



The Royal College of Pathologists
Pathology: the science behind the cure

Veterinary pathology examination regulations

2026

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



There are currently two veterinary examinations. The first is veterinary pathology, which is concerned with morbid anatomy and histopathology. The second is veterinary clinical pathology, which covers the disciplines of clinical biochemistry, haematology and cytology.

Entry and training requirements

There is no specific timing for entry to the examination. Candidates should obtain guidance from their training supervisor/sponsor as to when to sit the examination. 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.

The examination is intended for graduates in veterinary medicine who have undergone suitable postgraduate training in veterinary pathology. Training may be undertaken either in a full-time training (residency) post in the pathology department of a university veterinary school or in another institution able to provide a suitable training programme, agreed with the College. Initially, training should be as broadly based as possible but thereafter should focus on the pathology of a species group chosen by the candidate.

Training is normally conducted under the supervision of a fellow of the Royal College of Pathologists, who should also act as the candidate's sponsor.

Candidates are strongly advised to select a sponsor/supervisor who will actively provide guidance and support during the training and examination preparation.

Part 1

Candidates will usually sit the Part 1 examination after 2 years' training when the candidate is in a full-time training post. Where candidates combine training with other duties, a longer training period is likely to be required.

Part 2

The Part 2 examination will usually be taken at least 1 year after successfully completing the Part 1 examination. Candidates will be **required** to provide a written recommendation from their supervisor/sponsor of fitness to sit the examination with details of activities undertaken in veterinary pathology since passing Part 1.



In addition, candidates will be expected to have completed Stage A of the necropsy workplace-based assessments in order to satisfy part of the entry requirements for the Part 2 examination. The second criteria needed to take the Part 2 examination is an observed autopsy. Further details of these assessments can be found on our [website](#).

Structure and format of the examination

Part 1

The Part 1 examination comprises a written component only.

Written component

The written component consists of two 3-hour papers:

- paper 1 – general/mechanistic pathology
- paper 2 – species group pathology.

From Autumn 2026, both papers will contain 2 sections – 3 long answer questions (LAQs) questions and 9 short answer questions (SAQs).

Paper 1 is taken by all candidates regardless of the species group selected by the candidate. Paper 2 focuses on the species group selected by the candidate.

The species groups are:

- small domestic animals: dog, cat
- large domestic animals: farmed ruminants¹ and either horse or pig option
- laboratory animals: rabbit, rat, mouse, guinea pig, hamster, dog, non-human primate
- birds: poultry, game birds, cage birds, wild birds

Notes for candidates

¹ Farmed ruminants include deer and goats.



Candidates must pass both papers to be able to progress to Part 2.

LAQs/SAQs

These are designed to test factual knowledge and understanding across the range of the Curriculum. Each question comprises a stem and up to eight sub-questions. The stem defines the topic of the question and may include a short scenario or vignette. Each sub-question is designed to elicit a specific piece of information, or demonstration of understanding of the topic and its context. Unless stated otherwise, the answer required will relate specifically to the material provided in the stem and not to the topic in general.

Points to note:

- They are criterion-marked against an explicit model answer
- Marks are only awarded for information required by the question – no marks are available for additional material
- If a defined number of facts are requested (e.g. State two causes of.....), only that number of responses will be marked (e.g. Answer – correct cause, incorrect cause, correct cause, will only receive one out of two marks).
- SAQ sub-questions require responses of a single word or phrase. LAQ sub-questions will be answerable in a small number of sentences.
- Examiners will be looking for key concepts in these answers, and no marks will be awarded for extra information.
- The mark allocation for each sub-question will be stated in brackets in each instance.

Part 2

Observed necropsy

Candidates will have to complete a necropsy assessment under the observation of an external RCPATH examiner. Candidates must pass this section in order to proceed to the



main Part 2 examination. The necropsy should be arranged after the candidate's examination entry has been confirmed and, ideally, should be completed 6–8 weeks before the date of the examination. If the candidate is unsuccessful at their first attempt of the autopsy, they will be permitted a second attempt.

The Part 2 examination will take place over the course of 2 days and will be held at one location for all species groups. It will involve the study and analysis of specimens appropriate to the species group chosen and the writing of critical informative commentaries. Candidates will be assessed on a range of skills including:

- **histopathology biopsy diagnosis** – normally a maximum of 20 histopathological spots, which are usually tissue sections on glass slides and may include images and visual aids, including electron micrographs. Special stains and immunohistochemical stains may be used. Limited cytology and/or haematological spots may be included. This examination will last 3 hours with a mark allocation of 30% of the total available.
- **gross specimen recognition** – maximum of 10 fresh or fixed macroscopic specimens or images or a combination. This examination will last 1 hour with a mark allocation of 15% of the total available marks.
- **data interpretation** – may include case histories, species group problems and clinical data (data from substance trials or studies; laboratory animal candidates). This examination will last 2 hours with a mark allocation of 20% of the total available.
- **structured oral examination** – topics will include species pathology, health and safety, laboratory management, quality assurance, quality control, animal use legislation, where appropriate, and image capture and use. This examination will last no longer than 45 minutes with a mark allocation of 10% of the total available.

Note, in the case of the large domestic animals examination, the distribution of species material will normally reflect the option chosen; approximately one-third being of the option chosen with two-thirds devoted to ruminants.

Timing of the examinations



The Part 1 examination is offered once a year in autumn. The Part 2 practical examination is offered once a year in autumn.

