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Issue 3

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Information and News for FRCA Exam Candidates

Welcome to the January 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 will also be using twitter to post info on exam dates and where and when results will be published.



Examinations News

Provisions for Dyslexic candidates at Exams

Appendix 3 of the Examination Regulations have been amended to reflect that 45 minutes extra time for Primary and Final MCQ and Final SAQ exams will be given to dyslexic candidates who meet the listed requirements. This change takes effect from the February 2012 Primary MCQ and the March 2012 Final Written exam.

Turn Over for:

- Exams Information and Key Facts
- Hints and Tips
- Exam statistics
- Exam review
- E-Portfolio

Primary MCQ and Primary OSCE/SOE dates change from August 2013

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.

Opening the Final FRCA Exams to any doctors practising anaesthesia in the NHS

With effect from 1st September 2012 the Final FRCA components will be open to any doctor who is practising anaesthesia in the NHS (subject to certain criteria). See the website for further details.

Single Best Answers in the Primary MCQ

The Primary MCQ has a new format; 60 multiple true false (MTF) and 30 single best answer questions (SBA). The SBA questions reflect topics from all three current subsections. Full details can be found in the Examination Regulations Appendices 1 and 3.

Position of the Irish College

It is presently no longer the intention of the Irish College of Anaesthetists to seek GMC recognition of their examinations as an equivalent test of knowledge to the FRCA towards the granting of a UK CCT. Full details are available on the website.

Exams: Information and Key Facts

The Primary MCQ Exam

The Primary MCQ Exam dates for 2012 are: 7th February 2012, 12th June 2012 and 11th September 2012. The number of candidates who sat the Primary MCQ in September 2011 was 304. 217 passed (71.38%).

- * 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 your 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.

You are allowed five attempts at the Primary MCQ

The Next Primary MCQ Exam is 7th February Application is now closed

The following Primary MCQ exam is on **12th June 2012**

Application opening date: **5th March 2012**

Application closing date: **24th April 2012**

The Primary OSCE/SOE Exam

The Primary OSCE and SOE exam dates for 2012 are; w/c 16th January 2012, 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 October 2011 was 372. 200 passed the Primary exam a pass rate of 53.76% 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 16th January 2012** and runs through to **Saturday 21st January inclusive (applications for this are now closed)**

Exams: Information and Key Facts

The Final Written Exam

The Final Written Exam dates for 2012 are: 13th March and 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 September 2011 was 365. 249 passed (68.22%).

- * 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. 60×5 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 13th March 2012

Applications accepted from: 12th Dec 2011

Application closing date: 31st Jan 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.

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. It is estimated that 30 SBAs should take approximately one hour. The invigilator will give time checks, 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

23rd—26th April 2012

Course Code D26

Course Fee £280

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.

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 spread out across 6 booklets and 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 relevant curriculum (Final = Intermediate Level, although questions can be made up from competencies in the Basic level). The areas of the curriculum that are tested in exams are identified by the letter 'E'. These '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 You can call the dept direct on:

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.

Exams Statistics

The next issue of the Candidate will be available in May 2012

Primary MCQ

550 candidates sat the exam in June 2011. The pass rate was 349/550 (63.45%), compared with 49.4% in February 2011.

304 sat the September 2011 exam 217 (71.38%) passed and 87 (28.62%) failed.

Primary OSCE/SOE

372 candidates sat the exam in October. 200 passed the Primary exam (53.76%). The number of candidates sitting both parts was 307. 152 (49.51%) of these candidates passed the Primary. 21/24 sat and passed OSCE only and 27/41 sat and passed SOE only.

Final Written

365 candidates sat the September 2011 exam. 249 (68.22%) passed and 116 (31.78%) failed. The attendance rate at this sitting was the lowest so far and the pass rate was at its highest since Summer 2007. The pass rates for those on their first attempt was 79.31%.

Final SOE

359 sat the June 2011 exam and 211 (59%) passed. A total of 373 candidates presented for the December exam. 254 passed which is a pass rate of 68%.

Examinations Review

Recent changes and upheaval in Postgraduate Medical Education and Training (PMET), including transformations in recruitment, the impact of Working Time Regulations (WTR), the introduction of a new curriculum and the amalgamations of PMETB into the GMC, coupled with significant changes to the FRCA has necessitated a review of the FRCA set against the GMC Standards for Assessment. An Examinations Review Working Party (ERWP) was set up to consider all aspects of the FRCA and to report their findings/proposed actions to the RCoA Council.

The ERWP considered all aspects of the FRCA examinations from the perspectives of candidates, patients and examiners and from an educational viewpoint. Following their review, the ERWP proposed a number of actions to further improve the FRCA. Continual quality assurance processes have been implemented to ensure that feedback from questionnaires and reports are given full consideration and changes put in place where considered appropriate. Improvements will be made to the candidate experience as a result of this review and patient input into the FRCA will be reviewed. The many findings and considerations of the ERWP are set out in their report which is available on the College website. An article regarding the candidate survey carried out over the last 18 months will appear in the March issue of the Bulletin.

The FRCA Examinations are predominantly fit for purpose. They appropriately match and work alongside the training

E-Portfolio

programme and meet the GMC Standards for Assessment.

e-Portfolio News

The trainee e-Portfolio was launched on the 15th August 2011 and over 3338 trainee accounts have been created to date (the Schools of Anaesthesia decided which trainees were to use the e-Portfolio from the off-set). General take-up has been encouraging and 60% of the above 3338 trainees have now used the system.

e-Portfolio Updates

As part of the Phase 2 project, updates are scheduled for early 2012. Please see below for a summary of the main improvements:

Guest Assessor Approval for WPBAs – the facility will be added for a Workplace Based Assessment to be completed entirely from the trainee's access. The assessor will be able to enter their login details on the trainee's assessment page in order for them to comment and sign-off the assessment.

Appointments and Rotations – trainees will be able to keep a history of their appointments and rotations.

ARCP – the functionality for conducting ARCPs within the e-Portfolio will be made available. At present, we are planning to test and pilot this function in late January 2012. We will keep you posted when this function will be rolled out UK-wide.

Recommendation

Feedback so far suggests that the system is easy to use but it is important to note that the system does differ to other e-Portfolios you may have used. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with the training materials available on the College website: <http://www.rcoa.ac.uk/index.asp?PageID=1467>

In case of any queries please feel free to contact the e-Portfolio Support Team – e-Portfolio@rcoa.ac.uk