

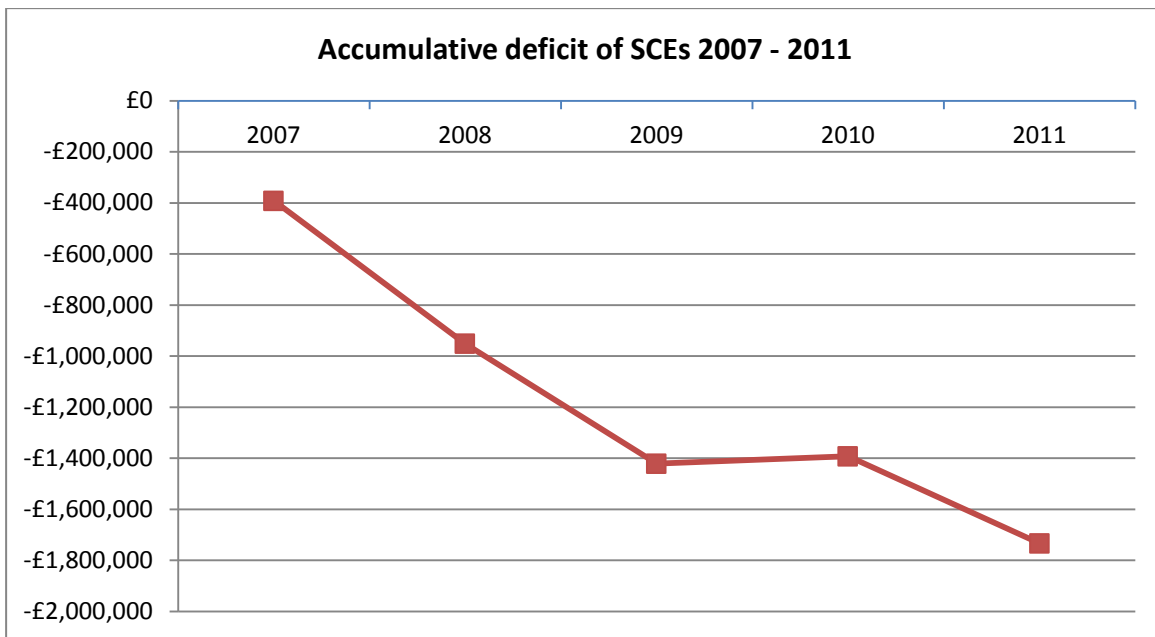
Specialty Certificate Examinations

Frequently Asked Questions

Why does it cost at least £861 to take an SCE?

Candidates want to know that when they take and pass an examination that the exam is reliable and fair and tests their knowledge. In order to achieve that, we invest heavily in their development and in the quality processes around setting the papers. The SCEs are very “high stakes” as they have direct and important consequences on the careers of those who take the examinations.

The graph shows that since the start up of the SCEs in 2007, over £1.7 million has been invested.



Development of the 12 SCEs started from scratch in 2007, 12 months before the first candidate sat the first paper in June 2008. Over the past 6 years, almost 15,000 questions have been written, edited and banked for use in SCE question papers, 39 papers have been set, and the performance of 7,800 questions has been analysed. This work is supported by an administrative team set up to ensure that the examinations run smoothly and the candidates can depend on a good service when they apply. The SCEs have consistently demonstrated their reliability from their launch in 2008 to the present.

Don't some SCEs make a surplus?

It is not expected that any SCE will have recouped its investment before 2016 and some with small candidate numbers will never recoup their investment costs.

Because the level of trainees in the UK expected to take the SCEs is limited by the number of trainees in any particular specialty the recoupment is dependent upon the growth in uptake among international trainees.

Are the larger specialties subsidising the smaller specialties?

No. The finances of each SCE are kept separate. All the examinations are developed in conjunction with the appropriate specialist society, and the Federation of Royal Colleges of Physicians has set up a central administration service to support the work. However each SCE manages the costs it incurs and receives income only from its own candidates.

Some of the specialist societies are financial partners with the Federation and share in the loss and surplus of their own SCE. For those specialist societies that are not involved in a financial partnership, the Federation funds 100% of the exam and all the income goes towards recouping the Federation investment.

Would it cost less if they were pencil-and-paper examinations?

Examinations for small numbers of candidates are always relatively expensive to deliver. It is true that delivery by computer (CBT) is more expensive on a per head basis than delivery of the exam on paper. However, if the examinations were to be delivered on paper, then it would not be possible to offer the exams in multiple locations.

The advantage of CBT is that the examination can be sat at a computer-based test centre very easily and there are test centres in all cities and large towns across a wide spread of different countries. If the SCEs were delivered on paper, in most cases only a single venue would be set up to cater for numbers; for most candidates this would result in additional costs for travel and accommodation, and sometimes having to take an additional day off work.

Are the SCEs more expensive than other specialty examinations?

The SCE is comparable in price to other specialty examinations when differences in the length of the exam and the numbers of questions are taken into consideration.

The SCE is made up of 200 questions in 2 x 3-hour papers. When compared to specialty examinations offering the same format, the fee of the SCE is equivalent, if not lower.

The number of questions in the exam is directly related to the reliability of the examination.

Are the fees for the SCEs likely to go up or down?

The fees of the SCE are reviewed every year in the light of inflation, their costs and the current economic climate. Fees are normally agreed by the three colleges of the Federation and the specialist societies in November and any changes implemented for the following year. They are published on the MRCP(UK) website well in advance of taking effect.