

Background and Context

The changes made to the Part 2 Medical Microbiology exam in 2017 removed the 'wet' practical component and shortened the format from 3.5 to 2 days in length. As a result, its intensity substantially increased, with a greater amount of material covered in four exam papers over a 2-day period. The result of the 2017 changes is that candidates have become relatively 'over-assessed', with consequences for the stress placed on candidates and resources used.

Revised format

The revised format will be introduced in the Autumn 2021 exam session and will reduce the exam to two papers. This involves changing the 2017 format as follows:

1. Removing the essay question from the examination.
2. Removing the question on critical appraisal of a journal article from the examination.
3. Reducing the number of multi-part SAQs from twenty to ten.
4. Reducing the number of multi-part complex scenario questions from ten to five.

The revised 2021 format is summarised below:

Component	Time allowed	Format
Paper 1 – written exam	3 hours	Five complex clinical and laboratory scenarios in microbiology and infection prevention. Each scenario requires assimilation of a clinical history or an infection prevention narrative, critical interpretation of laboratory results and will, typically, comprise 7-10 questions. AND Ten short-answer questions (SAQs). Each SAQ will, typically, comprise 4-5 questions relating to a topic. SAQs will focus on a clinical scenario, infection prevention topic, laboratory practice point, and/or laboratory safety.
Paper 2 - OSPE	3 hours	Objective structured pathology examination (OSPE). This will retain the same format as the OSPE component of the current exam. It will comprise 15 stations, each of 9 minutes' duration (plus a variable number of rest stations). Topics will usually include laboratory practice, clinical infection scenarios, infection prevention, data interpretation and research methods. At least two of the 15 stations will be in face-to-face spoken format and include assessment of candidates' communication ability.

Each of the two papers will carry approximately equal weighting. Candidates' marks from papers one & two will be combined, such that candidates may compensate for a low score in one of these papers with a high score in the other.

It is envisaged that both papers will usually be taken on the same day – though not necessarily in the order listed above. The scheduling arrangements for the papers will be confirmed in advance for each exam sitting.