will be corrected as soon as possible by the administrative staff and the examiner concerned. Sometimes it will be apparent to the staff inputting the results that a particular examiner is not marking correctly (e.g. giving two marks per domain). These concerns will be passed to the Supervising Examiner who must as soon as possible speak (tactfully) with the offending examiner to ensure that they allocate marks correctly and understand what they are doing.

6. MRCS Assessors

The role of the Assessor is to evaluate the performance of the examiner and the examination as a whole, and to offer immediate and supportive feedback with positive suggestions for improvement where necessary. Assessors evaluate all aspects of the examination including scenarios, props, candidate and examiner briefing, utility of examination, documentation, examiner/lay examiner/patient/actor behaviour, pre-exam preparation, questioning and marking.

Assessors are to act as mentors for new examiners and lay examiners to help them build confidence and develop into the role, also to provide support and

constructive feedback to examination centres and examiners. Based on the evidence acquired, Assessors make recommendations for improvement to the examination to IQA.

Assessors should attend the candidate and examiner briefings where possible and observe examiner preparation in the morning. The Colleges should inform candidates and examiners of the presence and work of the Assessors, emphasising that they are not taking part in the evaluation of candidates' performance. Please allow the Assessor(s) the opportunity to address the examiners at the end of the examiner briefing as they may wish to highlight good and bad examiner behaviour.

During examination the Assessors should not interfere in any way in the course of the examination. Using the forms provided, Assessors should evaluate each examiner and discuss strengths and weaknesses with the examiner concerned at the next break point.

Immediate, serious concerns regarding any aspect of the examination or examiner behaviour should be drawn to the attention of the Supervising examiner or lead administrator as soon as it is possible. The Supervising Examiner should observe the examiner in question and be left to make their own judgement as to whether intervention is required.

Assessors should be prepared to provide feedback to individual examiners and to the Supervising Examiner. There will be times in the day including short periods at lunch breaks so not invading rest time too much when individual examiners who have been observed by Assessors can receive feedback. There is also time at the end of the OSCE while the exam marks are being compiled, and before examiners are able to leave, when further feedback can be provided.

7. Observers

Observers will normally have been notified in advance and the Supervising Examiner will be responsible for briefing them and making sure that they do not cause any disruption to the running of the circuits. Official observers and trainee examiners would normally rotate around the stations anticlockwise (i.e. in the opposite direction to the candidates) so they do not watch the same candidate more than once. In no circumstances should there be more than one observer per station.

The presence of assessors or observers during a circuit should be communicated to the candidates during their briefing.

8. Malpractice

In the event of suspected candidate malpractice being notified to the Supervising Examiner by either examiners or centre administrators this should be noted but no action would normally be taken until the end of the circuit. At this point the Supervising Examiner in conjunction with the senior member of the examinations administrative staff decide on whether the suspected malpractice is significant and in need of further investigation. Guidance is available within the ICBSE documentation. They may request a written statement from the accuser and should notify the candidate of the reported concerns and interview the candidate for their explanation. The candidate will be informed that results will be withheld until the matter has been resolved.

In practice, with a long gap between the OSCE and the publication of results, resolution will have been achieved before the results are published.

9. At the end of the circuit

The Supervising Examiner should ensure that all examiners remain at the centre until all the result sheets have been checked as complete. This is particularly important at the end of the day (particularly on Fridays) when examiners will be in a hurry to get away quickly.

The Supervising Examiner or deputy (as mentioned above) will debrief the candidates who have completed the circuit. They should make sure that the candidates have no immediate concerns about any aspects of the conduct of the examination and if necessary can talk to the candidate separately from the other candidates. All candidates should be encouraged to fill in the feedback forms and the person doing the de-brief should point out that the form contains space on the back for free text comments.

If a candidate highlights a specific concern about the conduct of the examination by a particular examiner the Supervising Examiner may at their discretion decide to raise it with the examiner concerned immediately or it may be more appropriate to ask the Assessor, if available, to check the examiner's performance.

Candidates may not feel totally comfortable airing concerns with the Supervising Examiner. Therefore, please allow the Assessor the opportunity to talk to the candidate's on their own once you have completed your de-brief.

The Supervising Examiner should log any untoward events that occurred during the circuit (e.g. timing irregularities, prop malfunctions or temporary partitions falling down) and list the examination numbers of affected candidates.

It is important to document candidate complaints fully on the day. This may require written statements from staff and examiners concerned to ensure the information is contemporaneous and accurate.

10. Notes

It is not necessary to hold a formal examiners' meeting at the end of the OSCE examination day but Supervisors may find it helpful to schedule one to ensure that examiners don't disappear too soon and may use it for instant feedback and to discuss station allocations for the following day. If the examination staff have completed laying out the circuit, examiners should be encouraged to familiarise themselves with the content of their station. This is particularly important for the afternoon allocations as time is short during the lunch break. Whenever possible examiners allocated to a station in the afternoon circuit who are free in the morning should sit in that station for at least four candidates so that they will be familiar with it.