



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

## Information and Guidance

# Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination 2020

## Objective structured practical examination (OSPE)

EXAMINATIONS DEPARTMENT  
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS  
December 2019

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

The Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination is an objective structured practical examination (OSPE). It is for ST1 chemical pathology trainees and ST3 chemical pathology (metabolic medicine) trainees in Stage A of an approved training programme.

The examination is designed to test a candidate's applied knowledge and skills relevant to the year 1 chemical pathology curriculum. Candidates should be familiar with the curriculum. It is available on the College website at: <https://www.rcpath.org/trainees/training/training-by-specialty/chemical-pathology.html>. Hard copies are provided to trainees upon registration with the College.

Trainees must be registered with The Royal College of Pathologists before applying for the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination. Registration can be completed on the [College website](#).

## 2 PURPOSE OF THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION

The purpose of the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination is to:

- 2.1 indicate the capability and potential of a trainee through a test of applied knowledge and skills relevant to the year 1 curriculum
- 2.2 demonstrate a trainee's readiness to progress to the next stage of training
- 2.3 measure a trainee's capacity to achieve competencies for their chosen career path
- 2.4 drive learning demonstrated through the acquisition of knowledge and skill
- 2.5 indicate suitability of choice at an early stage of the chosen career path
- 2.6 enable a trainee to collect evidence for the Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP)
- 2.7 help to identify trainees who should be counselled out of the specialty
- 2.8 provide evidence towards the award of the Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT).

## 3 ELIGIBILITY FOR PROGRESSION TO STAGE B OF CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY TRAINING

In order to progress to Stage B of chemical pathology training, all ST1 chemical pathology trainees and ST3 chemical pathology (metabolic medicine) trainees must undergo an annual review of competence progression (ARCP). The ARCP determines eligibility for progression to Stage B of chemical pathology training.

The outcome of the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination is one of the major components of the ARCP. Trainees must show evidence of a successful outcome in the Stage A Examination in order to be considered eligible to progress to the next stage of



training. However, a successful outcome in the Stage A Examination does not necessarily imply automatic progression to Stage B of chemical pathology training.

#### **4 ENTRY CRITERIA FOR THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION**

In order to be eligible for the examination, trainees should normally, at the time of attempting the examination have satisfactorily completed a minimum of seven months' whole-time equivalent chemical pathology training in an approved training programme and be on course to complete the requirements of the Year 1/Stage A chemical pathology curriculum.

Trainees who do not meet the training requirements can still apply to attempt the exam but are strongly advised to discuss their potential application with their educational supervisor/training programme director prior to submitting their application form. It is advised that the trainee has the support of their educational supervisor/training programme director if they wish to attempt the examination without meeting the minimum training requirements.

#### **5 FORMAT OF THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION QUESTION PAPER**

The Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination questions undergo a rigorous writing and editing process before inclusion in an examination question paper. The questions are written and edited by a panel of chemical pathologists with relevant knowledge and experience, who ensure that questions are technically correct, clear and unambiguous. The questions are mapped to the year 1 chemical pathology curriculum.

The Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination will consist of 19 stations. A PC terminal may also be used. Candidates will move around each station. After the completion of each station, candidates must post their answer sheet(s) into the ballot-style box or envelope provided. There will be 9 minutes per station. There will be examiners present for the duration of the examination.

The questions and materials (photographs etc.) will be affixed to the stations. Candidates may be asked to write brief comments or make verbal comments in response to specific questions or a particular topic. Candidates may be asked to discuss cases with an examiner, who will test the ability to discuss a clinical problem. Unless otherwise notified, it is the responsibility of the examiner to ensure all necessary materials and equipment are available at the candidate's disposal.

Each question will give an indication of what materials are required (if any) and whether an examiner will be present for the candidate to enter into discussions with. An indication of the maximum amount of marks achievable will be given for each section of a question.



## 6 FREQUENCY OF THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION

Trainees will have two opportunities in any one year of training to attempt and achieve a successful outcome in the Stage A Examination. If they are unsuccessful it is up to their Deanery to consider, within the arrangements of the ARCP, the case for additional training. Trainees are unable to exit Stage A of training and proceed to Stage B unless they have achieved a successful outcome in the Stage A Examination.

It is expected that all eligible trainees will attempt the examination at the first opportunity. Only in exceptional circumstances may an eligible candidate attempt the examination at the next or later opportunity, and only if it is with written agreement from the trainee's educational supervisor **and** the training programme director.

## 7 TIMING OF THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION

The examination dates for 2020 are to be confirmed.

## 8 EXAMINATION VENUES

The Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination will be conducted as follows:

**TBC**  
**10:00 – 13:00 approx.**  
The Royal College of Pathologists  
6 Alie St  
London  
E1 8QT

**TBC**  
**10:00 – 13:00 approx.**  
The Royal College of Pathologists  
6 Alie St  
London  
E1 8QT

After application, trainees will be sent further information along with their candidate number.

## 9 APPLYING FOR THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION

In order to apply for the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination, trainees must:

- Complete the online application form and return the PDF form signed by their educational supervisor or training programme director.
- Ensure that the full fee is paid at the point of application.
- Ensure that both are completed by the specified closing date and that the educational supervisor's form reaches the College no later than one week after the closing deadline.

Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.



By signing the application form, trainees and their supervisor or training programme director confirm that they have read, understood and agree to abide by the content of this document. Trainees who apply and present themselves for the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination are deemed to be judged and judge themselves to be ready, prepared for, and capable of attempting the examination with an intent to achieve a successful outcome. (Please refer to items 4, 6 and 12 for further clarity).

## 10 FEES

The fee for each opportunity of the examination is £270 to be paid online.

## 11 CLOSING DATE FOR APPLYING

The application periods will be:

- First opportunity: Monday 17 February to Friday 13 March.
- Second opportunity: Tuesday 28 July to Monday 10 August.

Receipt of applications after these deadlines will *not* be accepted.

## 12 WITHDRAWAL FROM THE CHEMICAL PATHOLOGY STAGE A EXAMINATION

### After the application

In exceptional circumstances, a trainee may need to withdraw their application prior to the examination. A refund or transfer of fee will be considered. Notification of withdrawal from the examination must be given to the Examinations Department in writing prior to the exam date (by e-mail to [exams@rcpath.org](mailto:exams@rcpath.org) is acceptable, supporting evidence will be requested where required). Withdrawal from the examination must have been discussed and agreed with the trainee's educational supervisor or the training programme director.

### Before the examination

Trainees who are aware, in advance of the examination but after submitting their application, of exceptional adverse personal circumstances, such as bereavement or temporary or permanent illness or injury which they feel may affect their performance in the exam are strongly advised not to present themselves for the examination. Adverse circumstances known to the trainee in advance of the examination will not normally be accepted as mitigating factors in their performance in the examination if they could have withdrawn. However, trainees who decide to withdraw due to such adverse circumstances just before the examination may be permitted to defer their attempt on application to the Examinations Department. This must have been discussed and agreed with the trainee's educational supervisor **and** the training programme director.



### At the examination

Trainees who present themselves for the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination are deemed to be ready, prepared for and capable of taking the examination with an intent to achieve a successful outcome.

Candidates who experience adverse personal circumstances such as illness or injury in the course of the examination will normally have these factors taken into consideration. Candidates wishing to have such circumstances taken into consideration must inform the Assessment Department in writing as soon as possible after the examination, with appropriate documentary evidence.

## 13 MARKING SYSTEM

The College has recruited the assistance of a Statistics Advisor to ensure that appropriate standard setting is applied, and that the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination works towards meeting the standards for curricula and assessment systems set out by the General Medical Council (GMC). A robust standard setting methodology will be applied – the Angoff method.

Directly following the examination, answer sheets [except for those from the interactive station(s)] will be double marked by examiners. There will be two examiners at the interactive station(s), one examiner may act in the capacity of a moderator/observer.

There are **two criteria** required to pass the examination. Trainees must achieve or exceed both:

- the pre-specified Angoff pass mark in at least 12 of the 19 stations. This is equivalent to passing 65% of the stations, and so, if one or more stations have to be eliminated from the final scoring due to technical problems, the 'number of stations passed' criterion will be adjusted.
- the global Angoff pass mark for the entire complement of stations in that examination. Since the global pass mark will depend on the stations selected for each examination, this will differ slightly from one examination to another.

The above will be ratified by the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination Panel at the standard setting meeting to be held after the examination.

## 14 NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

### First Opportunity

Following the attempt of the first opportunity of the examination, results will be posted to candidates via first class mail on **Friday 19 June**. Results will not be issued to personal callers, or by telephone, fax or email. Individual results, listed according to candidate number, may be accessed online from midday on the day the results are posted. For ease of reference, candidates are asked to memorise their candidate number.

### Second Opportunity

As above, except that the results will be available and posted via first class mail to candidates on **Friday 23 October**.



Anonymised results from the Stage A Examination will be sent to the GMC and deaneries on an annual basis.

## 15 FEEDBACK

With the letter of notification of results, all trainees will be advised of the overall pass mark and their own personal pass mark. All trainees will be advised of the titles of failed and passed stations. Educational supervisors, training programme directors and heads of pathology schools will also receive a copy of these correspondences.

## 16 DISABILITY AND SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Candidates with a permanent or temporary disability (defined under the Disability Discrimination Act as a physical, sensory or mental impairment which has, or had, a substantial and long-term adverse effect on a person's ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities), which may require a change in the Stage A Examination procedures, should inform the Examinations Department as soon as they know when they wish to attempt the examination, well in advance of the closing date. Please see the instructions below.

Candidates who are pregnant and anticipate that they may need particular consideration (i.e. facilities to enable them to sit down during practical examinations) should contact the Examinations Department as soon as this need becomes apparent (instructions below). Although centre organisers and examiners will do their best to give candidates full consideration on the day, the Stage A Examination is conducted with the local facilities that are available and it may not be possible to meet candidate's requirements if their needs are not known in advance.

Candidates should complete the Reasonable Adjustments Request form and email this along with any relevant evidence to [exams@rcpath.org](mailto:exams@rcpath.org). The form can be found on the [College website](#).

Any variation of the rules or procedures in this document will be at the discretion of the Director of Examinations and may consist, for example, of allowing extra time to complete the examination or the waiving or withdrawal of charges for the subsequent opportunity. Additional marks will not be awarded under any circumstances.

## 17 SECURITY AT EXAMINATION VENUES

Candidates must bring official identification with a photograph (e.g. passport, picture driving licence or a national identity card) to the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination. The identification should be produced on arrival and must be readily available throughout the examination. Candidates without appropriate identification will **not** be admitted to the examination.

Candidates must **not** bring books or other printed materials, mobile telephones, pagers or any other electronic equipment to the examination. The only exception is where candidates have been given **specific written instructions** to bring electronic equipment.





Candidates must **not** enter any examination room until invited to do so by the examiner or invigilator.

## 18 CANDIDATE MISCONDUCT

Candidates are obliged to observe all the regulations relating to the confidentiality and proper conduct of the examination. Any allegation of cheating, deception, fraud or attempting to gain an unfair advantage will be fully investigated by the Director of Examinations. A candidate accused of such misconduct will be advised of the investigation and the procedures that will be followed.

A candidate found guilty of misconduct will be reported to his/her employer, and the relevant professional bodies, such as the GMC. If any information comes to light at any stage that indicates the regulations have been breached, the Royal College of Pathologists reserves the right to retrospectively annul the relevant examination result.

## 19 RULES

- 19.1 The Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination materials used at the venue(s) must not, by any individual, be reproduced or removed from the examination venue for the purpose of distributing.
- 19.2 The Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination will take place at the times and venues published. It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that they know their candidate number, the correct date, time and location of the examination at which they are required to attend to present themselves at the appointed time and place.
- 19.3 The answer sheets will be anonymously marked. The booklet of answer sheets will carry candidate number and **not** candidate name. It is the candidate's responsibility to check that they have been given the correct booklet of answer sheets. If there is any doubt, the candidate should immediately attract the attention of the assessor/examiner.
- 19.4 Candidates arriving late will not be permitted to attempt the Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination if two or more stations have been completed. This constitutes a fail.
- 19.5 A candidate may not speak to or otherwise communicate with another candidate during the examination and may not act in such a way as to disturb other candidates.
- 19.6 Candidates who need to take medication during the examination should inform the assessor/examiner before the start of the examination.
- 19.7 In the event of an emergency, candidates must follow the instructions given by the assessor/examiner. Candidates must maintain silence throughout the examination.
- 19.8 Candidates must not remove any of the materials from the venue. Removal of any material will result in disqualification.



19.9 If, for any reason, a candidate is unable to attend the scheduled Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination, they should contact the Examinations Department at The Royal College of Pathologists on 020 7451 6700 before the scheduled start time. Discussions prior to withdrawal must have been agreed with the trainee's educational supervisor **and** the training programme director. Any candidate who fails to notify the College of their inability to attend before the scheduled start time will be issued with a fail result and will forfeit their fee, unless the absence was due to illness, in which case the candidate should obtain a medical certificate from a qualified medical practitioner and submit it to the College as soon as is reasonably practicable.

19.10 Eating or drinking is not allowed in the examination room.

## 20 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY - STATEMENT OF INTENT

The Royal College of Pathologists is committed to the principle of diversity and equality in employment, membership, academic activities, assessment, examinations and training. As part of this commitment we are concerned to inspire and support all those who work with us directly and indirectly.

Integral to our approach is the emphasis we place on our belief that everyone should be treated in a fair, open and honest manner. Our approach is a comprehensive one and reflects all areas of diversity, recognising the value of each individual. We aim to ensure that no one is treated less favourably than another on the grounds of ethnic origin, nationality, age, disability, gender, transgender, sexual orientation, race or religion. Our intention is to reflect not only the letter but also the spirit of equality legislation.

## 21 APPEALS

A candidate who has taken the College Chemical Pathology Stage A Examination has the right to appeal if there is evidence of a procedural or administrative irregularity by the College or its contractors in the conduct or content of the exam that has adversely affected the candidate's result. Any such appeal should be made by the candidate himself/herself, and must be made in writing to the Director of Examinations at the College within four weeks of the issue of the result.

The Director of Examinations will decide what further action is appropriate. Such action may comprise a review of examination procedure, refund of the examination fee or waiving the fee for the next opportunity to attempt the examination etc. A reasoned response will normally be provided within four weeks of receipt of the appeal.

Appeals submitted on the grounds that a candidate seeks to challenge the professional or academic judgement of the assessor/examiner will **not** be considered. **In no circumstances** will papers be re-marked.

## 22 SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Sample examination questions are available on the College website.



The sample questions may be printed from the website in order for trainees to familiarise themselves with the format of the question paper.

