

Report on the 2016 accreditation exam

On 25 June 2016, 85 candidates took the IPEd accreditation exam—the first exam to be presented onscreen rather than on paper. We are pleased to announce that 40 candidates passed the exam and have become IPEd accredited editors, entitled to use the AE designation. IPEd congratulates the successful editors. This brings the number of accredited editors in Australia to 364.

The exam was held at Cliftons training and conference centres in Brisbane, Sydney, Canberra, Melbourne, Adelaide and Perth, and at the Quill Consultancy in Hobart, a partner of Cliftons. In addition, two candidates sat the exam in overseas venues under special invigilation arrangements.

The onscreen format was developed using Microsoft Word, the platform most editors work with today. An early prototype was demonstrated at the IPEd National Editors Conference in May 2015. After further development, the Accreditation Board (AB) conducted trials of the prototype in Cliftons venues in Canberra and Brisbane in December 2015, to verify that the exam would work seamlessly in the onscreen environment. In addition, we trialled the exam itself in Sydney, very successfully, on both PCs and Apple Mac computers. We were confident that the exam would offer no difficulties to candidates, and the feedback on the usability of the onscreen format was overwhelmingly favourable. The Board thanks those editors who volunteered to give their time to help us with testing.

The pass rate in 2016 was 47 per cent. This is lower than it has generally been in the past, when it has ranged from 51 to 85 per cent. While this result may seem disappointing at first glance, we believe it shows that the exam continues to serve its purpose well: granting the AE designation to those who have demonstrated competency across all parts of the exam paper and in the skills specified in *Australian standards for editing practice*.

In considering this result, we looked at a number of factors that might have influenced the result. We considered the level of difficulty of the paper: was it more difficult than previous papers? The exam was produced by the same team that created the 2014 exam, which had a 63 per cent pass rate, and it was thought that this did not affect the results. We wondered whether the change to an onscreen format may have affected the results. But candidates generally thought the ability to work onscreen made it easier to complete the paper this year, and the onscreen layout allowed a much simpler presentation of most questions and answers.

Marking was also completed by an experienced team, who had all marked previous exam papers, many in the previous exam in 2014. In addition, marking is always reviewed across the whole team of markers to ensure consistency, and marking was considered to be at the same level as in the past.

Further, there was still a high proportion of candidates who did exceptionally well, clearly demonstrating their knowledge and skills as editors.

The marking team observed that many candidates appeared to lack both solid training in editing and broad editorial experience; many did not manage to demonstrate quite basic editorial skills, particularly in parts 2 and 3 of the paper. Indeed, almost 20 per cent of candidates had less than the recommended minimum three years full time experience. Some candidates showed skills in particular specialities, but lacked broader editorial skills. Many candidates ignored the brief not to rewrite in Part 2, and both introduced errors and missed errors that needed correction. The markers also felt that many candidates made poor choices of questions in Part 3, attempting specialist questions that were beyond their experience.

One of the limitations of our work with Cliftons is that the company works entirely with PCs, and not Macintosh computers. The AB wanted to ensure equal access for all candidates, and so organised with Cliftons to hire Macs for those candidates who specified a Mac on their registration form. Unfortunately, on the day, some candidates in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth (but not in Sydney, Canberra or Adelaide) experienced problems with the Macs. These candidates were helped by invigilators when they experienced problems, and given additional time at the end of the exam to make up for any loss of time or work. Subsequent research has provided some evidence that the problems that we encountered are related to the settings used in Track Changes. The AB is working with Cliftons to ensure this does not happen next time.

Our recommendations for future candidates in the period before the next exam are:

- If you have not done so, complete a full, formal editing course—many courses are available now, including high-quality correspondence courses.
- Once you have completed formal editing training, use society workshops to extend and consolidate your skills. Familiarise yourself with *Australian standards for editing practice*, which have been set to help you in your professional work, as well as being the basis for the exam.
- Try to get to a Preparing for the Accreditation Exam workshop in the lead up to the exam: these are usually offered by state branches of IPEd.
- Complete the sample exams on the IPEd website before attempting the exam. The AB is working to improve the existing sample exams and to develop a third one.

For the exam:

- Ensure you have at least the minimum recommended experience to attempt the exam
- Make sure you follow the brief provided in each question.
- Choose questions that suit your skill set and specialities.

For branches of IPEd, we recommend continuing to offer workshops to members on developing sound style sheets, working with authors, working to the brief (the difference

between copyediting and rewriting, for instance), structural editing, grammar and basic language skills, as well as both basic editorial skills and more specialised skills to prepare editors for the current environment or particular specialities.

In conclusion, we believe the change to the onscreen format has been a success, and we will continue to develop and refine this format for future exams. Looking ahead, it is expected that the next exam will be held as early as possible in 2018 (perhaps April or May), but an announcement on the exact date will be made in late 2017.