



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

## New Style Part 2 Examination in Clinical Biochemistry

### Information for potential candidates

In Spring 2011, the Panel of Examiners in Clinical Biochemistry will introduce a new format for the FRCPath examinations in Clinical Biochemistry. From that time, the Part 1 examination will comprise two written papers only, in the same format as at present. The practical papers will be reformatted and will become elements of a new modular Part 2 examination. Part 2 will also contain an Oral examination and candidates will have to submit a Dissertation, PhD/MD or portfolio of papers as at present, although this submission may in future be made at any time and not necessarily before taking the other Part 2 components.

The style of questions contained in the Part 2 examinations will be very similar (and in most instances identical) to those currently set in the old Part 1 Practical and Part 2 Oral examinations, although there will be some redistribution between papers.

The new Part 2 examination will be a modular examination:

Module 1	Practical skills module
Module 2	Clinical, scientific and management skills module
Module 3	Written component module

Further information about the individual components of the examination is given below:

#### Module 1 - Practical skills module

Paper 1 is a three hour objective structured practical examination (OSPE) where candidates move between a series of 19 stations at nine minute intervals. At 18 stations they are provided with laboratory material such as:

- analytical outputs (e.g. electrophoretic strips, chromatography scans)
- clinical scenarios (e.g. sample requirements, investigation protocol questions)
- quality control and/or external quality assurance data
- analytical, physiological or pharmacological calculations

One station will test communication skills using a simulated encounter with a clinician. A final period of nine minutes is allowed for completion of answers at the end of the examination.

*Note: This paper is an extended version of the current OSPE paper, which will also contain calculations of the type currently set in Paper 2. It will contain one additional station at which candidates will be asked to role-play a communication scenario with another clinician such as a General Practitioner.*

Paper 2 is a three hour bench practical which tests the candidate's ability to address an analytical issue. Candidates may be provided with raw experimental data and be required to perform simple laboratory bench practical work. This multi-part paper tests the ability of candidates to plan an experiment, execute simple bench practical work, record results, analyse raw data and draw appropriate conclusions. The paper is marked on the basis of the written work produced.

*Note: This paper is the same format as the current practical Paper 3 (wet practical).*

## **Module 2 - Clinical, scientific and management skills module**

Paper 3 is a three hour written paper in which candidates are required to interpret clinical cases and critically appraise journal articles. In the clinical cases section candidates are given six questions comprising a brief history and laboratory results and are asked to describe and interpret them. In the journal article evaluation section candidates are required to choose two out of three provided journal articles, on which they are asked to answer questions that test their critical reading and appraisal skills and their understanding of experimental methods and statistical techniques.

*Note: This paper comprises the clinical data interpretation questions currently contained in Paper 2 and a new section on critical appraisal of journal articles.*

The Oral examination comprises two 20-minute examinations. The first oral comprises general clinical biochemistry issues (including patient and laboratory safety). The second oral covers clinical patient management (medical candidates), laboratory problem solving (scientist candidates) and laboratory management (all candidates). Candidates are given 20-minutes on their own to prepare their answers to the scenarios used in the second oral.

*Note: The new Oral examination will be a shorter version of the existing Part 2 oral format. The standard will be appropriate to Year 3 to 4 trainees rather than candidates approaching completion of training as at present.*

## **Module 3 - Written component module**

The attention of candidates is drawn to the advice given in the section on 'Guidance for candidates undertaking written options for the Part 2 examination' (see the Examinations section of the College website, [www.rcpath.org/exams](http://www.rcpath.org/exams)). It is essential that candidates gain approval of a dissertation proposal before starting work.

*Note: The requirements for module 3 (written component module) are unchanged except that candidates may enter the other modules before successful completion of this module.*

A pass at Part 2 will only be awarded after passing all three modules.

## **Standards and marking methods**

### **Module 1**

All answers are double marked.

Paper 1 (OSPE) is criterion-marked on the basis of model answers. Each question carries equal weight. A standard setting procedure is used to determine the notional passmark and enable appropriate scaling. Candidates are also required to pass a minimum number of questions in order to pass this paper. This paper carries 60% of the available marks for Module 1.

Paper 2 is marked using the College closed marking scheme. This paper carries 40% of the available marks for Module 1.

A total mark of 47.5% or less on Paper 1 or Paper 2 is a definite Module fail. A total mark of between 47.6–49.9% on one paper can be compensated by a corresponding surplus of marks in the other paper unless the candidate failed to pass the minimum number of questions stipulated for Paper 1.

### **Module 2**

All answers are double marked.

Paper 3 is criterion-marked on the basis of model answers. The clinical cases and journal article sections of this paper carry equal weight. A standard setting procedure is used to enable appropriate scaling. This paper carries 60% of the available marks for Module 2.

The Oral examination is marked on the basis of model answers using standard mark descriptors and the College closed marking scheme. A total mark of 47.5% or less in Oral 1 or Oral 2 is a definite fail. A total mark of between 47.6–49.9% in one Oral can be compensated by a corresponding surplus of marks in the other Oral. This paper carries 40% of the available marks for Module 2.

A total mark of 47.5% or less on Paper 3 or the Oral examination is a definite Module fail. A total mark of between 47.6–49.9% in one paper can be compensated by a corresponding surplus of marks in the other paper.

### **Module 3**

Dissertations are reviewed by two examiners and are graded as follows:

- A = pass
- B = modification or additional work required
- C = unacceptable.

Dissertations must be of a standard equivalent to that required for peer-reviewed publication in order to achieve a Grade A.

MD or PhD theses and portfolios of published works are assessed in the first instance by the Chair of the Panel of Examiners, who will refer them to other examiners for further assessment if necessary.

### **Organisation of the examination**

The two modules will be held on consecutive days at the same venue.

In module 2, candidates will be assigned at random to two groups, who will take either Paper 3 in the morning and the Oral in the afternoon or *vice versa*. The groups will be quarantined at lunchtime to prevent communication between candidates regarding the content of either exam until the end of the day.

### **Examination entry and pass/fail rules**

Candidates may apply to sit the Part 2 examination at any time after they have passed the Part 1 examination. The time of entry should be as advised by their Educational Supervisor, who must support the application. It is anticipated that most candidates will attempt the Part 2 examination in the fourth year of Specialist Training.

Candidates will make a single application for the entire Part 2 examination. They may elect to sit the whole examination in one session or to sit an individual module. A module pass can be carried forward and this module will not need to be taken again when the other modules are attempted. There will be a lower re-sit fee for individual modules.

Candidates who have unsuccessfully attempted a module four times will not be permitted to re-enter any part of the examination. Any case for re-admission based on extenuating circumstances must be referred to College Council.

Candidates must pass all modules in order to pass Part 2 of the Examination.

## **Fees**

The total fee for parts 1 and 2 of the examination will not change and will remain the same as for other pathology specialties. At 2010 rates, the fee for the entire Part 2 examination would be £1030, with a resit fee of £540 for Module 1 and £490 for Module 2.

## **Transition arrangements**

Candidates who have passed the old Part 1 examinations (written and practical) by the end of the Autumn 2010 examinations session will proceed to take the old style Part 2 Oral Examination as at present. In order to pass the entire examination and receive award of FRCPath they will still have to submit a satisfactory written component (dissertation, MD/PhD or portfolio of published works) but from Spring 2011 candidates may take the Oral Examination at any session after entry for Part 2 and will not have to wait until the written component is completed. There will be no time limit for completion of the style old Part 2 examination but candidates will continue to be subject to the maximum number of re-sit attempts stipulated in the Regulations.

Candidates who have passed the Part 1 written examination but not the old Part 1 practical examination by the end of the Autumn 2010 examinations session will transfer to the new style examination structure. They may enter for the new Part 2 examination at any time from the Spring 2011 session onwards. The time of entry should be as advised by their Educational Supervisor, who must support the application.

Candidates who have not yet passed the Part 1 written examination by the end of the Autumn 2010 examinations session will transfer to the new style examination structure but may only enter for the new Part 2 examination after they have passed the Part 1 examination, which will comprise two written papers only from Spring 2011.

Further information about the new examination, including examples of questions, will be posted on the Examinations section of the College website, [www.rcpath.org/exams](http://www.rcpath.org/exams), and presented to trainees at national training meetings during the course of 2010.

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