



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

Information and Guidance

BMS Stage A and C Examinations (GI/Gynae/Skin Pathology) 2020

EXAMINATIONS DEPARTMENT
THE ROYAL COLLEGE OF PATHOLOGISTS
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CONTENTS

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Purpose of the Stage A and C examinations
- 3 Entry criteria for the Stage A and C examinations
- 4 Format of the Stage A and C examinations question paper
- 5 Frequency of the Stage A and C examinations
- 6 Timing of the Stage A and C examinations
- 7 Applying for the examination
- 8 Fees
- 9 Closing date for applying
- 10 Withdrawal from the examination
- 11 Marking system
- 12 Notification of results
- 13 Feedback
- 14 Disability and special situations
- 15 Security at examination venues
- 16 Candidate misconduct
- 17 Rules
- 18 Equality and diversity - statement of intent
- 19 Appeals



1 INTRODUCTION

The Stage A and C BMS Examinations are for candidates in Stage A or C of the RCPATH/IBMS Advanced Specialist Diploma (ASD) in Histopathology Reporting - Gastrointestinal Tract (GI) Pathology, Gynaecological (Gynae) Pathology or Dermatopathology (Skin).

The examination is designed to test a candidate's applied knowledge and skills relevant to the curriculum. Candidates should be familiar with the curriculum.

Candidates must be registered with The Institute of Biomedical Science for the ASD before applying for the Stage A Examination.

2 PURPOSE OF THE STAGE A and C EXAMINATION

The purpose of the Stage A and C examination is to:

- 2.1 indicate the capability and potential of a candidate through a test of applied knowledge and skills relevant to the curriculum.
- 2.2 demonstrate a candidate's readiness to progress to the next stage of training.
- 2.3 measure a candidate'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.

3 ENTRY CRITERIA FOR THE STAGE A AND C EXAMINATIONS

In order to be eligible for the examination candidates should have either previously passed the portfolio or have submitted their portfolio for assessment for either the Stage A or Stage C of their programme as appropriate.

4 FORMAT OF THE STAGE A AND C EXAMINATION QUESTION PAPER

- 4.1 The Stage A 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.

In this stage the exam will involve a mixture of microscopic assessment of slides, macroscopic assessment of specimens and face to face stations. The face to face stations will require no written answers, but the other cases will take the form of short answers. For example, candidates may be required to write a histopathology report based on their assessment of the slide and then questions related to this pathologic process.

The examination will last three hours and is akin to the Stage A Examination the medical histopathology trainees sit. Both the portfolio and examination must be passed before a candidate can proceed to Stage B.

- 4.2 The Stage C examination is akin to the FRCPath Part 2 Histopathology examination and consists of several parts including OSPEs, Surgical Cases, Long Cases and Macros. One part involves the assessment of 20 cases which will be provided in ten pairs of haematoxylin



and eosin (H&E) stained slides in 20 minute slots over 3 hours and 20 minutes. The cases will include a mixture of neo-plastic and non-neo-plastic material. They will vary in difficulty from straightforward cases readily diagnosable on a single H&E section, more complex cases requiring more detailed description, differential diagnosis and special techniques, and cases not capable of diagnosis on a single H&E which should prompt an approach for further techniques, extra blocks and specialist opinions.

Another part involves four long cases which may include, for example, a number of H&E stained slides or a single H&E stained slide with immunohistochemistry sections. Twenty minutes is given for each case and candidates are expected to discuss the microscopic findings and additional material to make a final diagnosis or to discuss a differential diagnosis.

In a further part candidates will be provided with pictures of pathology specimens with clinical information and will be asked to prepare their responses to specific questions and to mark on the photographs where they would take blocks. Two x 20 minute slots will be provided to view a total of four cases followed by a 20-minute discussion with two examiners. Formal written reports are not required in this exercise, which is designed to allow candidates to demonstrate their capabilities in gross pathology and familiarity with block selection in the context of the RCPATH Minimum Datasets.

There will also be two x 20-minute Objective Structured Practical Examinations (OSPEs) one of which is conducted face-to-face with two examiners while the other is a written exercise only. Possible topics include management/clinical governance type and MDT type cases, although this list is not exhaustive.

The order that candidates will undertake these different parts of this examination will vary and will be dependent on the number of candidates.

5 FREQUENCY OF THE STAGE A AND C EXAMINATIONS

Candidates will have one opportunity in any one year of training to attempt and achieve a successful outcome in either the Stage A or Stage C examination. Candidates will have a maximum of four attempts at each of the examinations.

6 TIMING OF THE STAGE A AND C EXAMINATIONS

During 2020, the Stage A Examination will take place on **Friday 5 June** in Bristol. The Stage C examination will take place on **Tuesday 13 and Wednesday 14 October** in one of the venues where the FRCPath Part 2 Histopathology examination is being held.

7 APPLYING FOR THE STAGE A AND C EXAMINATIONS

In order to apply for the examination, candidates must complete the online application form, including the sponsor form signed by their training supervisor and payment.

Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

By signing the Stage A or Stage C application form, candidates and their supervisors confirm that they have read, understood and agree to abide by the content of this document. Candidates who apply and present themselves for the 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.

The application form will be available on the College website during the relevant application period (listed below).



8 FEES

The fee for the Stage A examination is £270.

The fee for the Stage C examination is £660.

The fee for the portfolio element of each stage is paid to the IBMS. Please see their website for further information.

9 CLOSING DATE FOR APPLYING

The application period for each of the examinations is as follows:

- Stage A: Monday 13 – Thursday 23 April
- Stage C: Friday 10 – Friday 24 July

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

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

10 WITHDRAWAL FROM THE STAGE A AND C EXAMINATION

Notification of withdrawal from the examination must be given to the Examinations Department in writing. This can be done by email.

Candidates who withdraw from the examination up to two weeks after the relevant closing date may have their fee refunded. **Candidates who withdraw later than two weeks after the relevant closing date will forfeit the entire fee.** Forfeiture of the fee will be waived only in exceptional circumstances.

Whilst candidates may withdraw up until the day before the examination, candidates should make every effort to provide as much notice as possible if they are unable to attend an examination.

Candidates 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 candidate 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, candidates 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.

Candidates who present themselves for the 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.



11 MARKING SYSTEM

The College has recruited the assistance of a Statistics Advisor to ensure that appropriate standard-setting is applied. 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 and C examinations, answer sheets will be double marked by two examiners.

There are two criteria required to pass the Stage A Examination. Candidates 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 examiners during the standard setting process held after the examination.

Candidates for the Stage C examination must pass all components in order to pass overall. Each section is marked separately against an agreed specimen answer and a pass or fail awarded for the section.

12 NOTIFICATION OF RESULTS

Following examinations, results will be posted to candidates via first class mail on:

- Stage A: Friday 3 July
- Stage C: Friday 20 November

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.

Results will be shared with the IBMS to ensure progression to the next stage of training.

13 FEEDBACK

Within the letter of notification of results, all candidates will be advised of the overall pass mark and their own personal pass mark. All candidates will also be advised of the areas passed and failed.

14 DISABILITY AND SPECIAL SITUATIONS

Candidates with a permanent or temporary disability (defined under the Equality 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 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 below for instructions.

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 (please see below for instructions). Although centre organisers and assessors/examiners will do their best to give candidates full consideration on the day, the 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.

15 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 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 assessor/examiner.

16 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 IBMS. 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.

17 RULES

- 17.1 The 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.
- 17.2 The 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.
- 17.3 Candidates arriving late will not be permitted to attempt the examination.
- 17.4 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.
- 17.5 Candidates who need to take medication during the examination should inform the examiners before the start of the examination.



- 17.6 In the event of an emergency, candidates must follow the instructions given by the examiners. Candidates must maintain silence throughout the examination.
- 17.7 Candidates must not remove any of the examination materials from the venue. Removal of any material will result in disqualification.
- 17.8 If, for any reason, a candidate is unable to attend the scheduled examination, they should contact the Examinations Department at The Royal College of Pathologists on 020 7451 6700 before the scheduled start time. 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.
- 17.9 Eating or drinking is not allowed in the examination room.

18 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.

19 APPEALS

A candidate who has taken the 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 assessor/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.

