

Correspondence

The exit examination should not function as a selection criterion

As an early member of the Association of Psychiatrists in Training, which was founded to support the changes involved in the new College structure, I would like to comment on the paper by Hughes and colleagues¹ as well as the issues raised by Shields.²

Measuring trainees' competence before considering them competent to practise in an unsupervised and leadership role is eminently reasonable. However, it should be understood that such an examination should essentially be a measure of the training programme rather than the individual competence of the trainee. This is not to say that the competence of the trainee is not important, but that the exit examination should not function as a selection criterion. It is simply not fair to allow a trainee who does not have the potential competence to successfully work as a consultant – and this would seem to particularly involve clinical and communication skills – to devote fruitless years to training. For various reasons, candidates considered suitable initially may at a later stage demonstrate problems that preclude a successful transition to a consultant career. Nevertheless, the main selection point should be early enough to allow those regarded as less suitable

to pursue alternative areas of medicine for which they may be better fitted.

Thus, while the final examinations should be rigorous, they should focus on more specific areas of knowledge and the expected pass rate of properly trained candidates should be very high. I would also note that the reliability quoted by Burn & Bowie³ simply represents a correlation between test items and apart from making the assumption that the results represent interval, rather than ordinal data, says nothing about validity.

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- 1 Hughes NS, Haselgrove A, Tovey MS, Khokhar WA, Husain M, Osman-Hicks VC. Exit examination: a survey of UK psychiatrists' views. *BJPsych Bull* 2015; **39**: 254–9.
- 2 Shields GS. Raising the standard: it's time to review the MRCPsych examinations. *BJPsych Bull* 2015; **39**: 262
- 3 Burn W, Bowie P. Raising the standard: it's time to review the MRCPsych examinations. The Royal College of Psychiatrists' response. *BJPsych Bull* 2015; **39**: 262–3.

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Correction

Stigma of mental illness and help-seeking intention in university students. *Psychiatrist* 2013; **37**: 253–260. The second author's name was spelt incorrectly and should be Aengus ó Conghaile. The online version of this article has been corrected post-publication, in accordance with this correction.

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