

Report on the 2014 Patent Examination Board Student Survey

As part of its quality assurance remit, the PEB Governance Board was keen to learn more about the backgrounds of students sitting the 2014 examinations and hear their views about the changes made during the transition from the JEB to the PEB examination, and more generally on the quality of the examinations.

Accordingly, the PEB surveyed all the students who had taken one or more of the PEB examinations in September/October 2014. What follows is a summary of some of the main issues arising, with the report appended in full.

Of the 389 people surveyed, there were 104 individual responses. This was a gratifying response rate of 27 per cent. In terms of background, the single largest subject represented was Physics (24%), closely followed by Chemistry (15%), Mechanical Engineering (14%), and then Biochemistry/Biomedical (17%) and Electrical Engineering (17%).

All except one respondent were aware of the support and guidance available on the PEB website, and the majority found it 'helpful' or 'somewhat helpful'.

When asked about the extent to which the examinations gave the 'opportunity to demonstrate your knowledge and skills', the majority said it did so either 'satisfactorily' or 'well'. With the exception of the Law paper, there were a minority in each case who thought the examination did not give them adequate opportunity, and some thought Law, P1 and all the finals examinations thought the examination paper did so 'very well'.

53% of all those who responded also made comments, which fell into three broad categories:

- Venue
- Administration
- The examination question paper.

Venue

There were 14 comments about venues. In addition to the positive comments which included the provision of larger desks, some noted issues with too high noise levels at the venue, including invigilators holding conversations whilst the examination was in progress. Some did not like the change of venue during the week in London. These comments have been noted, and we are seeking quieter venues for the 2015 examinations, or quieter rooms in the same venues. We have secured a single venue for the London examinations. Invigilators were trained and given strict written instructions. We regret these were not always observed. Any invigilators who did not meet our requirements will not be used again.

Administration

There were 10 comments about this, including both negative and positive comments about the administration of the examinations. As we enter a second year of administering the examinations,

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both candidates and the PEB administration will be more familiar with recently introduced processes and we anticipate improving the experience for all candidates. We will introduce some of the suggested improvements in 2015. For example if you previously provided passed a JEB examination we will not require you to evidence it again, and we will add the examination times on the both examination confirmation letters.

Comments about the examination question paper

There were twenty nine comments about the examination question papers highlighting a range of issues; the most significant being about the excessive length of some papers and/or the time available to answer the questions, lack of clarity within the syllabus, and requests for worked answers to be published.

In order to address some of these concerns the PEB is introducing the following for 2015.

Length of the paper

Each of the 2015 draft papers will be worked by a tester who will sit the paper as if they were a candidate. They will submit their worked answers and comments to the Principal Examiner who sets the paper. The tester will then be sent the draft mark scheme with which to compare their answers. All comments and observations about the examination question paper and mark scheme from testers will be considered at the meetings at which the draft papers are reviewed and finalised. One of the questions the testers will be asked about is the length of time it took them to complete the examination question paper.

Lack of clarity within the syllabus

The PEB has recently published reformatted syllabuses which both standardise the look and feel of the syllabuses, and provide clarity on what will be examined.

Worked answers

The PEB will not at this stage be publishing worked answers, but in addition to publishing good pass scripts for all examinations, with the mark awarded shown, all the mark schemes used by the examiners during the marking process will be published on the PEB website on results day in March 2015.

The PEB is very grateful to those who completed the survey, and will repeat the exercise at a future date. In the meantime, you are welcome to send your comments and observations to peb@patentexaminationboard.org.uk.