



The Royal College of Pathologists

Pathology: the science behind the cure

## Forensic pathology examination regulations

**2026**

These regulations must be read in conjunction with the 'Regulations and guidelines – College examinations for membership and diplomas'.



Examinations team

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## **Entry and training requirements**

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.

2 examination routes are possible:

- FRCPath Part 1 in histopathology followed by Part 2 in forensic pathology
- FRCPath Part 1 and 2 in histopathology followed by diploma in forensic pathology.

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 the planned Certificate of Competence of Training (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, it 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 2 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 4.5 years, of which 3.5 must have been in the specialist/specialty registrar grade and must have included 2 years of forensic pathology training in an approved programme. Prior to



completion of training, candidates must also have had at least 3 months' experience in both neuropathology and paediatric pathology with 2 months on formal attachment for each. It is expected that candidates will have completed the majority of this training prior to attempting the Part 2 examination.

## **Structure and format of the examination**

### **Part 1**

Candidates will take the general histopathology Part 1 multiple choice question (MCQ)/extended matching question (EMQ; see [Histopathology regulations and guidelines](#) for further details).

### **Part 2**

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

#### **Casebook**

Candidates should also read the section on 'Guidance for candidates undertaking written options for the Part 2 examination' in the [Examinations regulations and guidelines](#) document on the College website.

#### **Candidates must submit a casebook of 10 medicolegal cases, covering a wide spectrum of forensic work.**

The cases proposed by the candidate, including a brief outline of the case circumstance and cause/manner of death must be submitted to the College for approval in sufficient time to allow consideration.

The range of cases should be such that the examiner has confidence that the candidate has had sufficient exposure to, and has knowledge of, the range of cases that a forensic pathologist may face, e.g. most types of trauma are included whether accidental, suicidal or homicidal but with a significant proportion of suspicious deaths.

The finished project **must be submitted at least 4 months before the application closing deadline (which are in January and July) of the Part 2 examination for which**



**the candidate wishes to enter.** The College cannot guarantee that an amended submission (if required) will be marked in time for the candidate to undertake the examination if it is submitted later than this.

The casebook should have a total word count of 20,000 plus/minus 10%, not including references or diagrams. The word count must be stated and the candidate may lose marks if outside these limits.

The candidate should demonstrate an ability to formulate good quality reports with well-reasoned discussions in the context of key literature. A key element of the casebook is demonstration of the ability to draw appropriate conclusions for a case and therefore the candidate should not merely copy that of a consultant in an original report. The case need not necessarily include a full post-mortem report, but the essential/salient points should be present to allow the examiner to determine that appropriate conclusions and cause of death have been reached.

Acknowledging differing practices in the country and that some trainees may not have the opportunity to personally conduct homicide or suspicious death autopsies, 'involvement' may include only limited examination including special techniques but may also be only attendance through the autopsy examination and at the scene where possible. It is expected, however, that in a number of cases the candidate will have themselves undertaken the post-mortem examination. The candidate should make clear what the extent of their involvement was for each case. The candidate may comment on, for example, any procedures not done.

Candidates will not be allowed to sit the practical exam until the casebook has been awarded a pass (A) by the examiners. Candidates submitting a satisfactory casebook but failing to achieve the required standard in the practical exam will not be required to submit a new casebook at any subsequent attempt at the examination.

### **Practical and oral examination**

The practical examination is designed to assess the competence of candidates to practice forensic pathology independently. Candidates should ensure that they are fully aware of and have covered the forensic pathology curriculum published by the College.



The examination comprises the elements listed below, which normally take place over a period of 2.5 days. In most instances, the first component will be the written essays and an example timetable is as follows:

Day 1: PM – Written exam

Day 2: AM – Autopsy component

PM – Microscopy

Day 3: AM – Long cases

PM – Viva/oral

Instances may necessitate a different timetable, but you will receive notification of the intended schedule before the dates, with contact details and information as to where to attend.

**Each section of the examination assesses a distinct set of professional skills, each essential to the performance of an independent medical practitioner in forensic histopathology. Candidates must therefore pass each section of the examination in a single sitting.**

**Should a candidate make 1 or more egregious errors that are of medicolegal significance and undermine the examiners' confidence that the candidate has reached the stage of independent consultant practice in forensic histopathology, the College's egregious errors policy will be followed (see section 2.8.5 of the [Examinations regulations and guidelines document](#)).**

### Written

This will have a duration of 3 hours and will comprise 6 questions, all of which should be answered. While there may be an occasional question that is in a short written answer format, the questions will primarily be essay format. In addition to forensic pathology knowledge and practice, questions may be included on, for example, service provision, governance and quality assurance, and relevant legal issues.



## Autopsy

The total duration of 3 hours will include 30 minutes for examiner demonstration and discussion (i.e. there will be a maximum time of 2.5 hours for the autopsy itself). This 2.5 hours will also include completion of an autopsy findings sheet that includes main findings, proposed further investigations and cause of death, but the candidate will not be expected to complete a post-mortem 'write up' or report.

Candidates may be asked to undertake special techniques/examinations **if** appropriate to the case; if a candidate during their examination thinks any such technique may be appropriate, they can suggest it but must seek approval from the examiner before undertaking it. They may, however, be asked to describe how they would undertake any specialist technique/examination.

Candidates should not at any time take any photographs or images during the examination; if for some reason it is thought that something should be recorded in such a way, approval must be sought and given by an examiner and an approved device used.

## Microscopy

This will normally comprise 20 cases with a duration of 3 hours. The material may cover any aspect of post-mortem practice appropriate to forensic pathology. While in most instances there will be 1 section per case, there may be occasional questions with more than 1 tissue section and the number of cases may then be decreased.

Each candidate will have their own set of slides. Digital reporting will not be used.

## Long cases

This will have a duration of 3 hours and comprise 2–4 questions, all of which should be answered. This may include completion of autopsy report conclusions based on reports and/or photographs, interpretation of other expert reports including toxicology, or examination/reporting on specimens/photographs including bones.

## Oral



This is likely to include the candidate being asked questions based on photographs or other material but may include other areas relevant to forensic practice (e.g. ethical, legal or management issues).

## **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 2 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 3 months' experience in both 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 2 components:

- a casebook of 10 medicolegal cases. The purpose and format of the casebook 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.
- a written and practical examination: these will have the same format as for Part 2 FRCPath, to comprise a written paper, autopsy, microscopy, case reports, gross specimens and oral.

Candidates must pass each component of the examination in a single sitting. Should a candidate make 2 or more egregious errors that are of medicolegal significance and undermine the examiners' confidence that the candidate has reached the stage of independent consultant practice in forensic histopathology, the College's egregious errors policy will be followed (see section 2.8.5 of the [Examinations regulations and guidelines](#) document).



## **Timing of the examinations**

The Part 2 and Diploma examinations will be offered twice a year in spring and autumn.

