

## **PASSING MARK FOR THE ORAL EXAMINATION TO REMAIN AT 70%**

In May 2007 a discussion paper was circulated by the Board of Certification (BOC) inviting comment on the pass rate of the Oral Examination. The BOC was seeking a response to the following questions:

- 1) Do you feel the oral exam mark should be decreased? Why or why not?
- 2) If yes, what do you want the pass mark to be?
- 3) Do you support candidates achieving excellence on the exam (i.e. > 80%) being recognized and if yes, how?

The paper was circulated to Branch Executives CIPHI, Exam Coordinators, employer groups, and recognized schools whose graduates are eligible for certification. These contacts were directed to circulate the paper to interested parties.

The response received to this paper was tremendous and far exceeded any numbers of responses the BOC has received on other issues in the past. The respondents were very clear on what they felt the exam mark should be, and more importantly, provided detailed rationale to back up their opinion. These details were considered by the BOC and due consideration was given to those respondents which were most impacted by candidates entering the field.

In addition, the majority of respondents went beyond the questions asked, and made many thoughtful comments on the exam process in general. These included support for the process as well as criticism of the BOC and its decision-making processes. Very much appreciated were all the suggestions as to how all components of the process could be improved as well as flagging issues of concern for future discussion and resolution.

Out of 123 responses, 85 were in favour of retaining the 70 % pass rate. The number in respondents in each group are found in the table below followed by a summary of the comments received. Those highlighted in yellow were expressed by the majority of respondents in that category and therefore were considered to carry the most weight.

A few of the most common threads were:

- the need to review the practicum the practicum agencies and the school curriculums
- determining what success factors the candidates are missing
- CIPHI should not be lowering their standards but aim to obtain the most competent and qualified inspectors.

In addition, regardless of what pass grade respondents were in favour of, there was consensus that the CPHI (C) vacancy rate should not be a reason to lower the mark and that further review is necessary to determine why candidates are failing and focus efforts to take corrective action.

The BOC met with the National Executive CIPHI in Kelowna in June 2007 and discussed the results of the discussion paper. Both bodies agreed that:

- a) The membership had clearly indicated their preference to retain the 70% mark and that this should be upheld, and
- b) The BOC needs to continue to review the examination process overtime and take measures to ensure the exam is fair and consistently applied across Canada.

There was very little support for recognizing higher-ranking exam candidates and this will not be pursued by the BOC.

The BOC wishes to thank all of those who took the time to respond to this issue and encourages your on-going participation in assisting CIPHI promote and create a workforce of competent and professional individuals.

**SUMMARY OF RESPONSES TO PASSING MARK DISCUSSION PAPER**  
**June 2007**

<b>DIRECTORS/ MANAGERS</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No Preference</b>
<b>BC</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1 (60%)</b>	
<b>AB</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>ON</b>					
<b>SK</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>NB</b>					
<b>NS/PEI</b>					
<b>NFLD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>MB</b>					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>EXAM COORDINATORS/ EXAMINERS*</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No preference</b>
<b>BC</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>7</b>			
<b>AB</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>ON</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>		
<b>SK</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>		
<b>NB</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>		
<b>NS/PEI</b>	<b>2</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>
<b>NFLD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>MB</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>5</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>CIPHI BRANCH EXECUTIVES</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No preference</b>
<b>BC</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>AB</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>ON</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>SK</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>NB</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>		
<b>NS/PEI</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>NFLD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>MB</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			

<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>		
<b>SCHOOL PROGRAM HEADS</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No preference</b>
<b>Ryerson</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>60%</b>	
<b>BCIT</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>		
<b>CBU</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b>		
<b>Concordia</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	

<b>EHO'S</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No preference</b>
<b>BC</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>2</b>
<b>AB</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b> <b>(60%)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>ON</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b> <b>(60%)</b>	
<b>SK</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>		
<b>NB</b>					
<b>NS/PEI</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>3</b>			
<b>NFLD</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>		
<b>MB</b>					
<b>NWT</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>SENIOR EHO/ SPECIALISTS</b>	<b>Total #</b>	<b>70%</b>	<b>65%</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>No preference</b>
<b>BC</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>			<b>1</b>
<b>AB</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>			
<b>ON</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>		<b>1</b> <b>(80%)</b>	
<b>SK</b>					
<b>NB</b>					
<b>NS/PEI</b>					
<b>NFLD</b>					
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>OVERALL TOTAL RESPONSES</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>

\* NOT ALL RESPONDENTS MAY HAVE IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES AS EXAMINERS

**Directors and Managers**

60%	
65%	<p>Should look at quality / structure / length of practicums as the true issue for high failure rate</p> <p>Consultant report recommended 65%</p> <p>Would support 65% but better if 60% - workout changes to exam and after 3 to 4 years raise the mark</p> <p>Is a good measure of competency</p> <p>65% would result in the last two exams matching a passing rate of 28% which had been achieved on some previous exams</p> <p>Distressing to discover that the mark recommended in the consultant report was overridden by the exam coordinators. Not clear who these EC's represent or what their expertise in deciding pass rates s.</p> <p>Supports 65% but wouldn't have changed it from 60%</p> <p>"a good examiner should be able to adjust marks at end of exam to reflect candidates ability to be a successful PHI"</p> <p>Supports 65% for now but by 2010 back to 70% - this gives time to adjust to all changes in exam process</p> <p>65% until new system is fully implemented and gelled</p> <p>Input from employers should be given considerable weight in deciding the outcome of this discussion paper.</p>
70%	<p>70% to maintain professional integrity whether PHI's are in short supply or not</p> <p>Changes in marking and standardization of exam should have been implemented separately</p> <p>Students should get a sample question to help them prepare</p> <p>Supports 70% but feels increase shouldn't have been implemented immediately Changes to exam and mark should have been implemented separately</p>
No Preference	Major flaw of BOC is to fail to connect with stakeholders – health units and schools
Other	Supports 75% - and CanMeds structure for oral exam process Shouldn't be fully certified until after one year in the field

	<p>Suggest allowing candidates who failed reports to be able to resubmit at any time and have them marked rather than just at exam time.</p> <p>BOC must engage employers</p> <p>Any increase should involve extensive consultation</p> <p>Too much mystery surrounds the BOC process</p> <p>Process needs to be much more transparent</p>
General Comments	

### EHO Specialists & Examiners

60%	<p>We have observed several competent practicum candidates during the past few years and a significant portion of our candidates have been unsuccessful</p> <p>University courses are 60%</p>
65%	<p><b>Consultant report supports lowering the mark</b></p> <p><b>Exam questions were fair</b>, however, maybe too many questions – consider reducing the number of questions</p> <p><b>Practicum time is not enough</b></p> <p><b>Decrease the mark as we need more inspectors across the country</b></p> <p>Supports 65% if practicum stays at 12 weeks / 70% if practicum time increases</p> <p>There is no need to make us ‘appear’ to be more stringent or higher up or better than another profession by having an inflated passing grade</p> <p>Should have a post practicum evaluation that can be used if an individual did not receive a good grade on the oral – this is subjective and can create biases based on the evaluator</p>
70%	<p><b>If the mark is lowered we would be fostering a profession of mediocrity. We want the most competent PHI’s who have made a commitment to the profession</b></p> <p><b>If a candidate cannot get at least 70% on an exam, that they should have</b></p>

prepared for at length and that was well thought out by the examiners, they are unlikely to be well prepared to work in the field, Ours is a profession in which individuals must be able to think and reason through a wide variety of situations, a process which in my experience the oral exam is designed to mimic. It is the 'reasoning process', which allows us to be effective.

The exam process is new, consistent and fair

Decreasing the mark will devalue and erode the quality of EHO's

The BOC spent time and effort getting to a decision – it was not just dreamed up

If a workforce of more competent professionals is the objective more efforts should be directed towards continuing education and competency initiatives (experience is a great teacher)

There seems to be a failure in the system somewhere – is it the educational institutions, practicum, exam performance, or individuals competence level  
Would suggest the oral exam format has serious limitations (i.e., especially if prompting is not allowed)

Students tend to lack intangible skills like conversation, conflict-resolution, time management and general professionalism

The flip side of not filling vacant positions is filling them with under-qualified personnel

Reducing the passing grade is another quick fix that will not encourage review of other factors affecting proficiency

More explicit practicum expectations / improved QA and QC in practicum provision (provincial/national auditor/coordinators) / CPHI resource person for practicum coordinators and students

Not out of line with other institutions

Profession should strive for excellence

Would rather see vacancies than low quality inspectors

Candidates seem to have the knowledge but can't apply it to given situations

The allegiance should be to the profession not the perspective employer

Maintain standard – high status is reflected

Felt exam questions were reasonable on April exam

**Failure rate will decline over time – stay where we are**

Found exam marking criteria too generous

Combine oral and report mark for 70% pass rate

Higher failure rate may be due to changes in exam content/structure

Successful candidates are able to apply theory on a topic to situations, unsuccessful are not

Issues related to candidate nervousness and time management

Thought questions were excellent - candidates didn't get it – field training is an issue

Candidates are very timid

Majority of directors would work short staffed than hand hold staff that aren't competent

Students are unable to answer basic BOC questions – routine everyday questions. How can they expect to do the work.

70% pushes the candidate to really answer the question

Supports written exam

Candidates don't listen to questions, once they hear the topic they start talking about everything they know about the topic rather than answering the question

English as a second language is an issue

Talked to many students, even those that failed, and all support the 70%

We should most likely concentrate on recruiting more people to EH programs in general and prepare more (and higher quality) candidates for examination rather than lowering examination standards

The failure reflects this lack of true understanding of our profession from the start. Schools increase intake and are aggressively promoting the program just to fund their HE program

The inspectors who are not competent or confident are a drain on morale and our credibility in the field

	<p>There are too many out there who exit the classroom with good grades but lack the knowledge to put that knowledge into real life situations and that in part is a big problem. I believe it comes down to the practicum portion not giving the student enough real lifetime experience together the skills to put into play what they have learned.</p> <p>Increasing the number of MARGINAL health inspectors would merely continue lowering our professional standards, which have already been lowered over the past recent years. Other professional organizations would never consider lowering their entrance exam marks, simply to increase their membership</p> <p>The oral panel needs to be changes to include other professionals as the day when we entered the field (i.e., MOH, Engineer and/or EHO). Perhaps have the orals taped so that a third party may review the interview.</p> <p>Need to remove candidate stress – provide them 20 minutes prior to the oral to review the questions and write their notes to respond</p> <p>If I failed the exam when I took it (many years ago) it would have been all about me sitting in the chair and how I prepared for that day, which for me was 4 years of preparation. The failure wouldn't have been the board's fault, my school or any agency I worked for.</p> <p>Public health is not for everyone, therefore, not everyone should be a PHI</p> <p>The program is not intended for someone to just slide by and get the designation. We are a professional group known to set the standards. CIPHI is a respected designation we want to keep it that way.</p> <p>Quality not Quantity</p>
No Preference	<p>No opinion on pass mark but shouldn't reflect market demand</p> <p>60% was okay then – but does this now mean that the 'old slugs' who pass at 60% aren't competent professionals</p> <p>Recommend another review of the exam process by an outside body</p> <p>Problem lies in how the oral exam is marked – are the examiners too tough on students (based on suggestions / rumour)</p> <p>Exams should be marked 'subjectively' – the actual passing grade is not important</p>
Other	<p>Should be raised to 80% There should be greater expectations with the requirements for sitting being lowered (i.e., 2 reports instead of 3, an easier exam, no written / multiple choice)</p> <p>Should be an average mark of oral and report mark with no single mark</p>

	<p>lower than 75%</p> <p>Should sit at 2 locations only – East and West – to make it a true national exam. All candidates across the country would get the same questions.</p> <p>Not sure what the oral exam tells us.</p> <p>Why not take the exams and have experienced PHI's test their knowledge to see if the exams are really that bad or are the students just not getting the right education/training</p>
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## Branches

60%	
65%	<p>Fits with the consultants recommendation</p> <p>Would bring the passing mark to a median level</p> <p>Membership should accept the failure rate and understand it as part of 'growing pains'</p> <p>Branches need to take responsibility of ensuring proper field training to prepare for the exam process</p>
70%	<p>Twelve weeks practicum training is not long enough nor is it properly controlled for consistency – this is a critical factor</p> <p>This is an acceptable pass rate</p> <p>The high demand for certified PHI's shouldn't be the factor to lowering the pass mark</p> <p>Most candidates are not well prepared on how to used their education in a real-life scenario</p> <p>All components of the certification process should be reviewed. It is too premature to make changes (i.e., practicum, schooling, academic achievement)</p> <p>The basis upon which the initial decision to raise the mark was a solid one. The old 60% is too low a standard to strive for in this day-and-age of advanced education and evolving EPH field</p>

	<p>The passing grade should remain as it was arrived at with much effort and consultation</p> <p>Some members feel that the mark should be increased not decreased</p> <p>It is not the role of the BOC or NEC to ensure that the exam is a stress free process</p> <p>Supports maintaining a high level of entry to practice</p> <p>The same employer groups who rarely respond to BOC/CIPHI surveys etc criticize the BOC for lack of stakeholder consultation.</p> <p>Continuing to collect and analyze relevant data (i.e., number of practica completed, schooling location, overall academic performance) relating to the exam process will provide a more accurate understanding.</p> <p>60% is too low – advanced education is evolving in the field</p> <p>The exam is not onerous. Much work has been done to address various issues like ‘prompting’.</p> <p>We should continue to ‘weather the storm’ as there are only two data sets being evaluated – inadequate basis to make any conclusions</p> <p>Employers must also look inwards to training they are providing their own students as a possible source of failure</p> <p>The certification process is multi-faceted and the only part is not controlled by the BOC – the practicum</p>
<p>No Preference</p>	
<p>Other</p>	

**Schools**

<p>60%</p>	<p><b>Should not amend mark due to vacancies</b></p> <p>Need to determine whether candidates are receiving the proper academic skills</p> <p>Why has the failure rate increased? – the solution is not as simple as amending the passing grade</p> <p>Review all parts of the certification system and then review the passing</p>
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	<p>mark</p> <p>Adjusting the passing grade without a full-scale analysis may lead people to think the profession is unsure of itself.</p>
65%	<p>Recommended using the pass rate the consultant recommended as this may bring the failure rate more in line with past rates</p> <p>Are students less competent if they get 65-69% pass? It serves no practical purpose to exclude this cohort.</p> <p>Judging any student within 5% - using any sort of criteria let alone professional competency is next to impossible</p> <p>This would result in pass rates that are more consistent with previous years Exams.</p>
70%	<p>My experience is that those who I expect to pass do and those who I don't do not</p> <p>Exam results should be a challenge that reflects the professionalism that CIPHI is trying to achieve .This gives confidence to the public that these candidates are professional.</p> <p>If the field develops to include a 'technical' level than the PHI needs to be knowledgeable and able to take on duties of supervision</p> <p>Lowering the examination grade rewards the weaker candidate and punishes those who are focused and ready to be professionals. A moral issue that could have lasting implications.</p> <p>Should have a professional review of the entire process – expert review, analysis and recommendations – please consider springing some dollars on a thorough evaluation in the national context</p> <p>BOC should consider centralizing exams rather than holding them in every province.</p>
No Preference	
Other	

**EHO's across Canada**

60%	<p>60% oral but the oral should be replace with a written at 70%</p> <p>Experienced PHI's would not be able to answer</p> <p>Review and edit questions</p>
65%	Supports questions and format
70%	<p>To lower the pass grade in order to accommodate the demands of the employer would be detrimental in the long term. We argue we are professionals, we have a certification board, we have set high standards for our profession and we aspire to be recognized as such.</p> <p>Increase time and improve field training *****</p> <p>If the mark were lowered we would be fostering a profession of mediocrity. We want the most competent PHI's who have made a commitment to the profession</p> <p>BOC to evaluate practicum agencies</p> <p>Too soon to change back : Wait and see – may be a 'blip' – anomaly</p> <p>Sense of entitlement with many university students about their educational experience</p> <p>Improvement should be focused on improving exam not lowering the mark</p> <p>Ours is a profession in which individuals must be able to think and reason through a wide variety of situations,</p> <p>The BOC did spend considerable time, effort and consultation setting a pass grade- they don't just dream this stuff up.</p> <p>70% but doesn't understand why it wasn't 65% based on the consultants report</p> <p>It is hard sometime with workloads, etc., to train and give a new successful grad good job experience, so them being a strong candidate will benefit them and HR</p>

	<p>If we allow less qualified people in the field that is only going to create problems for other inspectors, supervisors, and managers. We have to be careful because we DO NOT want technicians hired and we have to be clear about that.</p> <p>The competence I have observed from 2 of the students who were unsuccessful at their oral exam this last go seems to fly in the face of their results – there is a failing as these two were very competent. So, what did the BOC miss in its assessment, how was this missed and how could CIPHI better gauge this in the future/ lowering the score does not seem to be the answer here</p> <p>Lowering is counter-productive and sets a dangerous precedence. We should be looking into why students are failing and focus our efforts on correcting the problems. SOME people may not be suitable for this profession.</p> <p>The oral exam is really the only way to test how a student communicates and assesses risk in a situation. These two things are fundamental skills required to work in this field.</p> <p>More focus on exam questions and extra weighting on how well the student answers the question and communicates the risk.</p> <p>Allowing poorly or unqualified candidates means that we will be saddled with these individuals for numerous years to come</p>
General Comments	<p>Has the 'fast-tracking' program caused an issue</p> <p>What are the schools teaching (Ryerson)</p> <p>BOC too secretive – not transparent enough</p> <p>Students are very negative towards the BOC</p> <p>BOC viewed as being out-of-touch with capabilities of candidates</p> <p>Students need breakdown of marks to help them improve</p> <p>Would support having the BOC review the last two exam results and change failure to pass if grade is lowered</p> <p>Why are students failing? – questions / training / unsuitable candidates</p> <p>BOC did not show due diligence in increasing to 70%</p> <p>Schools can only train so many people and allowing a lower standard of inspectors will not be constructive in the long run</p>

	<p>Re-examinations should be offered more frequently along with more feedback on where they did poorly</p> <p>System can be improved with respect to feedback</p> <p>I would prefer to have a higher pass mark (even 80% or more) then if we need to we can adjust the questions of the exam to make them easier, or explain the scenario's better.</p> <p>English as a second language is an issue – lowering the grade does not address this</p> <p>Have 4 exams per year instead of 2 – costly and labour intensive but best solution to staff shortages which does not compromise high standards</p>
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