

Regulations for the Intercollegiate Membership Examination of the Surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain and in Ireland

Updated March 2023

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The examination syllabus and the format and content of this examination are common to all four colleges. (i.e. The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh, The Royal College of Surgeons of England, The Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Glasgow and the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland.)
- 1.2 Candidates can enter any part of the examination through any college, but may enter with only one college at each sitting. Any candidate who has entered an examination with more than one of the four colleges at the same sitting will forfeit the fee for each additional application.
- 1.3 Upon successful completion of all parts of the examination, candidates will be eligible for election as Members of the College at which they have applied for and passed Part B of the examination, irrespective of where the examination is held.

2. The Examination

The Intercollegiate MRCS examination, under these regulations, comprises two parts as follows:

2.1 Part A Multiple Choice Questions (MCQ)

- 2.1.1 The Part A is a five hour MCQ examination consisting of a three hour paper (Applied Basic Science) followed by a two hour paper (Principles of Surgery in General), taken on the same day.
- 2.1.2 The marks for both papers are combined to give a total mark for Part A.
- 2.1.3 The papers sat at each of the colleges at any particular sitting are identical and are held simultaneously.
- 2.1.4 The papers cover generic surgical sciences and applied knowledge, including the core knowledge required in all nine specialties as follows:

Paper 1 - Applied Basic Sciences MCQ paper

Paper 2 - Principles of Surgery-in-General MCQ paper
- 2.1.5 To achieve a pass in Part A, the candidate will be required to demonstrate a minimum level of competence in each of the two papers in addition to achieving or exceeding the pass mark set for the combined total mark for Part A.

2.2 Part B Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE)

2.2.1 Part B consists of an Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).

2.2.2 The OSCE will normally consist of seventeen examined stations each of nine minutes' duration. These stations will examine the following broad content areas:

1. Applied Knowledge - consisting of anatomy, surgical pathology, applied surgical science and critical care
2. Applied Skills - consisting of communication skills in giving and receiving information, history taking and clinical & procedural skills

2.2.3 There may, in addition, be one or more preparation stations and one station that is being pre-tested. This pre-testing station will not contribute towards the final mark of the examination. Candidates will not be informed which station is being pre-tested.

2.2.4 To facilitate the assessment of non-verbal communication skills and interaction with the examiner and patient (or actor in the role of the patient as the case may be), the colleges will require candidates for the duration of the stations in question for the Part B (OSCE) to remove any clothing and/or other item which covers all, or part of, the candidate's face.

2.3 All parts of the examination will be conducted in English.

3. Entry to the Examination - Eligibility

3.1. The Intercollegiate MRCS examination of the Surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain and in Ireland will be held under these regulations at least three times each year.

3.2 To enter the examination, a candidate **must** possess a primary medical qualification that is acceptable to the United Kingdom General Medical Council for Full or Provisional Registration or to the Medical Council in Ireland for Full or Temporary Registration; overseas candidates must hold a primary medical qualification acceptable to the Councils of the colleges. Prospective candidates who wish to check the acceptability of their medical degrees should see the World Directory of Medical Schools on <http://search.wdoms.org/>. If the medical school does not appear on this list, candidates should contact the examinations department/section at the college to which they wish to apply for the examination for further clarification. Candidates who have previously entered Part A with one college and then apply to a different college will also have to supply full details, as set out here, to the new college.

- 3.3 Candidates who have been erased from the GMC register (or that of an equivalent international body) for reasons related to fitness to practise are not permitted entry to any MRCS examination.

Candidates who are suspended from practice by the GMC (or equivalent international body) and/or their employer are not permitted to apply for entry to any MRCS examination until the suspension has been lifted.

Candidates who are subject to any warnings, interim orders, undertakings or conditions on their practice from the GMC (or equivalent international body) and/or their employer must declare this information to the relevant College upon applying to any MRCS examination. Candidates are also required to disclose information as to why the condition or undertaking has been imposed. Any information provided may be checked with GMC (or equivalent) and/or their employer. This will be reviewed by the relevant College prior to the examination and will be taken into account in deciding whether a candidate is permitted to sit the examination. The relevant College's decision on these matters is final.

Candidates should note that failure to declare conditions, warnings, or suspension as required:

- at the time of application
- prior to the examination date for which they have entered, or
- when applying for election to membership

will result in penalties being applied as defined in the Intercollegiate Code of Conduct and Intercollegiate Misconduct regulations.

- 3.4 **First time applicants whose names do not appear on the Registers of the UK General Medical Council or Medical Council in Ireland** must submit their original certificate (or an authenticated copy) of a primary medical qualification acceptable to the Councils of the four Colleges (see note under paragraph 3.2 above on checking eligibility of primary medical qualifications).

Candidates following through under older regulations - June 2006 Regulations, revised April 2009 and September 2007- August 2008

- 3.5 Any candidate who has passed Part A of the Intercollegiate MRCS examination must complete the requirements of the MRCS examination by applying to sit Part B (OSCE) under these regulations.
- 3.6 The Intercollegiate MRCS examination under these regulations may be taken by those who are not in recognised training posts.
- 3.7 Candidates must pass Part A before applying to sit Part B (OSCE).
- 3.8 Candidates who fail the Part B (OSCE) are not required to re-sit Part A.
- 3.9 Candidates who fail the Part B (OSCE) are required to re-sit all stations of the Part B (OSCE) in order to meet the requirements of these regulations.
- 3.10 Number of Attempts

- 3.10.1 Candidates are allowed up to six attempts at the MRCS Part A (with effect from April 2013).
- 3.10.2 Candidates are allowed up to four attempts at MRCS Part B (OSCE).
- 3.10.3 One additional attempt may be granted under the Additional Attempt Policy
- 3.10.4 An attempt is defined as an occasion when a candidate commences, but not necessarily completes, the MRCS Part A, MRCS Part B (OSCE), MRCS Part B (OCC), MRCS (ENT) OSCE or Part 2 of the DO-HNS examination for the award of MRCS (ENT).

4. Timing

- 4.1. The number of attempts is defined in 3.10 above. Failure to pass the Examination within the permitted number of attempts as defined in 3.10 above will debar the candidate from applying for any component/part of the MRCS examination under these, or any other regulations.
- 4.2 Any candidate entering any part of the MRCS under these regulations are required to pass Part B of the examination within seven years of passing Part A or seven years from passing the second component of Part 1 or Part 2 of the Regulations dated June 2006 (revised April 2009).
- 4.3 Candidates who do not pass the MRCS Part B (OSCE) within seven years of passing the MRCS Part A (MCQ) will be required to take and pass the MRCS Part A (MCQ) examination again. Candidates who re-enter the MRCS Part A (MCQ) examination and pass will have a further seven years in which to pass the MRCS Part B (OSCE).
 - 4.3.1 In this instance, candidates re-starting the MRCS will not have the number of attempts defined in section 3.10 above re-set. Instead, candidates will have the number of attempts remaining at each part or component of the exam in which to complete each part or component. For example, if a candidate had passed the MRCS Part A (MCQ) on their third attempt and had made two attempts at the MRCS Part B (OSCE) before becoming time-expired under regulation 4.2 above, the candidate will then have three attempts to pass the MRCS Part A (MCQ) and two attempts to pass the MRCS Part B (OSCE).
 - 4.3.2 In the event that a candidate re-starting the MRCS passed the MRCS Part A on their sixth attempt, they would have a single further attempt in which to pass the MRCS Part A.
- 4.4 Candidates who entered the examination under the Regulations June 2006 revised April 2009 had 3½ years in which to complete all parts of the examination dating from their first attempt at Part 2. This regulation applied even if they chose to sit Part 2 before Part 1. If all parts of the exam were not completed within 3½ years from the first attempt at Part 2, the candidate became time-expired.

Candidates who are “time-expired” in the Intercollegiate MRCS examination of the Surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain and Ireland (Regulations June 2006 revised April 2009) or the Collegiate MRCS, are not permitted to sit Part A or Part B of the Intercollegiate MRCS examination of the Surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain.

- 4.5 Candidates who have passed any component or part of the MRCS examination will not be permitted to re-sit the same component or part with any of the Colleges unless under the circumstances defined in regulation 4.3 above.

5. Admission to the Examination

- 5.1 Candidates should consult individual college websites or contact the examinations department/section of the relevant college for details of dates and venues for examinations. Details of the examinations department/section of each of the four colleges are to be found at the end of the regulations.

- 5.2 Application for entry to any part of the examination must:

- 5.2.1 be made on the appropriate (paper or electronic version) application form;
- 5.2.2 be accompanied by the specific examination fee payment, which must be received in full by the relevant college before a candidate is entered for the examination;
- 5.2.3 reach the examinations department/section of the appropriate college by the date specified in the examinations calendar.

Applications received after the closing date may be returned.

- 5.3 Candidates are not permitted to apply for an MRCS Part B examination when the exam sitting commencement date falls within six weeks of an examination date previously entered. This regulation is applicable across all four Surgical Colleges. Candidates who enter for an examination, with any College, within six weeks of a previous examination will forfeit their fee.
- 5.4 If, exceptionally, a candidate is permitted to enter the examination without first having paid the specified examination fee and fails thereafter to pay the fee, the candidate shall not be permitted to take any further part with any Surgical Royal College without payment of the outstanding fee or, if the unpaid fee relates to such a candidate’s final part of the examination, the relevant college reserves the right not to mark or assess that part of the examination or not allow the candidate to proceed to Membership of the relevant college in accordance with these regulations.
- 5.5 The colleges reserve the right, regardless of eligibility to take the examination, to review applications on an individual basis in exceptional circumstances.
- 5.6 The colleges reserve the right to make recordings of the examinations for the purposes of quality assurance and training.

6. Proof of Identity

- 6.1 Candidates must bring proof of identity to each examination. Proof of identity must be an official document, such as a current passport or driver's licence that includes the candidate's name, signature and photograph.
- 6.2 For the purposes of visual identification, any candidate sitting any examination will be required to remove any clothing and/or other item which covers all, or part of, the candidate's face. The colleges will observe sensitivity and, in specific circumstances privacy in the visual identification of candidates. Entry to the examination will not be granted unless visual identification has taken place.

7. Withdrawal from the Examination

- 7.1 A candidate who withdraws in writing an application for admission to any part of the examination may be refunded the fee paid (less an administrative fee of 20%), provided that notice of an intention to withdraw is received by the examinations department/section before the closing date by which applications are due, as shown in the examinations calendar. No refunds are normally made to candidates who withdraw after the closing date.
- 7.2 Applications for consideration of a refund on medical grounds must be accompanied by a medical certificate and must cover the date of the examination. The application must be submitted within 14 days of the commencement of the examination. Applications approved on these grounds will be refunded 80% of the fee.
- 7.3 Applications for a refund on bereavement grounds must be accompanied by a death certificate and must be submitted within 14 days of the commencement of the examination. Applications will be considered for immediate family members only. Applications approved on these grounds will be refunded 100% of the fee.
- 7.4 Applications for consideration of a refund on compassionate grounds should be supported by the College or Clinical Tutor or the Assigned Educational Supervisor and the Head of the School of Surgery.
All such applications must be submitted to the examinations department/section of the appropriate college within 14 days of the commencement of the examination and will be refunded 80% of the fee.

From August 2022 onwards, candidates who withdraw on the grounds of having tested positive for Covid-19 and wish to apply for a refund (less an administrative fee of 20%) should provide evidence in the form of a letter from their consultant/trainer to confirm that they had been too ill to work at the time of the examination.

- 7.5 For information on pregnancy and deferral see paragraph 12.
- 7.6 Candidates with special needs should advise the appropriate college at the time of application of the nature of their needs and any assistance that they require. Requests should be supported by medical evidence (an educational psychologist's report is required for requests for extra time because of dyslexia).

If appropriate, details of extra time or other allowances made by other examining bodies should be given, although the colleges are not bound to follow these.

- 7.7 Candidates should note that the four Royal Surgical Colleges operate a 'Fit to Sit' policy; if a candidate attends and takes an examination, they are declaring themselves fit to sit the examination and they will not be able to subsequently claim that their performance was affected by mitigating circumstances. Candidates will therefore need to take responsibility for deciding in advance whether they are unwell or facing other significant mitigating circumstances.

8. Results

Results will be placed on the website and sent out in the post by the examinations department/section of the college through which the candidate entered.

Anonymised result data will be analysed for the purposes of standard setting, and anonymised result data may also be used for research purposes.

Result outcome data for UK trainees will be passed to HEE, on behalf of the four statutory education bodies, for recruitment purposes.

9. Feedback

Candidates will receive a breakdown of their marks for both Parts of the examination. No further feedback is available.

10. Appeals Mechanism

Details of the appeals process and fees charged may be obtained from the appropriate college.

11. Improper Conduct by Examination Candidates

- 11.1 In the case of improper conduct of an examination candidate, as defined below, the colleges acting jointly may impose a penalty relating to the candidate's eligibility for the relevant or future examinations. Improper conduct is defined as:

11.1.1 Dishonestly obtaining or attempting to obtain entry to the examination by making false claims about eligibility for the examination, or falsifying any aspects of the entry documentation.

11.1.2 Obtaining or seeking to obtain unfair advantage during an examination, or inciting other candidates to do the same. Examples of unfair advantage are:

11.1.2.1 having on the person any material that would give advantage in an examination once the examination has commenced (this includes electronic communication devices);

- 11.1.2.2 communicating, or attempting to communicate, with another candidate, once the examination has commenced;
- 11.1.2.3 refusing to follow the instructions given by invigilators, examiners or examinations staff concerning the conduct of, and procedure for, the examination.

This list is not exhaustive.

- 11.1.3 Removing or attempting to remove from the examination any confidential material relating to the examination.
- 11.1.4 Obtaining or attempting to obtain confidential information concerning the examination from an examiner or examination official.
- 11.1.5 Passing confidential information on the content of the examination to a third party.
- 11.1.6 Seeking to gain prior knowledge from, or provide knowledge to, other examination candidates on content of the examination.

This list is not exhaustive.

- 11.2 If a candidate is found to have acted improperly, his/her name may be reported to his/her national authority. The colleges may also on an individual basis decide that a candidate should not be allowed to proceed further with the examination or, having passed the examination, may not be admitted to Membership according to their own statutes and regulations, in cases where serious misconduct not related to the examination is judged to make the person unfit to become a Member of the College.

12. Notification of Pregnancy and Deferral

- 12.1 A deferral may be permitted to a candidate supplying an appropriate medical report which satisfies the relevant college indicating that:
 - 12.1.1 the candidate has any pregnancy related problems or illness; and/or
 - 12.1.2 the candidate's confinement is due shortly before or around the date of the examination; and/or
 - 12.1.3 the candidate has sufficient discomfort for her to consider that it will have a detrimental affect on her performance.

In such circumstances, a deferral will be permitted and no further fee will be required.

- 12.2 Any candidate who does not inform the college of her pregnancy and is consequently unable to sit for that examination will not normally be allowed to defer this examination without submission of another fee.

13. Eligibility for Diploma of Membership

- 13.1 Candidates who have passed the Intercollegiate MRCS under these regulations may apply for Membership of one of the Surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain or in Ireland providing they satisfy the criteria below. The candidate must:
- 13.1.1 hold a primary medical qualification that is acceptable to the United Kingdom General Medical Council for Full, or Provisional Registration or to the Medical Council in Ireland for Full or Temporary Registration; overseas candidates must hold a primary medical qualification acceptable to the Councils of the four colleges.
 - 13.1.2 have passed the examination requirements which may be satisfied in one of the following ways:
 - 13.1.2.1 A pass in Part A and Part B of the Intercollegiate MRCS.
 - 13.1.2.2 A pass in Part 1 and Part 2 of the Intercollegiate MRCS examination (Regulations June 2006 revised April 2009), *and* a pass in Part B of the Intercollegiate MRCS examination.
 - 13.1.2.3 A pass in Part A of the MRCS and MRCS (ENT) OSCE examination for the award of MRCS (ENT).
- 13.2 Candidates should apply for membership in accordance with the laws of the College at which they have applied for and passed Part B or MRCS (ENT) OSCE examination, (irrespective of where the examination is held).

NOTE: These Regulations are under continual review. It is recommended that candidates keep in regular contact with their college to ensure that they have the most up-to-date information. Any changes will be announced on the intercollegiate website: <http://www.intercollegiatemrcsexams.org.uk/>

Appendix

Recommendations and Advice for those in Training Posts and seeking a CCT

1. It is recommended that Part A should be taken in Specialty/Core Training Year 1 (ST/CT1) and that Part B (OSCE) should be taken in Specialty/Core Training Year 2 (ST/CT2). Candidates may, however, take the examination earlier subject to the requirements of paragraph 3.2.

Note: Candidates in Foundation Training are highly unlikely to have gained the necessary experience to pass the Part B (OSCE). Given that candidates are permitted a maximum of four attempts in which to pass the Part B (OSCE), Foundation Trainees may disadvantage themselves by making premature attempts at the examination.

2. With effect from the April 2013 Diet, candidates will be entitled to a maximum of 6 attempts at Part A. New candidates after that date, as well as candidates who are already in the system under the previous unlimited attempts regulations will be allowed to proceed up to a maximum of seven years from passing the first part of the examination in accordance with these GMC guidelines:

*“Any valid passes in national professional examinations can be counted towards a CCT – even if obtained outside approved training - provided that the candidate enters, or where appropriate, re-enters, approved training **within seven years of the examination pass.**”*

This limit of seven years may be applied flexibly in individual cases subject to a detailed review of the circumstances. Examinations will not be counted towards a CCT if they are taken after doctors have completed their training programmes.

*“No candidate will **normally** be allowed more than **six attempts at an examination.** In order to sit an examination once the limit of six has been reached, a candidate will have to demonstrate additional educational experience for each re-sit. Colleges will determine what sort of evidence will count in these circumstances but it will have to be relevant for all candidates including those who are not in UK training schemes.”*

College Details

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh

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Nicolson Street
Edinburgh
EH8 9DW
Tel: 0131 527 1600
Email: surgical.exams@rcsed.ac.uk
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The Royal College of Surgeons of England

38-43 Lincoln's Inn Fields
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WC2A 3PE
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