

TABLE Vb
*Comparison of subsequent performance of candidates passing
 or failing MCQ—next attempt at Preliminary Test*

Performance in Preliminary Test	Performance at next attempt at Preliminary Test		
	pass	fail	total
(1) failed including MCQ	48	104	152
(2) failed but passed MCQ (i.e. would have passed on MCQ alone)	13	4	17

$\chi^2 = 5.54$ $P < 0.025$ (Yates correction)

There is, then, a significant difference between the candidates shown in the two groups. Thus, although if the essay paper were abandoned as part of the Preliminary Test some candidates who now pass would fail and vice versa, it would be fair to say from these early results that those who would be failed under the MCQ alone appear to be the less able candidates, while the reverse is true of those who would pass.

We tested the notion of abandoning the essay in the Preliminary Test on two senior academic psychiatrists. In each case the reaction was the same, an acceptance that, based on the evidence presented, the possibility was worth exploring, but there was a strong feeling—perhaps what the Americans call a 'gut reaction'—that the essay should and probably

would be retained. There are a number of reasons why this reaction might be general. There is the suspicion of MCQ type examinations mentioned earlier, and also of computers. Stories of 'computer error' in the press always fail to mention that it is the 'human error' in the programming that is responsible for the mistake. The chances of this happening in the marking of an MCQ examination are negligible. Or perhaps it is that examinees get a great deal of satisfaction out of covering sheets of paper with their essays rather than marking little boxes. In the former they can range freely if not always accurately and legibly, in the latter they are forced into what many see as the unsatisfactory confines of prepared alternative answers.

Our suggestion is, then, that the evidence currently available indicates that the possibility of abandoning the essay paper in the Preliminary Test examination should be further explored. It would not be a precedent, as the Royal College of Physicians has for several years been content to use MCQ type of examination alone in Part I of its Membership Examination.

References

- HASSALL, CHRISTINE & TRETHOWAN, W. H. Analysis of the results of three examinations for membership of the Royal College of Psychiatrists. *News and Notes*, April 1974.
 ——— A further analysis of the membership examination. *News and Notes*, July 1976.

Association of Psychiatrists in Training

The Association of Psychiatrists in Training is holding an 'Open Forum' on Tuesday, 4 July, from 6-8 p.m. at the Institute of Psychiatry, London, with the title 'Does the Mentally Abnormal Offender get the Treatment he Deserves?' The guest speakers will be Mr. Louis Blom-Cooper, Q.C., Mr. Tony Smythe (MIND), Dr Patrick McGrath (Broadmoor Hospital) and Dr Paul Bowden (St. George's Hospital, London). All those interested are invited to attend.