# GCC Test of Competence

## External Examiner's Annual Report

**Period:** January 2020 – December 2020

### 1.Results

| Date of TOC | Results |
|---|---|
| **January**<br><br>Pass rate first attempt :57%<br><br><br><br>Pass rate after submitting further evidence 100% | 2 Face to face assessment panels were held<br>Number of candidates: 7<br><br><br>Pass:4<br><br>Fail: 0<br>Further Evidence Required:3<br><br>Passed after submitting further evidence:3 |
| **May**<br>100% pass first attempt | One candidate assessment took place online<br>Pass 1 |
| **July**<br><br>Pass rate first attempt : 0 %<br><br>Pass rate after submitting further evidence : 43 % | 3 online assessment panels were held<br>Number of candidates -7 candidates<br><br>Pass: 0<br><br>Fail : 4<br>Further evidence required :3<br><br>Passed after submitting further evidence :3 |
| **September**<br><br>Pass rate first attempt: 33%<br><br>Pass rate after submitting further evidence : 66% | 1 online assessment panel was held-<br>Number of candidates:3<br><br>Pass:1<br>Fail:1<br>Further evidence required: 1<br><br>Passed after submitting further evidence :1 |
| **October**<br>100% pass first attempt | 1 candidate assessment took place online<br>Pass : 1 |

| November | 2 Online assessment panels were held |
|---|---|
| Pass rate after first attempt :17% | Number of candidates:6 |
| | Pass:1 |
| | Fail:2 |
| Pass rate after submitting further evidence 66 % | Further Evidence Required:3 |
| | Passed after submitting further evidence:3 |

**Please provide comment on the results in this period.**

25 candidates were assessed during the period January 2020 -Dec 2020. This is a slight increase from last year (21).

When comparing calendar year outputs, there were 21 candidates in each of the last 3 years. Whilst there has been a slight increase this year, the numbers applying appear to have stabilized.

Of these assessments, 7 were carried out face to face in January.  Due to Covid 19 restrictions, the remaining 18 were undertaken online using the Microsoft Teams platform.

Both the assessors and the GCC team should be commended for their adaptability, in ensuring that the process could continue. The online process, whilst considered as a potential future option, had not taken place before the pandemic.

Of the 25 candidates, 8 (32%) passed on the first occasion, 7 failed (28%) with a further 10 (40%) required to submit further evidence.  Of the latter group all bar one has subsequently passed, with a resulting total of 17 applicants eligible to apply for registration.

If the online assessments are considered in isolation, of these 18, only 4 (22%) passed on the first occasion, and 7 (39%) failed. As these numbers are small, it is not possible to significantly make comparisons. However, taking the number from the last 3 years (2017-2019 -total of 93 candidates)  the average first time pass rate was 36% (compared to 22% online ), and the number of fails 28% ( compared to 39% online). Due to the low numbers involved,  this is not yet statistically significant. It is however something that may need monitoring over time.

In terms of the candidates' country of qualification, 10 candidates originally qualified in South Africa, 7 in the USA, 6 in Australia and 2 in Spain.

The age range spanned from 23- 58 . The number of those who had qualified within the previous 2 years, was 13. One candidate had been qualified more than 20 years.

As there were fewer first time passes, and more fails than previous years, these were reviewed by first considering the quantitative data. Secondly, a review of the chairs' reports was undertaken, to identify any potential themes.

The 7 fails included 5 from the USA, 1 from Spain and 1 from Australia. Out of the 7 USA applicants, there was only 1 first time pass. Due to the limited numbers, it is difficult to deduce any significant variances, however it appears that the USA candidates were less successful on first application than others.

The review of the chairs' reports showed that concerns around patient safety was the main rationale for the failure of individual candidates, and was stated in all 7 fails. Within this, there were multiple reasons given around individual cases, often including a combination of factors for each candidate. The themes mentioned most were:-

- Patient assessment/patient management (6)
- Imaging – lack of understanding of use and contraindications (5)
- Risk assessment (3)
- Record keeping (3)
- UK legislation (3)
- Biopsychosocial model - Lack of understanding (3)
- Lack of evidence produced in EPQ and interview (3)

Those who had to submit further evidence, were asked to do so based on some repeated themes as above, the main ones being: -

- Record keeping (6)
- Patient safety and understanding of risk factors (5)
- Imaging- lack of understanding of use and contraindications (4)
- Patient outcomes – lack of understanding (4)
- Biopsychosocial model - Lack of understanding (3)

As stated earlier all bar one of this latter group have since submitted their evidence, and subsequently passed.

## 2. Analysis of Paperwork

**Panel Checklist and Panel Member Recording Sheets**

The assessor checklist appears to be an interview preparation tool, which also includes a recording of questions asked (planned and additional) and the outcome of the assessment. The TOC A form (panel member recording sheets) , also repeats most of this in a slightly different format. I have reviewed a couple of completed forms from each category. In each case these were partially completed, with cross references made between the two documents in two of those reviewed.

*It may be helpful to undertake a review of both documents (TOC Form A and the assessor checklist), and potentially identify how these can be amalgamated to avoid repetition and confusion amongst assessors, and to potentially reduce their workload in recording.*

**Chairs Reports/ Test of Competence Assessment Outcome**

Due to the decrease in the first- time pass rate, all chair reports were reviewed in detail, as highlighted earlier. All reports were comprehensive outlining the candidate's specific strengths and areas where further development needs were identified. Where a candidate was expected to provide further evidence, the rationale for further work was clear, and the expectations of producing further evidence were clear. Where a participant had failed, a detailed account of the rationale for this decision was given.

A sample of additional evidence from candidates was reviewed. It appears that a significant amount of effort is put into the process by candidates and the chairs reviewing the evidence. The production of additional evidence via this process, and the assessment

| process is quite comprehensive.<br><br>Once again, the chairs should be commended on the quality of their record keeping, and the time and energy committed to the process. |
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| **Result Letters from CER** |
| The Chief Executive and Registrar letter is now a standard outcomes letter, advising the candidate as to whether they have passed, are required to provide further evidence or have failed, and next steps. The attached chair's report gives the detail around the outcome. |

## 3. Assessment Panel Operation

| **TOC Pre- Meetings** |
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| I attended the on-line pre meetings for the October assessment. All panel members came prepared and ready to identify questions around the EPQ and the patient records. These were reviewed at the pre-meeting. Questions were developed accordingly, an appropriate ethical scenario was agreed, and a selection of questions were drawn from the question bank. The removal of the syllabus mapping, and development of the new question bank, appears to have improved the process.<br><br>The pre meeting process for 1 assessment took 2.5 hours. As stated in the last report, when the panel has a number of participants to interview, the preparation in itself is quite onerous, and panel members should be commended in terms of the due diligence shown. |
| **TOC Interviews** |
| As stated above, I observed 1 online assessment process in October. The chair had not undertaken an online interview before, however managed the process well. All panel members appeared conscientious and vigilant in reviewing the evidence and interviewing the participant They worked well as a team, and recovered well when one of the assessors temporarily lost their online connection. |

**4. Assessor Performance Appraisals**

**Confirm whether appraisals have been completed for all TOC Assessors and highlight any overall issues that have arisen.**

There were 15 assessors during 2020, all of these took part in the appraisal process. One assessor had not undertaken an assessment for nearly two years, due to a number of other commitments. This assessor had previously committed a number of years to the process, however, due to their current lack of capacity to undertake the role, had decided to resign.

Out of the additional 4 female assessors recruited last year, the one appointed as chair has subsequently been appointed to council, and therefore has resigned. Moving forward, there are now 14 assessors available ,10 male, 4 female.

*As stated in the last report, wherever possible, the GCC should aim to assure where possible, that each panel has a female assessor in the trio.* This occurred in all (bar one) assessments in 2020.

There are currently no female chairs. There are also a group of experienced chairs and assessors, who will be coming to the end of their tenure in the next couple of years. In recognition of both these issues, the GCC is currently recruiting both assessors and chairs.

*There is still a need to address the gender imbalance particularly around the appointment of female chairs.*

*To promote sustainability, current chairs should be encouraged to act in a coaching role for new chairs.*

**Online assessments – issues raised.**

Assessors were asked their view regarding online assessments. The majority believed the process has worked well to date, with some having issues with online connection (both candidates and assessors) during the process.
The positives were identified as being:
- No travel (candidate and assessors)
- More efficient - costs less for both parties
- No issues with candidate jet lag
- Candidates may have been more relaxed in their own environment.

The potential detrimental effects of continuing with online assessments were discussed as being:
- 'Less opportunity to have an open dialogue with candidates'
- 'Non verbal cues missing – both from the candidate and other assessors'
- 'Less flexibility in questioning process'
- 'Overall worked well, however we seem to lose an element of something virtually'
- 'Anxiety provoking when there are connection issues'.

The majority also discussed the impact on the panel itself. Whilst most felt it was nice not to have to travel, team building, developmental and networking opportunities were lost. This could have an impact in the future as new assessors/ chairs are appointed.

Moving forward -some assessors suggested that whilst the assessment itself could take place online, it may be beneficial to enable the panel to meet face to face as before, once possible.

It is not the remit of this report to make recommendations regarding the balance of face to face, and online working in the future. *The main suggestion is that as most assessors*

> *have a view on this, that they should be actively consulted and involved in making the decision about future steps.*
>
> A number of other issues were raised during appraisal, the majority of which had been raised at the annual review meeting, and are discussed further in the report.

## 5. Candidate and Assessor Feedback

**Assessor Feedback Forms**

I have reviewed all 30 assessor feedback forms received.

All appear to feel that the panels worked well together, and that the process worked well, with either no major issues or minor areas that could be improved. The latter appear to be related to the interviews now being held online. Written comments relating to the online process were reviewed.  Overall, although the majority thought the process worked well, the following issues were raised in written feedback:

1. Capacity to probe further during the interview. 11 assessors raised this by considering the lack of non-verbal communication in the 'room', and not knowing when or how to interrupt, in order to probe further. Some appear to have tried to overcome this by pre agreeing a communication process between assessors, e.g. use of the 'hand up' function, or even a mode of communication outside of the meeting e.g. text/ WhatsApp.
2. 7 assessors raised issues with internet connections being poor.
3. 4 had concerns around the candidate environment. Either whether the candidate may not be alone, and/or whether they may be recording. (NB since then candidates are now asked to complete a disclaimer note).
4. 4 believed that more time is needed for online interviews.
5. 4 stated that they would prefer the panel to meet face to face in the pre meeting and to be in the same room for the assessment itself.

All relevant peer comments were reviewed, and no major issues noted. Appropriate panel comments were shared during the individual appraisal meetings, which was welcomed.

**Candidate Feedback Forms**

All candidate feedback forms received have been reviewed. Of the 12 received, 7 were from the January face to face assessments, and 5 were from the online assessments.

Most feedback was positive about the process.

Areas which were given a lower score by candidates (which were in the minority)  or where they stated areas for improvement, related to either difficulties / confusion around some of the preparation required, or within the interview itself.

A couple of individuals commented in more detail around the completion of the online forms, with one stating *"The online application was quite a disturbing experience"* and that *"In general, the web-based application was less than polished and pleasant".*

**Considering the comments given, it may be useful over the next year to undertake a test run of the online application process to quality assure the process.**

In terms of the interview, the lower scores related to feeling less comfortable and supported by the panel, with the lowest score relating to "I was told how the interview would be structured". The latter issue was discussed at the assessor review meeting, with a

recognition that the chair should always set out the structure of the process at the beginning of each assessment.

## 6.Complaints and Appeals

There were no complaints or appeals during this period.

## 7.Review and Evaluation of the Process

Please provide comment on the annual review meeting.

The annual review meeting was held online in November with all 15 assessors attending.

Developments made to the TOC process during 2020 were discussed and noted. These being: -

- The biggest change in 2020, due to Covid-19 restrictions, was the change to remote online TOC assessments.
- The removal of the syllabus mapping document. The EPQ was then reviewed and amended, to ensure all Education Standards are covered.
- Further guidance has been provided to candidates on the GCC website around the submission of evidence requirements.
- The question bank has been reviewed.
- The majority of assessment panels in 2020, had a female assessor as part of the panel.
- Following last year's discussion around English Proficiency, those candidates not graduating from an English speaking country, will be asked for evidence of proficiency in line with the GCC's English Language guidance.

A number of issues were discussed by the assessors, either at this meeting and/ or at the one to one appraisals these included:

- The need for a protocol for remote interviews – this has since been produced.
- Peer feedback forms – last year it was suggested that this be shared across the panel, however since then questions have been raised around whether feedback would be as 'honest'. It was agreed therefore that this not be shared.
- Form B – The chair's outcome form. Other panelists do not usually see this. It was agreed that chairs should share this with other panel members, and with each other to enable consistency in report writing.
- Recruitment of new chairs and assessors was discussed, and the transition period moving forward.
- Remote assessments – these are to continue until April, when the process will be reviewed.
- It is not yet known how leaving the EU will impact on the number of assessments. Whilst the need may increase, this is not expected to be major.
- A need for future unconscious bias training for new assessors, and those who missed out last time was noted. Access to an online module is being arranged.

At appraisal, a small number of assessors stated that they felt less able to contribute in the online meeting.

**8. Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations**

The number of applicants (25) is slightly more than the last calendar year. 7 were face-to-face panels in January, followed by 18 assessments undertaken online from May onwards. Of the 18 online assessments, there was a proportionally lower first-time pass rate and higher fail rate than previous years. Whilst an initial review has taken place, it is too early to say whether this is significant, therefore this will need to be monitored over the coming years.

Overall, the remote interviews were deemed by most as a success. The GCC, chairs and assessors should be commended on their adaptability and transition to this previously untried approach. In particular, members of the team at the GCC, should be recognised for the effort required in establishing this process in a difficult year.

Feedback from assessors (at the TOC review meeting and appraisals) was mixed around remote interviews, however the majority felt that they worked reasonably well, with some reservations.

There are currently no female chairs. There are also a group of experienced chairs and assessors, who will be coming to the end of their tenure in the next couple of years. In recognition of both these issues, the GCC is currently recruiting both assessors and chairs.

Assessor appraisal, engagement in the TOC review and the panel observation continued to demonstrate that the assessors are conscientious, diligent and committed to the process.

Overall, I am satisfied that the process during 2020 has been undertaken satisfactorily, standards were maintained, and public safety assured.

**Summary of suggestions and recommendations**

As part of a continuous improvement process the following are offered:-

- ***The assessors should be actively consulted and involved in making any future decision regarding remote interviews***
- The GCC has previously tried to recruit female assessors and managed in 2020 to assure that a female assessor was part of each panel, apart from the last one in November. There is however still a gender imbalance. ***The GCC should therefore proactively seek to recruit female assessors and chairs , and continue to ensure that wherever possible there is a female assessor on each panel***.
- ***To promote sustainability, current chairs should be 'stepping back' from the chair role, and act in a coaching role for new chairs.***
- ***The TOC panel checklist and Form A (panel recording sheet), should be reviewed***- considering which is essential, and whether these could be amalgamated.
- As a couple of candidates had found the web-based application process difficult to navigate, **it would be useful for someone to undertake a 'test run' to quality assure the process.**

**Signed :-**  (Carol Ward)

**Date :- 11<sup>th</sup> February 2021**

**GCC response to the Test of Competence External Examiner's Report**

Below is the response and actions to the suggestions and recommendations made by the External Examiner in her 2020 annual report.

| Recommendation | Response | Planned Action (if applicable) |
|---|---|---|
| The assessors should be actively consulted and involved in making any future decision regarding remote interviews | The GCC moved to remote interviewing in May 2020 due to the pandemic, in the interests of the safety of both staff, partners and candidates. It is envisaged this will continue for the foreseeable future until face-to-face meeting are once again possible. At that point, the GCC will consider the options for TOC interviews in consultation with partners, the wishes of candidates and taking into consideration the cost of doing so. | Action will be taken, including a consultation, at an appropriate time. |
| The GCC should proactively seek to recruit female assessors and chairs , and continue to ensure that wherever possible there is a female assessor on each panel. | We have been successful in increasing the number of female assessors from 3 to 7, however, 3 female assessors have left the pool during the past two years. We have recruited more female than male chiropractors in the last two recruitment rounds. There are currently 11 male assessors and 7 female assessors. In addition, in 2021 we appointed our first female chairs.

For some time TOC panels have run with at least one female assessor. The office is always mindful to do so where practicable. | It is likely that an annual recruitment round for TOC assessors and chairs will be held and we will aim to eventually have equal numbers of both female and male assessors. |
| To promote sustainability, current chairs should be 'stepping back' from the chair role, and act in a coaching role for new chairs. | We will investigate the feasibility and need for coaching of new chairs, taking into consideration the need for the TOC to cover all costs. | One existing Chair is leading the training of the new assessors/chairs in April 2021. |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| The TOC panel checklist and Form A (panel recording sheet) should be reviewed- considering which is essential, and whether these could be amalgamated. | Over the past two years much of the TOC paperwork has been reviewed, including the Form B chair's report and Evidence of Practice Questionnaire. It is our intention to review the remaining documents to ensure currency and fitness for purpose. | A review of the TOC panel checklist and Form A will be undertaken during 2021. |
| As a couple of candidates had found the web-based application process difficult to navigate, it would be useful for someone to undertake a 'test run' to quality assure the process. | The online portal gives the GCC the opportunity to move some processes, including submission of TOC applications, online. This will eventually make the process more secure and allow candidates to self-serve, freeing up time for the office.<br><br>The online TOC process is new and we are aware of glitches, which are being fed back to our developers to investigate. | We keep all aspects of the portal under review and pass issues back to our developers when they are reported. |