



The Royal College of **Pathologists**

Pathology: the science behind the cure

College examinations for Fellowship

Regulations and guidelines for 2023

Candidates undertaking written projects for the Part 2 examination

January 2023

(superseding all previous editions)

Guidance for candidates undertaking written projects for the Part 2 examination

General guidance applicable to all written projects

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All communications and enquiries should be addressed to:

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Website: <https://www.rcpath.org/trainees/examinations.html>

General guidance applicable to all written projects

1 Introduction

This document must be read in conjunction with the current Regulations & Guidelines available on the College website www.rcpath.org.

Candidates for certain specialties are required to undertake a written project for the Part 2 examination. There are six options:

- dissertation
- casebook
- published papers
- PhD/MD thesis
- professional doctorate research thesis
- portfolio

Candidates should read carefully the specific instructions in the relevant specialty section for guidance on which of the six options is appropriate for their specialty.

2 Initial Proposal

Candidates **must** submit **an initial proposal** for their dissertation, casebook and published papers (or, if possible, before commencing a course leading to a PhD/MD thesis) for approval **prior to commencing the project**.

The initial proposal should outline the project (background, aims, methods and significance of the study) and include approval of a relevant ethics committee where appropriate. It must be no more than 1500 words.

PhD/MD submissions follow a different format, please see the guidance below.

Project proposals must be submitted by e-mail (exams@rcpath.org) to the Examinations Department. There is no specific format for this.

3 Submitting the project

The **finished project** can only be submitted to the College **after** success in the Part 1 examination.

Candidates will need to submit the following:

- A completed 'Part 2 written project' application form, available on our [website](#)
- An up to date CV
- A copy of the approved proposal
- The finished project document
- Electronic copies of **all** the above to exams@rcpath.org. Please **do not** submit hard copies.

PhD/MD submissions follow a different format, please see the guidance below.

Candidates must submit their finished project no more than three years after the original proposal was accepted. Candidates who do not submit within this time will be required to apply for an extension (giving reasons why the work has not been submitted within this time) or submit a new proposal.

In **Forensic Pathology only**, the finished project must be submitted at least four months before the entry closing date (which are in January and July) of the Part 2 examination for which the candidate wishes to enter. The College cannot guarantee that an amended submission (if required) will be marked in time for the candidate to undertake the examination if it is submitted later than this.

In **all other specialties**, candidates whose first application to sit the FRCPath Part 2 practical and/or oral is after Autumn 2019 will not be permitted to sit the practical/oral exam until they have submitted their project proposal. Proposals must be submitted before the closing deadline for the examination session in which the candidate wishes to sit. Candidates should consult the relevant specialty regulations for further information about the timing of the written component in relation to the practical and oral Part 2 examinations.

Further information on examination periods and dates is available on Exams section of the College website (<https://www.rcpath.org/trainees/examinations.html>).

Initial proposals and finished projects must be submitted to the Examinations Department and **not** to an individual examiner.

All written projects will be subject to scanning for improper citation or plagiarism using source-matching software.

4 Marking systems used for written projects

Written projects are marked by assigning to it one of three grades:

A= pass

B= modification or additional work is required (in forensic pathology and toxicology this may mean there will be a delay before they can sit Part 2 final examination). C = unacceptable.

Candidates will be informed of the grade awarded as soon as possible after the examiners have reached their decision. A candidate awarded a grade C will be contacted by the Chair of the Panel of Examiners and required to seek the advice of their speciality advisor.

Further information on marking written projects is available in Exams section (candidate information) of the College website (<https://www.rcpath.org/trainees/examinations.html>)

5 Entering the Part 2 examination

Applications for the Part 2 examination in Forensic Pathology may be submitted whilst the written option is still under consideration by examiners, but entry to the examination will **not** be confirmed until the written option has been awarded a pass mark. Candidates who withdraw from their Part 2 examination while their written option is under consideration will not forfeit their fee.

Candidates in all other specialties may apply for the Part 2 practical/oral examination while their proposal is still under consideration by the examiners, but entry to the examination may not be confirmed until the proposal has been accepted.

6 Communication about submitted written projects

Candidates must direct all communications and enquiries about their submitted written project to the Examinations Department (exams@rcpath.org). Candidates must not contact any member of the panel of examiners unless specifically instructed to do so by the Examinations Department. To attempt to do so will be regarded as possible misconduct.

Specific requirements for each written project option

7 Dissertation

A dissertation is an option for the Part 2 examination in Clinical Biochemistry, Genetics, Haematology Clinical Science, Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, Immunology, Molecular Pathology and Toxicology.

The purpose of the dissertation is to allow assessment of the practical ability of candidates, based on work performed in the department in which they are employed, and of their ability to report and assess the significance of their findings. It is a test of the ability to analyse, criticise and present data.

It follows that the project should arise from the normal work and interests of the department in which the candidate is employed. Medical candidates may wish to choose a topic that relates laboratory data to the investigation and management of patients, whilst non-medical candidates may wish to choose a topic oriented towards analytical work. In either case, there should be a considerable input of the use of results obtained in the course of the ordinary work of the candidate's laboratory.

The overall standard of the dissertation should be such that it is suitable for publication in a professional scientific journal.

A word-processed proposal describing the background to, and the object of the intended study, together with details of the proposed experimental work and the name and address of the proposed supervisor, **must be submitted to the College for approval, prior to commencing the project.** Acceptance of the project by the College at this stage will prevent time being wasted on a project that is not acceptable.

The College currently asks for modifications to a substantial number of projects, so approval is advisable prior to performing any practical work.

Projects that are not relevant to the specialty, lack an adequate element of practical work or are so ambitious as to be unrealistic **will not** be approved. A copy of the approved proposal will be sent to the assessors with the dissertation.

The project and the writing of the dissertation should normally be carried out under the supervision of a Fellow of the College. Where this is not possible, the candidate should give the name of the head of department for consideration by the Chair of the Panel of Examiners. Supervisors are required to certify that the candidate has personally carried out the investigative work. This requirement should not be taken to exclude the possibility of using or including results of tests produced in the course of the normal work of the laboratory, provided this is acknowledged in the dissertation.

The dissertation must be written in English and must be 4000–6000 words in length (excluding bibliography), with relevant illustrations and tables interleaved appropriately with the text. It must be word-processed in double-spacing (except for the references) and an electronic version of the final document attached to an email and sent to exams@rcpath.org.

The dissertation should be prefaced by a short abstract of the contents and a declaration stating what part, if any, of the work has been submitted in support of an application for another qualification and the personal contribution of the candidate to the practical work presented. It should normally state the problem that has been investigated, indicate the scope of the enquiry, include a relevant history of the subject, describe the methods used for exploring the problem, set out the data collected, include an analysis of the findings and attempt to deduce conclusions.

A dissertation may include published material or be based on work done for a higher degree, provided that the work was done during the candidate's period of training and they made a major contribution to it. Findings from publications or theses must not be reported verbatim, but presented in a different way and augmented by further work. Reprints of the relevant publications must be appended. The examiners attach great importance to the quality of presentation and dissertations containing more than occasional typographical errors will be returned for correction.

See Appendix 1 for additional advice about submitting a dissertation.

8 Casebook

A casebook may be presented as an option for the Part 2 examination in Genetics, Haematology Clinical Science, Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, Immunology, Molecular Pathology, Reproductive Science, Toxicology and is compulsory in Forensic Pathology.

Candidates should refer to the relevant specialty guidelines for the number of cases required.

The standard of writing should be equivalent to that expected for publication as a case report in a professional scientific journal. An electronic version of the final document

should be attached to an email and sent to exams@rcpath.org. It must be word processed in English, double-spaced apart from the references. Further guidance about the length of the casebook and the detail required is given in the relevant speciality sections. Relevant photographs, illustrations and tables should be interleaved appropriately with the text. Word limits are specified in the relevant speciality guidelines.

Supervisors are required to confirm that the candidate has made a major contribution to the cases and candidates will be expected to make clear their personal involvement in each case.

References to other publications and any scientific or technical help should be acknowledged.

The casebook should include discussion of the significance of various findings and a survey of the relevant literature.

The College appreciates that it may be desirable to publish work before it is submitted to the College. There is no objection to this, provided that:

- a statement is included in the casebook indicating which parts of the work have been published and giving appropriate references
- the major part of the work has been carried out by the candidate during the training period
- the casebook does not simply reproduce the published work, but incorporates the published material in a revised, amplified or extended form
- the candidate is the major contributor to the relevant publications (this usually means that the candidate is the first named author).

9 Published papers

Published papers may be submitted as an option for the Part 2 examination in Clinical Biochemistry, Reproductive Science, Genetics, Haematology Clinical Science, Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, Immunology, Molecular Pathology and Toxicology. Papers in press may be accepted.

As a general guide, a minimum of three papers is expected. Three publications by the candidate as sole author might be sufficient, but proportionately more multi-author papers will be required. Papers will be judged on their quality and on the candidate's contribution and, in cases of multi-author papers, the extent and nature of the candidate's contribution should be clearly indicated and certified by the sponsor.

Published papers submitted for the Part 2 examination in any speciality must be in English and must demonstrate original research by the candidate, reflecting a theme or themes. They should be linked by a critical commentary, written by the candidate. A collection of unrelated case reports is not acceptable. The bulk of the work should have been undertaken during the training period in pathology. When multi-author papers are submitted, the sponsor is required to comment specifically on the contribution by the candidate to each paper.

Electronic copies of all publications must be submitted to exams@rcpath.org, with a full list in chronological order of the publications, together with a full CV of the applicant and application form.

10 PhD/MD thesis

A PhD/MD thesis or equivalent may be submitted, together with confirmation of the award from the relevant university, as an option for the Part 2 examination in Clinical Biochemistry, Genetics, Haematology Clinical Science, Histocompatibility and Immunogenetics, Immunology, Molecular Pathology, Reproductive Science and Toxicology.

A thesis submitted as part of the Part 2 examination in any specialty should normally have been awarded during, or immediately before entering, training in the specialty and must demonstrate an ability to make use of laboratory and/or clinical techniques that are of relevance to the specialty.

Candidates should first submit the PhD/MD abstract, along with a full CV, for assessment of its suitability for the Part 2. Once the abstract is approved, candidates will need to submit confirmation of the award from the relevant university, a completed application form, and one copy of the thesis **if requested**.

Candidates are advised to submit the abstract as soon as possible after registering for the Part 1 examination, to ensure that, should it not be acceptable, there is sufficient time to plan and undertake a dissertation.

11 Professional doctorate research thesis

Candidates who are undertaking a course leading to a professional doctorate (DClinSci) as part of the HSST programme must submit their project proposal (see section 2) to the relevant university, who will arrange for the proposal to be reviewed and approved by the College in order to ensure that it would also satisfy the requirements for an FRCPPath dissertation (see section 7).

Upon completion, the research project will be assessed by the university, who will confirm satisfactory completion direct with the Examinations Department for approval by the Examinations Committee.

A research thesis already completed during study for a professional doctorate may be submitted together with confirmation of the award from the relevant university, as an option for the Part 2 examination in appropriate specialties.

Appendix 1

Additional advice for candidates submitting a dissertation

The following notes are designed to help candidates avoid common pitfalls in the design of dissertation projects and in the finished document.

General notes

- a) Candidates are strongly advised to consult their supervisor at all stages of the project to ensure that time is not lost on projects turned down by a Research Ethics Committee or by the College because of inadequate submission or poor design.
- b) Candidates are strongly advised to have their dissertation read through by their supervisor or another experienced scientist, to ensure that errors are corrected and the dissertation is of an appropriate quality for submission.

Dissertation proposal

- a) Candidates should note that the dissertation proposal is an essential element of preparing the work for the dissertation. It should provide at least as much information as would be required for a research proposal for a grant.
- b) Proposals including laboratory work for the dissertation should include reasonable detail of methods, especially if these are new. These should be referenced where possible.
- c) Proposals including the use of patient samples should give details of the patient groups selected, inclusion and exclusion criteria, and details of clinical assessments that will be undertaken on the patients.
- d) Candidates are advised that research involving patients will require the approval of an Ethics Committee. Candidates are strongly advised to take advice from the local Ethics Committee on this before submitting dissertation proposals.
- e) Where methods are being compared, each of the samples needs to be subjected to all methods being compared without prior selection to ensure there is no bias through sample selection.
- f) Where the utility of a test for diagnosis or to guide treatment is being assessed in relation to a gold standard, ideally all patients should be submitted to both the gold standard assessment and the test under investigation. Selecting only patients for the gold standard test who prove positive by the candidate test assumes 100% sensitivity for the test, which is usually an unwarranted assumption.
- g) Candidates are reminded that although previously published work can be included within a dissertation, this publication should not be repeated verbatim but presented in a different way and accompanied by additional work that the candidate has undertaken.

Submission of the dissertation

- a) Candidates should note that the most common reason for rejection of dissertations is poor quality of the written work.

- b) Candidates should check that their dissertation complies with the recommendations on format contained in these guidelines.
- c) Dissertations with anything more than the occasional spelling mistake, misplaced word or other errors of presentation will be returned for correction.
- d) Candidates should take care to ensure that, in the finished document, figures are not divorced from their legends, titles of sections do not appear at the bottom of pages and the size of figures and tables renders them legible.
- e) Candidates are especially advised to check all references in the text very carefully, to ensure that the numbers refer to the correct reference listed at the end.
- f) Candidates are reminded that where they have used a new method or adapted an existing method, sufficient details should be included for the method to be followed exactly by a scientist in another laboratory.