



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

Information and Guidance

Stage A Histopathology Examination 2020

EXAMINATIONS DEPARTMENT
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS
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1 INTRODUCTION

The Stage A Histopathology examination (previously known as the Year 1 OSPE) is an objective structured practical examination (OSPE). It is for histopathology trainees in ST1/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 histopathology curriculum. Candidates should be familiar with the curriculum. It is available on the College website and hard copies are provided to trainees upon registration with the College.

ST1 trainees must be registered with The Royal College of Pathologists before applying for the Stage A Histopathology examination. Registration can be completed on the [College website](#).

2 PURPOSE OF THE STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY EXAMINATION

The purpose of the Stage A Histopathology 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 HISTOPATHOLOGY TRAINING

In order to progress to Stage B of histopathology training, all ST1 histopathology trainees must undergo an Annual Review of Competence Progression (ARCP). The ARCP determines eligibility for progression to ST2/Stage B of histopathology training.

The outcome of the Stage A Histopathology examination is one of the major components of the ARCP. Trainees must show evidence of a successful outcome in the examination in order to be considered eligible to progress to the next stage of training. However, a successful outcome in the examination does not necessarily imply automatic progression to Stage B of histopathology training.



4 ENTRY CRITERIA FOR THE STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY 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 histopathology training in an approved training programme, and be on course to complete the requirements of the Year 1/Stage A histopathology curriculum.

Trainees who may not meet the training requirements can still apply to attempt the examination 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 STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY EXAMINATION QUESTION PAPER

The Stage A Histopathology 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 histopathologists with relevant knowledge and experience, who ensure that questions are technically correct, clear and unambiguous. The examination questions are mapped to the Year 1 histopathology curriculum.

The Stage A Histopathology examination will consist of 15 stations, which are made up of 13 question stations and two rest stations. 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. Candidates will **not** be allowed to access examination material during the rest stations. The examination will last for approximately three hours. There will be internal and external examiners present for the duration of the examination.

The questions will be affixed to the stations. Digital images will be included. Slides, digital microscopy, and/or macroscopic or microscopic photographs will be provided at some stations, where 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 at least one slide over a double-headed microscope with the examiner, who will test the ability to discuss a clinical problem. The communication stations could include histology and/or diagnostic cytology. 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 STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY EXAMINATION

ST1 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 OSPE at the first opportunity. Only in exceptional circumstances may an eligible candidate attempt the OSPE at the next or later opportunity, and only if it is with written agreement from the trainee's educational supervisor **and** the training school lead in England or the training programme director in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

7 TIMING OF THE STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY EXAMINATION

During 2020, the first opportunity of the Stage A Histopathology examination will take place on **Friday 3 April** in London and two further venues to be confirmed. The second opportunity will be held in Bristol on **Friday 5 June**.

8 EXAMINATION VENUES

The Stage A Histopathology examination will be conducted as follows:

Friday 3 April 2020 10:00 – 13:00 approx.			Friday 5 June 2020 10:00 – 13:00 approx.
London	TBC	TBC	Bristol

Trainees may, on the application form, specify their preferred venue for the first opportunity. Venues, due to limited space, will be allocated on a first-come, first-served basis and trainees may not be allocated to their first choice of centre.

After application, trainees will be sent information about their examination venue along with their candidate number.

Please note that only one venue is available for the second opportunity of the Stage A Histopathology examination. Trainees requiring to attempt the second opportunity of the examination will be sent the necessary additional information nearer the time.



9 APPLYING FOR THE STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY EXAMINATION

In order to apply for the Stage A Histopathology examination, trainees must complete the online application form, sponsor form and payment. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

By signing the sponsor 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 Stage A Histopathology 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.

11 CLOSING DATE FOR APPLYING

The periods for application will be as follows:

- First opportunity: Monday 13 January to Friday 7 February
- Second opportunity: Tuesday 5 May to Monday 18 May

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

Payment and application must be made online via the College website.



12 WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STAGE A HISTOPATHOLOGY 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 examination attempt date. Emailed correspondence will not be accepted. Withdrawal from the examination must have been discussed and agreed with the trainee's educational supervisor **and** training school lead (England) or the training programme director (Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland).

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 examination 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** training school lead (England) or the training programme director (Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland).

At the examination

Trainees who present themselves for the Stage A Histopathology 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 Examinations 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 Stage A Histopathology examination work towards meeting the standards for assessment set out by the General Medical Council (GMC). A robust standard-setting methodology will be applied – this will be the borderline group method (BGM) and/or the Angoff method.

Directly following the Stage A examination, answer sheets will be double marked by both internal and external examiners.

There are two criteria required to pass the examination. Trainees must pass a minimum number of stations **and** also achieve a score on or above the pass mark. The minimum number of stations required and the global pass mark will be determined by the Stage A Histopathology examination Panel during the standard setting process held after the examination.



14 NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Following the Stage A Examination, results will be posted to candidates via first class mail on:

- Friday 1 May – first opportunity
- Friday 3 July – second opportunity

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.

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

15 FEEDBACK

Within the letter of notification of results, all trainees will be advised of their overall pass mark and their own personal pass mark. All trainees will also be advised of the titles of failed and passed stations. Educational supervisors and training programme directors 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 affect 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. Instructions are 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 candidates' 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. 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 Stage A Histopathology 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.

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 Stage A Histopathology 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 Stage A Histopathology 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. 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 examiner.
- 19.3 Candidates arriving late will not be permitted to attempt the Stage A Histopathology examination if two or more stations have been completed. This constitutes a fail.
- 19.4 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.
- 19.5 Candidates who need to take medication during the examination should inform the examiner before the start of the examination.



- 19.6 In the event of an emergency, candidates must follow the instructions given by the examiner. Candidates must maintain silence throughout the examination.
- 19.7 Candidates must not remove any of the examination materials from the venue. Removal of any material will result in disqualification.
- 19.8 If, for any reason, a candidate is unable to attend the scheduled Stage A Histopathology examination, they should contact the Examinations Department on 020 7451 6700 before the scheduled start time. Discussions prior to withdrawal must have been agreed with the trainee's educational supervisor **and** training school lead (England) or the training programme director (Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland). Any candidate who fails to notify the College of their inability to attend the examination before the scheduled start time will be issued with a fail result and will forfeit the examination 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.
- 19.9. 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 Stage A Histopathology 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 examination 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 examiner will **not** be considered. **In no circumstances** will papers be re-marked.

Further information is contained within the 'Complaints and appeals procedure' on the College website.

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.

