



May 2012

Issue 4

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Information and News for FRCA Exam Candidates

Welcome to the May 2012 edition of 'The Candidate' a newsletter specifically designed to keep FRCA examination candidates informed of updates to exam processes, procedures, and regulations. Plus advice on exam timings, statistics and general information regarding exam sittings. We hope you find it helpful. We also use twitter to post info on exam dates and where and when results will be published.



## Examinations News

### New Examination Regulations for August 2012

In most years, a new set of examination regulations are produced to incorporate any published change to the examinations' rules and procedures. The August 2012 regulations will include a change to the Final FRCA exam eligibility to allow non-UK trainee doctors, who have worked in the NHS as an anaesthetist for one year to

sit the Final exams. Further conditions will apply, see the back page. The new regulations will appear on the College website from June 2012 but will not take effect until August 2012.

### Dress codes for Examinations

Following the recommendations on dress codes for postgraduate medical recruitment, training and assessment from the Conference of Postgraduate Medical Deans (COPMed) in October 2011. The FRCA included an additional Appendix to its exam regs, 'Appendix 5', which gives the dress code to follow for FRCA examinations. Candidates attending exams are recommended to read Appendix 5 to the current examination Regs.

### New exam venue in Manchester

From September 2012 a new exams venue at Manchester will become available to candidates sitting written examinations.

### New College website

A new College website, in Drupal 7 format will come on line from the first week of May. We hope you find the examination pages more straightforward to navigate and that it is easier to find the relevant information.

You'll no longer have to click on 'for professionals' at the top of the home page. Examinations will have its own identifier.

#### Turn Over for:

- Exams Information and Key Facts
- Hints and Tips
- Exam statistics
- E-Portfolio
- Breakdown of the 2012 exam change

# Exams: Information and Key Facts

## The Primary MCQ Exam

The Primary MCQ Exam dates for 2012/2013 are: 11th September 2012, 5th February 2013 and 11th June 2013. The number of candidates who sat the Primary MCQ in February 2012 was 271 . 150 passed (55.35%).

- \* The Primary MCQ is three hours long, starting at 2pm and finishing at 5pm. Candidates must be seated by 1.45pm for the brief.
  - \* No candidate will be allowed into any exam room more than 30 minutes after the start time. No extra time is given for late arrivals.
  - \* Don't forget your passport or photo driving licence. Hospital ID doesn't count. If your name has changed from that on you ID, then you will need to present proof of name change, such as a marriage certificate.
  - \* The Primary MCQ consists of 60 multiple true/false (MTF) questions and 30 single best answer (SBA):
    - \* 20 MTF in pharmacology
    - \* 20 MTF in physiology including related biochemistry and anatomy
    - \* 20 MTF in physics, clinical measurement and data interpretation.
    - \* 30 SBA questions in any of the categories listed above.
- Examples of SBAs are available on the website and there are presently a limited number of SBAs in the Primary guide.

**You are allowed five attempts at the Primary MCQ**

**The Next Primary MCQ Exam is 12th June 2012 Application is now closed**

The following Primary MCQ exam is on **11th September 2012**

Application opening date: **25th June 2012**

Application closing date: **7th August 2012**

## The Primary OSCE/SOE Exam

The Primary OSCE and SOE exam dates for 2012 are; w/c 14th May 2012 and 8th October 2012. All held at the Royal College of Anaesthetists. The number of candidates who sat the OSCE and/ or SOE exams in January 2012 was 410. 173 passed the Primary exam a pass rate of 42.2% overall.

- \* You must have passed the Primary MCQ within three years of the exam applied for.
- \* You need to have been awarded the Initial Assessment of Competency (IAC) in Anaesthesia or an overseas equivalent. At your first attempt you must provide a copy of your IAC with your application form. If you don't, it will delay the process and may mean you miss the application deadline for the exam.
- \* At the first attempt the OSCE and SOE sections must be taken together. If you pass one component but fail the other, only the failed component needs to be retaken.
- \* Due to examiner availability and daily capacity, the College has a limited number of spaces in the OSCE and SOE exams. The College makes a commitment to always examine UK trainees. However, there is a prioritisation system (a series of waiting lists) for other types of applicants. See section 4 of the exam regulations.

**You are allowed four attempts at the Primary OSCE/SOE**

**A pass in the OSCE or SOE is valid for two years**

**A pass in the Primary FRCA is valid for ten years as part eligibility towards the Final exams**

**The Next Primary OSCE/SOE Exams**

The next Primary OSCE/SOE exam week commences on **Monday 14th May 2012** and runs through to **Friday 18th May 2012** inclusive (**applications for this are now closed**)

# Exams: Information and Key Facts

## The Final Written Exam

The Final Written Exam date for 2012 is 4th September 2012. The Written Exam consists of a three hour Short Answer Question (SAQ) paper (0930 – 1230), followed by a three hour MCQ paper (1400 – 1700). The number of candidates that sat the Final Written in March 2012 was 418. 273 passed (65.31%).

- \* The SAQ consists of 12 compulsory questions (that's one question every 15 minutes). Each question is marked out of 20 with the pass mark being determined by the board of examiners. The pass marks for all questions are summed to give a total mark.
- \* Each SAQ question is split into sections (a, b, c etc) each section carries an appropriate weighted percentage of the whole score for the paper.
- \* The MCQ consists of 60 multiple true/false (MTF) questions and 30 single best answer (SBA) questions. MTF questions have five items, each item carries one mark. SBA questions are awarded four marks for each correct question.  $60 \times 5$  and  $4 \times 30 = 420$  available marks. The pass mark is determined using GMC approved methods.
- \* The overall pass mark for the written exam is the sum of the percentage pass marks of the MCQ and SAQ papers. Each part carries equal weight, so if you narrowly fail in one exam component you can still pass by a good performance in the other.

**You are allowed six attempts at the Final written**

**A pass is valid for two years**

## The Next Final Written Exam

The next Final Written exam takes place on 4th September 2012

Applications accepted from: 25th June 2012

Application closing date: 24th July 2012

## The Final SOE Exam

The Final SOE exam dates for 2012 are: w/c 25th June 2012 and 3rd December 2012. The SOEs normally run Monday to Friday but this is dependant on the number of candidates. The number of candidates that sat the Final SOEs in December 2011 was 373. 254 passed (68%).

- \* SOE1 in Clinical Anaesthesia is normally examined in the morning and SOE2 in Clinical Science is normally conducted after lunch.
- \* Clinical Anaesthesia is 50 Minutes in duration, comprising of 10 minutes to view and make notes on clinical material before going into the SOE cubicles. You will be asked three questions in 20 minutes based on the clinical material you just viewed.
- \* After 20 minutes the examiners will ask you three short case questions which are based on other clinical topics.
- \* The Clinical Science SOE lasts 30 minutes. You will be asked four questions on the application of basic science to anaesthesia.
- \* Two examiners will examine you in each SOE, they mark each question independently.
- \* The pass mark for the SOEs is 32 marks from a maximum of 40.

**You are allowed six attempts at the Final SOE**

**If you pass you will be awarded the FRCA. Successful candidates have to attend a ceremony (normally lasting about 45 minutes) at the end of the examining day.**

## The Next Final SOE Exams

The next Final SOE exam commences the week beginning Monday 25th June 2012

Applications accepted from: 5th April 2012

Application closing date: 3rd May 2012

# Exams: Hints, Tips and Courses

## The Primary MCQ

**Submitting your fee.** Currently, the College only accepts cheques, a sterling draft or postal order for exam fees. The College will not accept bank transfers. Therefore, if you leave your application to the last day you will need to submit it by hand or courier as faxed copies cannot be accepted without payment. Ensure you have sufficient funding in your account, if the College cannot secure payment you will be removed from the exam.

**Check the address and whereabouts of your centre:** The College holds written exams in London, Birmingham, Cardiff, Sheffield, Edinburgh and Belfast. Whilst the cities remain constant the centre used may vary. If it is your first attendance then work out where the venue is and how long it will take to get there, always allow for delays and arrive early. *New centre in Manchester from September 2012.*

**Practice, practice and then practice some more.** Always practice as many MCQs as you can. Reading is important but practice is essential. There are many MTF questions in the public domain. Examples of the new Primary SBAs are harder to come by at present as the College is still populating the question bank. There are 12 on the website and two in the Primary guide, these come with advice and rationale to why the answer is the single best answer from the options. There are also Final SBA examples on the website.

**Don't leave blanks and mark only one answer.** Make sure you enter a choice for every MTF item and SBA question. If you leave one blank it will be recorded as a 'void' (no marks awarded). No marks are deducted for wrong answers. If you mark both true and false for an MTF question your answer will be void. More than one response to an SBA question will result in a void. *Always check you have not done this.*

**It's all a matter of timing.** Practice doing 60 MTFs in less than two hours. 30 SBAs should take one hour. Ensure you are progressing as you expected. Allow enough time to transfer answers from question book to answer sheet, this should take around 45 minutes.

## The Primary OSCE SOE

**Read the notes on the back of your application form.**

The notes on the back of the application form give you all the advice you need to complete your form correctly. Please read them.

**Get organised.**

Arrive at the College at least 45 minutes before your first exam. Bring a £1 coin for the lockers. Listen to what the doorman has to say, you'll find it helpful. Be in the reception area in good time for your exam call. Get some fresh air between exams. Eat and drink throughout the day. Once you have done one exam forget about it and focus on what comes next.

**OSCE — Station spot-light - 'Simulation'.**

There are two 'Sim-man' stations in the OSCE. One of these stations uses an interactive simulator to create clinical problem scenarios and assess how you identify and handle the situation. You do not need experience of using a simulator model, the monitoring displays are no different from those encountered in real life and you should conduct yourself as you would if faced with the same problem in clinical practice.

**Oral exam technique.**

Technique improves with practice. Try to look confident, smile, and speak slowly and clearly. Listen to the question. Pause before you answer, it gives you time to think. Be precise, avoid using 'probably' or 'maybe' as it could undermine any correct answer you give. If you know there are a number of different approaches to a problem, then say so and follow up by confirming the technique that you *would* use. Remember you are trying to demonstrate that you are knowledgeable and decisive not vague and non-committal. If you make a mistake, say so immediately and correct yourself.

## Courses

**Primary FRCA Master class, Royal College of Anaesthetists, London**

26th-29th Nov 2012  
Course Code D70  
Course Fee £285

# Exams: Hints, Tips and Courses

## The Final Written

**0915 – 5.15** It's a long day with an early start. If you have a long trip to your exam centre, consider travelling down the day before.

**Prepare, Practice, Prepare, Practice** The MCQ and the SAQ require two different exam techniques. When you decide to sit the Final Written exam don't allow any distractions, remain 100% focussed. Practice both types of exams. Past SAQ papers are available on the website. MTF questions are available in the Final guide and SBA questions are available on the website. Practice mock exams. Attend an appropriately aimed course. Talk to your training team and take advice.

**SAQ Technique** The SAQ paper is hard work, candidates rarely finish the paper and leave the exam room in less than three hours. It also takes a lot of practice, as answering SAQs is not always intuitive. Be disciplined you have 15 minutes for each question, allow 13. If you stick to this you will have enough time left at the end of the paper to review each question and add extra info as you check them. The College has been made aware that many courses recommend candidates use one sheet of A4 paper to prepare each SAQ question, the exams dept will ensure sufficient paper is provided.

### Answer every question but only once.

All 12 questions in the SAQ are compulsory, if you don't answer all 12 then you will fail. The questions are in 6 booklets you must put your answers in the correct booklets, don't get this wrong. As you answer them in the booklets – tick them off on the question paper provided.

In the MCQ ensure you give an answer for all MTF and SBA questions, there are no marks deducted for wrong answers. Ensure you check you haven't indicated more than one answer for each MTF or SBA or you'll receive no marks for those questions.

**Exam Syllabus.** Exam questions are mapped to the Intermediate Level curriculum. 'E' competencies make up the exam syllabus.

## The Final SOE

**Manage your day.** The Clinical SOE (Long case, short case) is normally held before lunch and the Science SOE after lunch. Arrive at the College at least 45 minutes before your first exam. Bring a £1 coin for the locker. Get some fresh air between exams. Bring reading material as there will be lots of time between exams. Ensure you eat and drink throughout the day. Once you have finished the morning exam forget about it and focus on Science.

**Listen to the question.** Listen carefully to the questions and make sure you answer the question that was asked in a careful but considered manner. Don't just regurgitate a list of facts in a scattergun approach hoping that you might just give some key answers. If the answer is not immediately obvious to you try talking it through from first principles, draw a diagram if it helps.

**Technique helps.** Attend practice orals or a Final course. Whilst you will have done orals at Primary level, the Final is quite different.

**Speak to us.** If you have any concerns, queries or questions about exams don't hesitate to contact the Exams Department, we are always happy to help. General queries should be emailed to: [exams@rcoa.ac.uk](mailto:exams@rcoa.ac.uk) or call 020 7092 1525/1528.

## Courses

### Final FRCA Course

2nd—6th July 2012

Royal College of Anaesthetists, London

Course Code A79

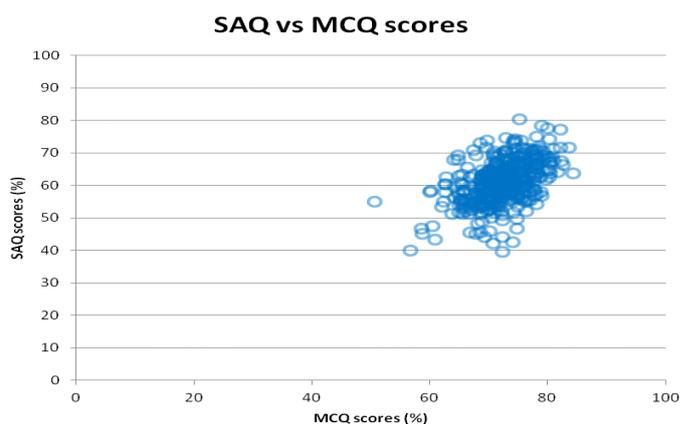
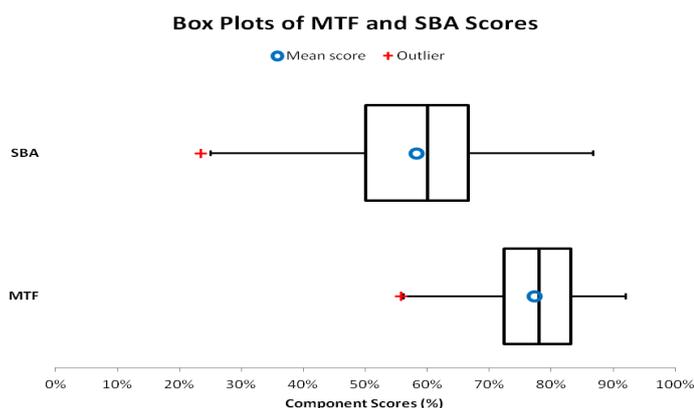
Course Fee £350

The Final Course structure has changed, it will be run over one week. Further details can be found in the events section of the college website.

## Examination Statistics

### Primary MCQ – February 2012

### Final Written – March 2012

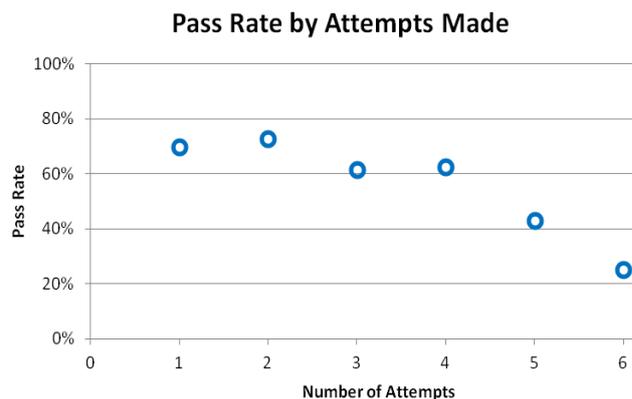
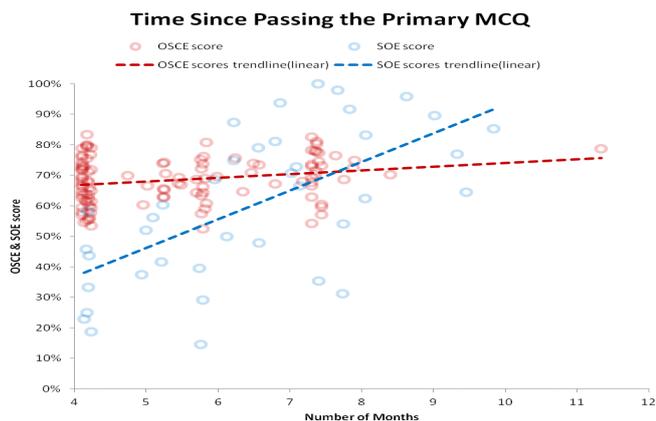


This box and whisker diagram illustrates the difference in the spread of scores between the two components of the Primary MCQ; this may be a reflection of the more discriminating ability of the SBA component.

The correlation between SAQ and MCQ scores is shown above and although a positive correlation is present, as expected, it is surprisingly not a strong correlation with a Pearson's product moment coefficient of 0.48.

### Primary OSCE & SOE – January 2012

### Final SOE – December 2011



This chart shows trends that candidates who waited longer after passing their Primary MCQ before sitting the Primary OSCE & SOE performed better. Those candidates which attempted January's exam after having passed the MCQ in September 2011 had a pass rate of only 20.25%.

This chart shows a trend that the greater the number of attempts candidates had at the exam the lower the pass rate was.

### Forthcoming examinations

The Closing date has fallen on the June Primary MCQ there are 510 candidates booked on to this exam which takes place on Tuesday 12th June, this is around the norm for the June diet of this component. In June 2011 - 550 candidates sat the exam. 349 (63.5%) passed.

The Final SOE examinations are scheduled for week commencing 25th June 2012 and the closing date for this exam is 8th May. In June 2011 there were 359 candidates sat this exam. 211 (59%) passed.

## E-Portfolio

For those trainees and consultants with access to the e-Portfolio – here are some quick tips on using the PDP and Learning Agreement in conjunction with the 'ARCP review progress' traffic light report.

**Step 1: Create the plan or agreement** – the trainee or their educational supervisor creates a new plan:

- \* The trainee uses the 'Planning' menu within their e-Portfolio
- \* The supervisor uses the 'PDP' tab when looking at a trainee's record

At least one 'PDP objective' must be added.

*Tip: a supervisor can also add objectives to a trainee's plan.*

**Step 2: Approve the objective(s)** – The educational supervisor must 'approve' the objective(s) to verify that the plan is agreed. To do this the supervisor should locate the trainee from the 'My Trainees' menu and select the PDP tab.

Click on the title of the plan then click 'Approve' within the actions column (on the right side of the page).

**Step 3: Confirm the approval** – Click on the 'Confirm' checkbox and press the 'Approve Objective' button. The 'PDP Objective' is then updated.

*Tip: Plans, Learning Agreements and their objectives can be edited at any time by either trainee or supervisor. If edited they will need to be approved again.*

**Step 4: Mark the objective as complete** – The final step is to mark the objective as complete, once the trainee has demonstrated that the objective has been met. Click 'Mark as Complete' as shown above in the Actions(s) column. Once again, click on the 'Confirm' checkbox and click on the 'Mark as complete' button.

*Tip: The College recommends that the trainee should meet with their supervisor to demonstrate progress. This will provide the necessary evidence for the objectives to be marked as complete.*

**Step 5: Mark the plan as complete** – Once all the objectives have been marked as complete – the plan itself can then be marked as complete.

Learning Agreements – either the trainee or the educational supervisor can mark the plan as complete.

Personal Development Plans – only the educational supervisor can mark the plan as complete.

Click the 'Mark Plan as Complete' button within the top section of the page.

**Step 6: Review Progress** – Once the overall plan or learning agreement has been marked as complete, the requirement within the 'review progress' section of the trainee's ARCP record should appear with a green background.

*Tip: Only complete plans or learning agreement will satisfy the requirements within the 'review progress' section of a trainee's ARCP record.*

### Summary

- \* Supervisors can add objectives to a trainee's plan.
- \* Plans, Learning Agreements and their objectives can be edited at any time by either the trainee or supervisor. If edited they will need to be approved again.
- \* The College recommends that the trainee should meet with their supervisor to demonstrate progress. This will provide the necessary evidence for the objectives to be marked as complete.
- \* Only complete plans or learning agreement will satisfy the requirements within the 'review progress' section of a trainee's ARCP record.

For an online version of this guide with screenshots please see: <http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/docs/Planning%20Top%20Tips.pdf>

## Exams : exam change and finally.

### Opening the Final exam to non-UK doctors working in the NHS.

Details of this change, which will be included in the August 2012 Examination Regulations, have been posted on the College website for the last 12 months and therefore the rules should be clear to all interested parties. However the College has had a number of calls from doctors who do not seem to fully understand the requirements of this change. Firstly, doctors should be clear as to why the Examinations Committee and College Council have approved this change.

Under the current rules eligibility for the FRCA is limited to doctors who are in UK training posts in anaesthesia or have been in one in the last five years. The five year time limit is waived for Specialty/SAS grade doctors. There are Trust grade doctors working in NHS service posts who have not been in UK training programmes but carry out full clinical anaesthetic roles within their department, and therefore are not eligible to sit FRCA examinations. From September 2011, 'any anaesthetist' who registers with the College is able to sit the Primary examination components but this was not extended to the Final exam. Many Trust grades hold exempting qualifications for Primary FRCA and with the exception of having held a UK training post would meet all other eligibility requirements to sit the Final. Therefore Council agreed the proposal that all doctors practising anaesthesia in the NHS should be allowed to sit all FRCA examinations, providing application was subject to availability, as the primary purpose of FRCA examinations is to examine UK trainees.

Firstly, it should be made clear that opening the Final exam to non-UK applicants working in the NHS does not change the eligibility requirements for UK trainees.

Those applying as non-trainees will need to meet certain eligibility requirements:

- \* must be registered with the GMC.
- \* must have been employed as an anaesthetist in an NHS post for at least 12 months immediately prior to the date of the exam applied for.
- \* must supply at least one satisfactory appraisal from a UK hospital.

The 12 months in a UK NHS post immediately prior to the examination applied for, must be a **continuous** period of 12 months and the applicant must have been working as an **anaesthetist for the entire period** of qualification. Doctors cannot apply if they have worked in Emergency Medicine or ICM in the last 12 months and they cannot use a period of time they worked in the NHS, which was not in the immediate 12 months prior to the exam applied for.

The Appraisal provided should come from the applicant's supervising consultant anaesthetist and be equivalent to an ARCP.

Those applying under this new eligibility will automatically be placed on to the Final Written exam. However, as spaces are more limited for the Final SOEs, non-UK applicants working in the NHS will be placed on a waiting list until after the closing date and will be booked on to the exam subject to capacity.

### And Finally.....

#### Did you know:

that to allow candidates who pass the Primary MCQ to apply for the following sitting of the OSCE/SOE the College will move the traditional dates of Primary exams. This will take place from the 2013-2014 academic year. A copy of the amended calendar can be found on the College website.

Guidance is now being arranged locally wherever possible. The College will contact the Regional Advisor or College Tutor and identify an Examiner in or near to the candidate's hospital.

The Faculty of Pain Medicine and the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine will run their own examinations from 2012/2013. The Fellowship of the Faculty of Pain Medicine will consist of a stand-alone MCQ exam and an SOE exam. The Fellowship of the Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine will consist of a stand-alone MCQ exam, followed by an OSCE/SOE examination.

**The next issue of the Candidate will be available in September 2012**