

Royal College of Pathologists

Examination regulations - 2016

FORENSIC PATHOLOGY

These regulations must be read in conjunction with the *Regulations and Guidelines – College examinations for Membership and Diplomas*.

Candidates wishing to pursue a career in forensic pathology should do so with a sound background in histopathology, such that they have a satisfactory knowledge of disease mechanisms and systemic pathology, and a more than adequate familiarity with autopsy techniques and microscopy.

Two examination routes are possible:

- Part 1 FRCPath in histopathology followed by Part 2 in forensic pathology
- Parts 1 and 2 FRCPath in histopathology followed by the Diploma in forensic pathology.

ENTRY & TRAINING REQUIREMENTS

There is no specific timing for entry to the examination. Candidates should obtain guidance from their educational supervisor as to when to sit the examination. Planning should take into account planned CCT date (where applicable) but candidates should apply only when they are ready. Some general guidance is given below, but apart from the sequence in which the examinations can be sat is not intended to be prescriptive.

Whichever examination route is chosen, at the end of any training programme candidates should have acquired a broad knowledge of medicolegal systems and legal aspects of clinical practice, familiarity in performing post-mortem examinations in a wide range of natural and non-natural deaths, including specialist techniques and related investigations, and an awareness of the responsibilities involved in dealing with suspicious deaths and of giving evidence in courts.

Part 1

Trainees will normally require two years' experience of specialty training in Histopathology in order to achieve the standard required to pass the Part 1 Examination.

Part 2

Candidates with the Part 1 examination in general histopathology wishing to take the Part 2 examination in forensic pathology must have been training for at least 4½ years, of which 3½ must have been in the specialist registrar (SpR) grade.

Of the 4½ years, at least two years must have been spent in full-time forensic pathology, in a department recognised by the College for such training.

Candidates must also have had at least six months' experience in each of neuropathology and paediatric pathology. (The six months in each need not necessarily require a full-time attachment for the whole of the specified period and proof of continuing informal exposure over a longer timescale may be considered an acceptable alternative after an initial three months).

During their two years in forensic pathology, it is desirable that candidates become exposed to the principles of toxicology and forensic science procedures, acquire a basic knowledge of forensic anthropology and have experience of attendance at scenes of suspicious deaths.

STRUCTURE AND FORMAT OF THE EXAMINATION

Part 1

Candidates will take the general histopathology Part 1 MCQ/EMQ (see the Histopathology regulations for further details).

Part 2

The Part 2 examination will comprise a submission of a casebook and a practical/oral examination.

Casebook

Candidates should also read the section on 'Guidance for candidates undertaking written options for the Part 2 examination' in the ***Regulations and Guidelines – College examinations for Membership and Diplomas***.

Submission of a casebook of 10 medico-legal cases, covering a wide spectrum of forensic work is required. The intention of the casebook is to demonstrate that candidates have had an adequate exposure to different types of cases during their training, are capable of drawing appropriate conclusions from the findings and are able to formulate good quality reports with well reasoned discussions.

The discussion should be able to demonstrate an appropriate knowledge of issues, such as might be challenged in cross-examination in court or similar scenario. The cases chosen must be only those in which the candidate has had substantial involvement and must include not only a detailed record of the autopsy findings with conclusions of a medico-legal report but also a separate discussion of the particular issues raised by the case. This discussion must include an appropriate review of the particular issues raised by the case and a survey of the relevant literature. Photographs and other illustrative material should be included, with appropriate regard for confidentiality.

The overall length of the casebook should be no more than 20000 words excluding references and should not normally exceed this length. The word count must be stated in the casebook.

The casebook must be submitted to the College **at least four months before the entry closing date of the Part 2 examination for which the candidate wishes to enter.**

Candidates will not be allowed to sit the practical and oral examination until the casebook has been awarded a pass mark by the examiners

The casebook will be marked by two assessors and given one of three grades:

A = pass

B = some modification or additional work required

C= unacceptable.

If candidates are awarded a C grade, they will have to re-submit the casebook with changes as required and will not be able to progress to the practical and oral examination until at least the next examination session (if submitted in time).

Practical and oral examination

Practical and oral examination is a three-day examination designed to assess the competence of candidates to practice forensic pathology independently and includes the following sections:

Autopsy	May include special dissection techniques.
Microscopy	Histological examination of 20 sections, to include material not only of overt medicolegal interest but from any aspect of general histopathology relevant to autopsy practice.
Case reports	Preparation of reports based on documents and other material, which may include toxicological analyses.
Gross specimens	'Wet tissues', bones, X-rays, etc.
Oral	With emphasis on aspects of forensic practice not covered elsewhere, which might include ethical, legal and management issues.
Written	short answer three hour exam

Candidates will be assessed on all sections of the examination, although particular importance will be placed on those aspects of greatest relevance to forensic practice, not least the performance of the autopsy.

Diploma in Forensic Pathology

This qualification is intended for those who have pursued the full FRCPATH in histopathology and who then wish to specialise in forensic pathology. The requirements are similar to those for the Part 2 in forensic pathology.

The examination may be taken after a period of training, which has included a minimum of two years' substantial involvement in Coronial/Fiscal autopsy practice, of which at least 18 months must have been in forensic pathology departments approved by the College. Candidates must also have had at least six months' experience in each of neuropathology and paediatric pathology, although the qualifications in regard to this time period, outlined in the Part 2 FRCPATH above, would equally apply here.

The examination has three components.

- **Written examination:** one three-hour paper to cover any aspect of forensic/autopsy pathology and which might also include such topics as service provision, quality assurance and relevant legal issues.
- **Casebook:** a casebook of 10 medicolegal cases, the purpose and format of which is exactly the same as for the Part 2 FRCPATH. Candidates submitting a satisfactory casebook but failing to achieve the required standard in other components of the examination will not be required to submit a new casebook at any subsequent attempt at the examination.
- **Practical examination:** the same format as for Part 2 FRCPATH, to comprise autopsy, microscopy, case reports, gross specimens and oral.

TIMING OF THE EXAMINATIONS

The Part 1, Part 2 and Diploma examinations will be offered twice a year in Spring and Autumn.

Examinations Department
The Royal College of Pathologists
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