

Please visit the [RCPsych exams](#) website for up-to-date information on the College membership (MRCPsych) examination.

Curriculum

The new curriculum for psychiatric training has been designed to ensure that a high standard of training is accomplished using a patient-based and learner-centred approach. The curriculum defines the competencies, professional behaviour and attitudes which psychiatrists should acquire and demonstrate in their clinical practice.

Workplace-based assessments (WPBAs) will take place throughout the 6 years of specialist training and competencies will be rated according to the level of training. Psychiatrists in training must register with the Royal College of Psychiatrists' [Portfolio Online](#) and complete their mandatory WPBAs. The evidence collected in the assessments will form part of the annual review of competence progression (ARCP), at which educational supervisors and College tutors review your training.

MRCPsych examination

The Examinations Unit within the College is responsible for the organisation of the written and clinical MRCPsych examinations. The MRCPsych examinations consist of two written papers – A, B and the Clinical Assessment of Skills and Competencies (CASC). Each paper is 3 hours long and contains approximately 200 questions, multiple-choice questions (MCQs) and extended matching items (EMIs). The balance of the two types of questions will vary but will be approximately two-thirds MCQs and one-third EMIs.

- [MRCPsych Paper A](#): the scientific and theoretical basis of psychiatry.
- [MRCPsych Paper B](#): critical review and the clinical topics in psychiatry. The critical review component will make up one-third of the paper, with the remaining two-thirds covering clinical topics (of which approximately 30% will be general adult psychiatry).

The written papers are followed by CASC. This is a 16-station examination, testing candidates' competency in clinical skills, appropriate to their stage of training. The examination is split into two sets of eight stations. One set comprises stations linked in pairs;

the clinical task in the first station will be linked to a related task in the second station. The other set is made up of individual 'stand-alone' stations. Membership of the College is the accepted qualification for entry into higher training in psychiatry.

The [current syllabus](#) and the [critical review syllabus](#) can be found on the [RCPsych exams](#) website.

The CASC examination can be taken after successful completion of Papers A and B and if you have a minimum of 24 months' experience in post-foundation training in psychiatry. Trainees are advised to start studying early in their specialist training years and to pace their studies throughout training.

The Examinations Unit is responsible for processing candidate enquiries, applications, entry and allocation to examination centres and the publication of final results, as well as recruitment, induction and training of College examiners.

The question papers are prepared by the panels responsible for each paper. All results are monitored and determined by the College's Examinations Sub-Committee. Regular reports are presented to the Education and Training Committee to ensure that standards are maintained. The Head of Examinations Operations is responsible for the overall management and delivery of the Unit's activities and manages the examinations team. Further details regarding exams regulations can be found on the College website.

Tips

- Find the best books/training materials.
- Find a place to study that is quiet and comfortable.
- Build on your existing knowledge base and experience.
- Think about your personal learning style and use this to plan effective revision – make notes or mind maps to aid learning and revision.
- Set aside a regular time to study.
- Allow time for preparation and breaks from studying.
- Keep a balance between work and personal life.

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Preparation

The following tips may help you go through the assessments and examinations more easily.

- Start preparing early in order to plan an effective revision programme.
- Study the curriculum.
- Plan when you are going to take the examinations (take account of your personal circumstances).
- Seek advice from those who have already passed the exam, especially those who have done so recently.
- Create your own study programme.
- Plan your application for study leave/revision courses.
- Form a study group with others who are also preparing for the exam.
- Practise scenarios for the CASC with others who have done the exam before.
- Plan regular breaks away from the place you are studying in your revision period.

Study skills and techniques

Postgraduate examinations require a significantly greater depth and breadth of knowledge than undergraduate examinations. Passing the MRCPsych examination requires learning large amounts of information.

It is important to reinforce memory by **revising** and by practising recall. **Clinical scenarios** are useful especially for the CASC – it can be helpful to practise these with others and to observe others practising too in order to obtain feedback.

Belonging to a **study group** may help you reduce your workload of finding information and enable you to share experience and provide support to each other. Study groups also aid reflection on progress.

It is important to discuss learning and your progress with your **educational supervisor**. If you lack experience or would benefit from more training in a particular area, make sure these educational needs are addressed.

Practice

Core competencies are the basis of the new format for training so it is important to use every opportunity to learn and practise clinical skills. Practise a variety of scenarios to prepare for the WPBAs. Other mental health professionals will be involved in these assessments and trainees will need skills in team-working.

Tips

- Find out what is required at your level of training.
- Try not to get downhearted if you do not achieve high marks in the early stages of training. Your marks should improve during training.
- Plan your WPBAs at the beginning of each post and relate this to your learning objectives.
- Keep the necessary paperwork to hand.
- Keep a record of WPBAs.
- Obtain feedback and take steps to improve your performance.

Theory

The core curriculum has sections which must be covered. There are various ways of approaching this – some trainees skim all sections and then return to studying specific topics in depth, others methodically study each section in turn before moving to the next. Choose the method that works best for you.

Stress management

Although the time frame for training has been set, trainees will

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Tips

- Identify your support network of family and friends.
- Talk to your clinical and educational supervisor.
- Develop coping strategies to deal with anxiety.
- Stay healthy by looking after your body and mind.
- Maintain a work/life balance.

Administration

Ensure that you apply to take the examinations in plenty of time, as forms must be completed and returned to the College. On the examination day, make sure that you arrive at the examination venue in good time.

If you are not successful

There may be various reasons why you were not successful and it is important to find out why it happened so you can address the issues. You will receive **feedback** from the College's Professional Standards Department. It is also advisable to seek advice from your College **tutor** and your **educational supervisor** – listen carefully to their suggestions and make notes so that you can look over them later. If you have failed a particular part of the examination, ensure that this area is an identified **learning need**. While you focus on this area, continue to revise the other sections of the curriculum with a range of consultants. This should help you to regain your confidence. Changes may be needed in your knowledge base, skills or attitude and you may need to widen your clinical experience.

Further reading

Bhugra D (2006) The new curriculum for psychiatric training. *Advances in Psychiatric Treatment*, 12, 393–396.

Bhugra D, Malik A, Brown N (2007) Workplace-Based Assessments in Psychiatry. Gaskell.

Cormac I, Marston G (1999) How to pass the MRCPsych examination. *Psychiatric Bulletin*, 23, 172–176.

You can find information about all our other support resources at our [Wellbeing hub](#).

Psychiatrists support service

The information in this guide is not a substitute for professional advice. If you need further advice and support, please contact the Psychiatrists' Support Service on 020 8618 4020 or pss@rcpsych.ac.uk ©2023 The Royal College of Psychiatrists www.rcpsych.ac.uk/pss