

The Timing of the Issuing Qualifying Examination Results

Introduction

In December 2014, the Patent Examination Board (PEB) issued a survey to students via the Informals asking a few short questions on possible changes to the dates for releasing Qualifying Examination results. 737 people received the survey and 318 replied - an impressive response rate of 43%. Clearly this is an issue close to trainees' hearts.

The survey

Two key questions were asked.

Would you like the issuing of the qualifying examination results brought forward?		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	93.7%	298
No	6.3%	20

Mindful of the timing of the EQE examinations, would you want to see the PEB results issued		
	Response Percent	Response Count
Not less than one week before the EQE examinations	7.4%	22
Not less than a fortnight before the EQE examinations	14.1%	42
Not less than a month before the EQE examinations	55.9%	166
Other (please specify below)	22.6%	67

The descriptive comments that were invited to supplement these questions gave a helpful understanding of the reasoning for the answers.

The options

The PEB has looked carefully at the possibility of issuing examination results a month early for the 2015 examinations.

It concluded that, if the examinations continue to take place in October it is unlikely that the results would be ready more than two weeks before the published dates. A number of things contribute to this assessment:

1. Allowing time to move of scripts from centres to examiners and, where needed, between examiners;
2. Implementing the quality assurance of marking processes which help to ensure consistency of marking by having:
 - a minimum number of scripts that must be marked by each examiner
 - standardisation of marking
 - marking sampling during marking

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- a review of marking and
- an awarding process.

In addition the PEB think it is important that examiners should be practising in their specialist field and therefore there is a limit to the time they have available to mark.

The PEB then considered moving the examination week earlier to see if that could help facilitate examination results being available a month before the EQEs. It was felt that the timing of the EQEs meant that it would be inappropriate for students to have a shortened preparation time between EQEs and the PEB Qualifying Examinations, and that the examination dates of March (EQEs) and October (PEB Qualifying Examinations) represented a do-able, if demanding, cycle of examination preparation and examination taking for a trainee.

Conclusion

The PEB GB and the examiners therefore decided that whilst the PEB could issue examination results for Qualifying Examinations early, it would not be able to safely issue them a month before the EQEs. Whilst the majority wanted results early, a majority also wanted them at least a month before the EQEs and this cannot be safely delivered for the reasons explained above. Rob Taylor Chair of the PEB Governance Board concludes:

‘The balancing of speed and quality is a problematic when it comes to delivering a reliable service that also meets customer wishes. The GB is unanimous in concluding that, in these circumstances and for something as important as the Patent Attorney Qualifying Examinations, quality should not be compromised for speed, as we want all candidates to be as sure as possible that they have received the right mark and that all due process has been followed. Appreciating the views of trainees, we will keep the issue under review and if future circumstances allow the PEB to release results earlier without compromising quality, we will reconsider our decision.’