

# **Additional attempts at FRCPath examinations: Guidance for candidates and supervisors**



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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Introduction

The Royal College of Pathologists allows 4 attempts at each part of the FRCPATH examinations before candidates need to request permission for additional attempts. However, it is expected that the local appraisal framework will identify candidates who are not progressing at a much earlier stage than this and put additional support and remedial actions in place.

Requests for additional attempts will be considered by College Council.

## 2. Requests for further attempts to sit examinations

### 2.1 Further attempts

Further attempts at FRCPATH (Parts 1 and 2) will be considered if candidates:

- provide evidence of the presence of extenuating circumstances that had affected or were likely to have affected their previous examination performance. The information set out below includes some references to NHS training structures. Candidates who do not work in the NHS should identify other appropriate individuals to provide evidence. If in doubt, they should contact the Examinations team for further advice.
- provide evidence that such circumstances have resolved.

### 2.2 Extenuating circumstances

‘Extenuating circumstances’ are exceptional circumstances that adversely affected the candidate’s performance in the examination or assessment. Known issues in relation to disability or special situations (which include personal health and exceptional adverse personal circumstances) would be expected to have been declared prior to an assessment or examination in line with section 3.6 of the College’s ‘Examinations regulations and guidelines’.



Extenuating circumstances might include, but would not be restricted to:

- personal health issues
- health issues affecting a close relative
- social or domestic issues
- specific learning difficulties
- adverse training conditions.

## **2.3 Adverse circumstances**

Adverse circumstances known to the candidate in advance of sitting an examination will not normally be accepted as extenuating factors in consideration of a request for a further attempt, if they could have withdrawn.

## **2.4 Application**

The candidate must apply in writing, stating full details of the extenuating circumstances and their resolution. All relevant documentary evidence must be included with the application. The candidate must also attach a statement of support from the educational supervisor and/or training programme director using the 'Additional attempts at FRCPATH examinations: Support from educational supervisor' proforma (Appendix A). They must also complete the 'Checklist for applicants requesting further attempts at College examinations' proforma (Appendix B).

## **2.5 Review of application**

If the application is judged to be complete by the Director of Examinations, it will be assessed by a Mitigating Circumstances Panel, comprising senior examiners and a lay representative. The Mitigating Circumstances Panel will also take account of performance at previous attempts at the examination. An anonymised summary will be presented to College Council, which will decide whether the additional attempt is to be permitted.



## 3 Standard of evidence

### 3.1 Burden of proof

The 'burden of proof' to support a claim on the basis of extenuating circumstances always lie with the candidate.

The College reserves the right to take such steps as deemed necessary to verify the evidence submitted without prior notification. Where the College is unable to authenticate the material to its satisfaction, the claim may not be accepted.

### 3.2 Consideration of claim

The College will only consider a claim of extenuating circumstances to grant a further attempt at an examination when, in its opinion, the evidence presented by the candidate meets all of the following standards. Evidence must:

- be written by suitably qualified professionals appropriate to the nature of the extenuating circumstances cited, and who have no personal relationship with the candidate; this may include the educational supervisor or training programme director
- be on headed paper and signed and dated by the author; evidence presented by email may be acceptable if the email has been sent by the author from the official domain name of the author's organisation
- be in English. It is the candidate's responsibility to provide supporting documentation and any translation should be undertaken by an accredited translator (e.g. be a member of the Association of Translation Companies, see <https://atc.org.uk/>).
- be a full and true copy of the original
- be unaltered by the candidate. Documentation that has been amended for any reason will be deemed inadmissible by the College. If there is evidence that a



candidate has fraudulently presented documentation to the College, the matter will be referred to the appropriate registration authority.

## 4 Nature of supporting evidence

All applications for additional attempts will require the provision of supporting evidence, examples of which are set out below.

### 4.1 Examples

An occupational health assessment or other medical evidence confirming that:

- a significant medical problem was or is present and its timing in relation to previous examination attempts. The assessment should describe how the condition has affected performance. If the medical problem was known prior to previous attempts but it was not previously drawn to attention, as specified in section 3.6 of the regulations, then the reason for not doing so must be stated.
- the problem has abated sufficiently for the candidate to attempt the examination again.

If it concerns the **health of a close relative**, medical evidence to indicate that:

- the family member had or has a significant medical problem and its timing in relation to previous examination attempts. The evidence should include a valid reason why this was not previously drawn to attention as specified in section 3.6 of the regulations.
- the problem has abated sufficiently for the candidate to attempt the examination again
- documentary proof of the relationship of the relative to the candidate must be provided.



If it relates to **social or domestic circumstances**, evidence to indicate:

- a substantial social or domestic problem and its timing in relation to previous examination attempts, which is documented from sources such as a doctor, solicitor, social worker or other relevant professional. The evidence should include a valid reason why this was not previously drawn to attention, as specified in section 3.6 of the regulations.
- that the problem has abated sufficiently for the candidate to attempt the examination again.

If it relates to **specific learning difficulties**, evidence to indicate:

- the nature of the difficulty and its likely impact in previous attempts at the examination from an educational psychologist or other appropriate professional. If the specific learning difficulty was known prior to previous attempts but it was not previously drawn to attention, as specified in section 3.6 of the regulations, then the reason for not doing so must be stated.
- specific learning strategies that have been recommended and adopted
- the reasonable adjustments, if any, that would be required for the candidate to attempt the examination again.

If it relates to **training difficulties**, evidence to indicate:

- the nature and severity of the training difficulties and their timing in relation to previous examination attempts from a postgraduate dean, head of pathology school or other appropriate individual. The evidence should include a valid reason why this was not previously drawn to attention, as specified in section 3.6 of the regulations.
- the adjustments to training that have been put in place to support the candidate to attempt the examination again.



## 5 Confidentiality of evidence

The confidential nature of information provided by candidates will be respected by the College in accordance with data protection regulations.

Confidential information will only be shared within the College on a 'need to know' basis. Any candidate wishing to restrict the sharing of such information should make their wishes known in writing at the time of application. Candidates should, however, be aware that the College cannot respond to a request if the Director of Examinations is unaware of relevant information. Normally such wishes will be respected, unless to do so would be against the best interests of the College or the interests of patient safety or security of any person. Where necessary, information will be anonymised before sharing within the College.

If relevant information is not provided with the application on grounds of confidentiality, it will not normally be admissible during any subsequent application.

## 6 Support for requests

Support for requests for further attempts at an examination must be made on behalf of a candidate by their educational supervisor or another appropriate individual formally involved in their training using the specified application form (attached as Appendix 1).

All relevant documentation should be submitted simultaneously.

## 7 Consideration of requests

### 7.1 Conditions

Applications must be received a minimum of 2 months before the date of the next Council meeting in order to guarantee that it will be processed and considered at that meeting.





Candidates should submit an application for the examination they wish to sit, before the closing date, even if this date is before their additional request application will have been considered by Council. Applications will be kept as provisional until such a time as Council has met to discuss the request. If the request is turned down, then the examination fee will be refunded.

## **7.2 Review by Council**

Council will need to be satisfied that the extenuating circumstances:

- were substantial and unpredictable
- were likely to have affected previous examination performance
- have been resolved or ameliorated sufficiently for a further attempt to be worthwhile.

Council will need to be satisfied that there is a valid reason why these circumstances were not previously drawn to attention, as specified in section 3.6 of the regulations, such that previous attempts could have been avoided until the circumstances had resolved.

The decision of Council is final but does not preclude a further application if the candidate produces new evidence (but see section 5 above).

## **8 Communication of decision**

The decision of Council will be communicated in writing to the candidate and the candidate's educational supervisor within 10 working days of the Council's decision.

## **9 Appeals**

Candidates may not appeal against the decision but may submit further requests as noted in the end of section 7.2. Any such request must contain additional evidence regarding the extenuating circumstances and/or their remediation and resolution.



## 10 Complaints

Complaints against decisions or about the process may be made by following the College's complaints procedure.



# **Appendix A: Additional attempts at FRCPath examinations**

## **Support from educational supervisor**



It is College policy that a candidate who has failed any component of the Part 1 or Part 2 FRCPATH examination on 4 occasions is not permitted to re-enter the examination unless permission is granted by College Council.

Full details of the process for application for additional attempts are described in 'Additional attempts at FRCPATH examinations: Guidance for candidates and supervisors'.

This proforma is for **completion by the candidate's educational supervisor or training programme director** in support of their application.

Full name of candidate	
Current appointment	
Date appointed	
Specialty	
Dates of previous attempts at FRCPATH examination	
Provisional CCT date (if relevant)	
Name of advisor/supervisor	



I wish to support this candidate's submission for a further attempt at the Part 1 / Part 2 examination (delete as appropriate) in the specialty of .....  
(please state your specialty).

The candidate has been unsuccessful in this examination because of the following extenuating circumstances. In addition, the extenuating circumstances that led to the examination failure have abated sufficiently for the candidate to attempt the examination again.



Comprehensive evidence to support this application, as detailed in section 4 of ‘Additional attempts at FRCPATH examinations: Guidance for candidates and supervisors’, is being provided with this application.

Signature of advisor/supervisor .....

Date: .....



# **Appendix B: Checklist for applicants requesting further attempts at College examinations**



<b>Name</b>	
I am applying for a further attempt at (please state specialty and type of examination, e.g. FRCPPath Part 2 in haematology)	
<p>I am applying on the basis of the following mitigating circumstances (more than one may be indicated but evidence for each indicated circumstance must be provided).</p> <p>(If completing electronically, please delete the irrelevant circumstances. If completing on paper, please highlight the appropriate circumstance(s) and cross out the irrelevant circumstance.)</p>	<p>Personal health</p> <p>Health of a close relative</p> <p>Social or domestic circumstances</p> <p>Specific learning difficulties</p> <p>Training difficulties</p> <p>Bereavement</p> <p>Other (please specify)</p>
I have provided the following items of evidence (e.g. medical note, death certificate, letter from educational supervisor/training programme director). Evidence may be scanned and sent but the Examinations team can	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> <li>•</li> </ul>





request original documentation if required.	
If evidence cannot be submitted, please give a full explanation for its omission.	
I confirm that the information provided in this application is correct.	
<b>Signature:</b>	<b>Date:</b>

