

## **An assessment of a final qualifying examination**

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It has been known for many years that examinations which come under the generic title of subjective tests are unreliable estimates of a candidate's ability. Nevertheless, such tests continue to be used, usually without any ongoing assessment of their performance.

By analysing data from three of the four subjects of the final qualifying examination of the Middlesex Hospital Medical School, which has much in common with the equivalent tests in the remainder of London University, we have been able to discuss problems of test reliability, inter-test correlation, and the categorization of candidates in relation to the marking schemes used, and the implementation of in-course testing.

We suggest that: (1) Medical school output in the United Kingdom could be increased by drawing more widely on the available pool of applicants, without any reduction in the standards of the qualifying examinations. (2) The intercalation of a science degree course between preclinical studies and clinical studies (current in London University) confers no marked advantage in performance at the qualifying examinations at the end of the undergraduate clinical course; although such courses may have their own educational merit. (3) The necessity to resit the terminal preclinical examinations confers a continuing disadvantage during the clinical period and at the qualifying examination. Such students deserve special educational treatment.

We consider that examinations of all types should be subjected to ongoing study on a routine basis. We recognize that this involves considerable time and effort. We feel that, in any case, such studies should precede, or at least coexist with, the introduction of new methods of teaching and assessment.