

Correspondence

Twelve Angry 'Men'

DEAR SIRS

We, the undersigned, were the only 12 candidates to sit the MRCPsych. Membership written examination in Trinity College, Dublin, on 10 May 1989.

The multiple choice paper contained 60 stems of 5 questions each, thereby totalling 300 questions.

The forensic stems read 'The Matrimonial Act in the United Kingdom', 'A Restriction Order in the United Kingdom', 'A Secure Unit in the United Kingdom', and included questions such as 'Is funded by the Home Office'? One other stem read 'The following are broadly true for England and Wales'.

Speaking at the Annual Dinner of the Irish Division of the Royal College of Psychiatrists in Dun Laoghaire, Dublin, last July the President of the College, Dr Birley, emphasised the importance of co-operation between the North and South of Ireland, the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland through the Royal College and its Divisions.

We feel the rest of the exam was fair - difficult but fair. However, we feel that firstly there are many important forensic concepts that are relevant to both sovereign nations that could have been asked and were not. Secondly we feel that contrary to the College President's expressed sentiments these MCQs discriminated against Irish candidates, leaving us to be marked out of 280. Scottish candidates will be marked out of 295 and English and Welsh candidates out of 300.

It would be helpful for future Irish candidates to know whether or not they need to know all aspects of British forensic law, and equally helpful for future English and Welsh candidates to know whether or not aspects of Irish or Scottish law are required for the exam.

We hope this clarification will be forthcoming through the *Psychiatric Bulletin*.

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DEAR SIRS

Thankyou for asking me to comment on the above letter concerning the Multiple Choice Question Paper in the recent Membership Examination.

The Examinations Sub-Committee has always been very concerned not to include questions that may discriminate unfairly against any particular group of candidates. The problems posed by differences in matters of Law between the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom have always been foremost in the Sub-Committee's concern, and advice has been sought from colleagues in Ireland whenever we have been in doubt concerning specific questions. We try to confine ourselves to issues of a general nature about which we believe it is reasonable to expect all candidates to be informed.

You will understand the dilemma in which the Examinations Sub-Committee finds itself in trying to meet these criteria. Matters relevant to forensic and legal psychiatry are of immense importance, and it would be very worrying to exclude them without good reason.

The Examinations Sub-Committee will certainly seek further debate concerning this problem, in order to consolidate understanding about what topics may be included in the College Examinations, such that candidates from the Republic of Ireland do not feel subject to unfair discrimination.

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Chief Examiner