

Specialist Training in Occupational Medicine

Questions and Answers

Question & Answer Sheet 3: Changes to the Faculty Examinations

This is one in a series of Question & Answer Sheets prepared by the Faculty of Occupational Medicine to explain changes afoot in relation to the new curriculum for higher specialist training of occupational physicians. (A library of information sheets is being assembled on the Faculty website.)

This sheet was updated in April 2008 to replace earlier advice. Elements that are new are represented in red for ease of reference, and reflect changes arising in the detailed re-drafting of the Membership Regulations.

Q1: I have heard that the Faculty examinations will change under the new PMETB-approved assessment framework: what are the main elements?

A1: The single AFOM examination will be replaced by two examinations, taken towards the end of the first year of training in occupational medicine (ST3), and during the final year of training (ST6). The need to demonstrate research competencies will remain, assessed either by a research dissertation or a substantial piece of audit, published work, or a relevant postgraduate qualification (eg, MSc).

This guidance relates to the two Faculty examinations, which will be called the Part 1 and Part 2 Membership examinations. Separate guidelines are being developed on the research dissertation.

Q2: Tell me more about the year 1 exam – a) What will it involve? b) When will it be offered? c) And are there any special transitional arrangements?

A2:

a) The Part 1 will be the **same examination** as set for the **MCQ component** of the Diploma in Occupational Medicine (DOccMed). It will assess the same knowledge base and use the same question sets, and initially there will be a common pass mark across both the DOccMed MCQ and the Part 1 examination. Specialty trainees will be accommodated in the same sitting as generalists (eg, GPs) wishing to obtain the Diploma qualification. (The Part 1 Membership will **not** include the portfolio and oral defence components of the DOccMed as these are tested elsewhere in the specialist training programme).

b) The first sitting of Part 1 Membership will be offered in May 2008, and will follow the DOccMed examination timetable. Trainees will have to pay a fee to sit the Part 1

examination, which will be set at the level currently charged for the MCQ component of the DOccMed examination.

c) A specialist trainee who already holds the DOccMed will be exempted the Part 1 examination, provided that the DOccMed MCQ has been passed within the previous five years. A trainee with an AFOM who elects to transfer to the new curriculum will also be exempted the Part 1 examination (see below).

Specialist trainees may wish to prepare for the Part 1 examination, as generalists currently prepare for the DOccMed, through attendance at an approved DOccMed course. Alternatively, some academic centres that also provide AFOM training are restructuring their offerings in anticipation of preparing specialty trainees for the Part 1 examination in the first year (based on the DOccMed syllabus) as well as the Part 2 examination in the final year (based around the AFOM syllabus).

Q3: Tell me more about the final year exam – a) What will it involve? b) When will it be offered? c) And are there any special transitional arrangements?

A3:

a) The final year examination (Part 2 of Membership) will be based on the old AFOM examination in terms of learning content and syllabus. Essentially, the same body of factual information will be examined, with a major overlap in the competencies tested. However, the assessment *methods* will change. These changes are intended to improve the reliability of the examinations.

In outline the elements of the examination will probably be:

- (a) MCQ paper(s) (using the “best fit” question format).
- (b) Structured short answer questions or modified essay questions (MEQs).
- (c) An OSPE (Observed Structured Practical Examination) paper – possibly covering such topics as ethics, law, occupational hygiene, interpretation of data and perhaps involving actors role-playing a mental health or disability case.

Details are still being developed by the AFOM examination committee, so this guidance is indicative rather than the final position. Further guidance will follow as the detail is elaborated. **However, it is anticipated that a journal examination will not be included.**

b) Part 2 of Membership will be a final year examination (ie, taken during ST6). Eligibility will require agreement from a trainee’s local ARCP that the ST5 competencies have been met and that progression to the final year (ST6) is appropriate. Trainees under the new curriculum will also have to submit their completed research dissertation before embarking on ST6, and so before they apply to sit the Part 2 examination.

The first sitting of the Part 2 of Membership will be offered in September 2010. Piloting of the new format of examination and training of examiners in the modified assessment methods for the OSPE will occur in 2009.

c) The Academic and Assessment sub-Committees of the Faculty have decided, given the substantial overlap in the competencies and syllabus being assessed, that:

- (i) Candidates who have passed the AFOM examination in its entirety **before 1 January 2009*** will be exempted the requirement to take the Part 1 and Part 2 examinations.
- (ii) There will be no need to run two different formats of examination (AFOM and Part 2 MFOM) in parallel, representing a major saving to a small specialty in terms of resources and logistics. Rather, trainees who started their training under the old system will continue to take the old format of examination *up to the point where the new format of examination becomes available*, at which point the old format will be withdrawn, and they will need to sit the new format exam. **(For them, success in the exam will lead to the award of AFOM, as previously.)**
- (iii) **The last sitting of the old format AFOM examination is planned for January 2010**, giving a notice period of more than 2 years for those wishing to attempt the old format AFOM and for trainers, trainees, and academic centres preparing for the new format of examination.[§]
- (iv) Trainees in post before 1 August 2007 have the option (until 31 December 2008) of switching from the old to the new curriculum and assessment system. They should note that while possession of the AFOM will be recognised (as in (i) above), they will still need to have submitted their research dissertation in full before the final year (ST6). Trainees who elect to switch and do not have the AFOM will need to take both the Part 1 and Part 2 Membership examinations. All trainees who switch will also need to participate in workplace-based assessments and ARCP reviews at the appropriate ST level. **NB. Trainees contemplating a switch should note that *the Part 2 MFOM examination will not be available until June 2010, while the AFOM will no longer be recognised in lieu of it after 31 December 2008.***
- (v) The AFOM as a stand-alone examination for non-specialists will be withdrawn after January 2010. Instead, the Faculty has revised its MFOM regulations to enable candidates outwith UK specialist training (eg, overseas trainees) to submit for Membership on condition that they pass the three central elements of examination (Part 1 and Part 2 MFOM, dissertation) and can demonstrate equivalent competencies to those of UK specialists. This advice updates previous proposals on the long-term future of the AFOM examination.

**Old curriculum trainees (those in post on 31 July 2007) have the option, until 31 December 2008, to switch to the new curriculum. In recognition of this, a pass in the AFOM up to 31 December 2008 will be treated as equivalent to passing the Part 2 MFOM. Beyond this date, however, trainees who follow the new curriculum are expected to satisfy the new assessment provisions, and hence to take the Part 2 examination.*

**Faculty of Occupational Medicine
6 St Andrews Place
Regent's Park
London
NW1 4LB
0207 317 5890
www.facocmed.ac.uk**

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[§] Trainees who have passed some sections of the AFOM by the last sitting but not the examination as a whole will need to take the Part 2 MFOM instead.