

# **Preparing to take the Royal College of Pathologists' examinations in Veterinary Pathology.**

## **Examinations in Veterinary Pathology**

Currently there are two types of examination in veterinary pathology: veterinary pathology with the option to specialise in specific species groups and veterinary clinical pathology.

The examinations are not restricted to anatomic pathologists but are open to all veterinary pathology sub-disciplines (microbiology, immunology, and parasitology) although currently there are not specific examinations for each.

## ***Introduction***

The role of the College is to assist, assess and then support the continued development of a cadre of professional pathologists. Membership of the College is intended to demonstrate that a candidate has achieved the status of a specialist with the ability to train and supervise junior colleagues.

The extent and standard of knowledge and ability that must be demonstrated in order to pass the examination is outlined in the Core Training Programme. Veterinarians have a proven academic record and a history of taking and passing professional examinations to gain their primary qualification. With this degree of ability and examination experience, one of the few reasons why they should fail to become members of the College is a lack of preparation.

Careful planning with support and advice from more senior colleagues is needed and must be allied to long hours of hard effort on top of the usual daily workload. A high degree of self-motivation and commitment is needed to make the grade, but the effort will prove worthwhile in the long run.

## ***Time***

If starting from scratch, the whole process to full membership may take about 4 or 5 years. The College recommends that the Part 1 examination should be taken after about 2 years with a further 2 years preparation for the Part 2. Depending on your experience in pathology and post-graduate training, the time taken may be shorter.

The period required to prepare will not simply depend on the time elapsed from registration but on the type of work you are doing and the nature of your employment. If you have not gained sufficient practical experience it may be advisable to wait longer than you may have originally planned.

Making the time scale realistic for one's own individual circumstances – there will be other commitments with work, family and leisure pursuits – will ensure that there is enough time for a rounded existence.

## ***Place***

The place in which any training is undertaken should be approved by the College. For those working in the universities, government laboratories, commercial diagnostic laboratories or major pharmaceutical companies there is not likely to be a problem but some trainees may need guidance from the College.

It may be necessary to undertake some work in laboratories other than one's primary place of work for short periods to obtain suitable experience. The sponsor or the SAC Specialty Adviser may be the person to contact for assistance in finding suitable additional training.

## ***Supervision, Sponsors & Mentors***

Without guidance, the process of preparation may be more difficult as the candidate attempts to work out how to best attempt the examination. A member of the College should act as a sponsor but this should involve more than merely signing the application form for the examination. Both sponsor and candidate should appreciate the need for planning and support and the time and commitment that this entails for both parties.

The sponsor should be an experienced member of the College who will help with considered guidance and practical assistance and ideally would be a senior colleague at the work place. It may be difficult to find a supervisor at work, however, and face-to-face meetings, whilst desirable, need not be so frequent in the modern era of easy telecommunication.

The sponsor and candidate may have a close working relationship that would benefit from the occasional input of another experienced pathologist. Mentors are a valuable counterpart to the sponsor and should be capable of assessing the progress of the candidate and offer advice on the schedule that has been developed. A mentor would be ideally placed to set and mark mock examination questions and to work with the candidate on a sporadic basis to assess their practical ability.

Apart from making an invaluable contribution to the future of the profession, the sponsor and mentor will gain a deeper understanding of the affairs of the College and keep up to date on all aspects of pathology. They will be in a unique position to gain the experience necessary to be good examiners and to contribute to the future of Veterinary Pathology in the College.

If there is any difficulty in finding a supervisor or mentor, the College SAC will try to find someone willing to help out. In order to do this the College would like to encourage its members to put themselves forward as sponsors and mentors and will try to give you the advice and logistical support that you need.

## ***Planning***

In discussion with the sponsor a plan for your preparation for the exams should be prepared. This should take account of working circumstances and the resources that are available for learning. In a pharmaceutical company the plan will differ from someone who is employed in a Contract Research Organisation (CRO) or a university and none offer a better environment than the others; they each have their strengths.

For Part 1, the study plan should cover all aspects of pathology including some clinical pathology, necropsy as well as histopathology, immunology, microbiology and special techniques. The species group selected must be covered thoroughly whilst material for the general principles of the discipline may be drawn from any of the species groups.

Part 2 offers a number of different routes through to the oral examination and the preparation may differ slightly depending on your choice.

A study plan should aim to build upon working experience to ensure that all aspects of the discipline are covered. If there are significant gaps in one's knowledge, it may be necessary to gain some experience at laboratories other than the primary place of work. Employers and sponsors should be able to help make the necessary arrangements.

Reference to a variety of texts and current scientific journals will be made during training and some guidance will be available in the book lists attached to the Core Training Programme. A rigid approach should be avoided.

It is a good idea to create a log book to record the activities that contribute to the training plan. This will be useful to sponsors, supervisors and mentors as well as the College Specialty Adviser if assistance should be needed. In addition it will impose a structure on the study plan and enable progress to be monitored and highlight any changes that may be required.

### ***Taking the Part 1 examination***

The examination is held only once a year, so there is usually a long lead time for preparation. There should be sufficient time to make a schedule that will allow enough time for revision and it would be unwise to leave too much until the last minute.

Examination technique can be refined with one's sponsor and mentor and if the preparation has been thorough there should be no reason to be excessively nervous.

There is a close marking system used by the examiners for written questions and the system applied to the practical tests. It is a myth that you must pass all questions to be successful but there is a limit to the amount of ground that can be made up if a written question is answered very poorly.

If a candidate has failed marginally on one paper of Part 1, there is a compensation system to allow good marks from the other paper to permit them to proceed to the practical examination. If **both** papers are failed marginally, the candidate will not be permitted to proceed.

Examiners are asked to comment on the shortcomings of failed candidates so that they can address any problems for a further attempt in the future. The Specialty Adviser is available to offer advice to unsuccessful candidates and the examiners should not be contacted directly.

If a candidate is convinced they have been treated unfairly during the examinations there is an appeals procedure in place that should be pursued with the Examinations department of the College.

### ***The Part 2 Examination***

The options for the Part 2 examination are designed to support candidates that present themselves from a range of different working environments. Some may be working in a university training or research programme whilst others may be employed in industry or a commercial laboratory.

It is permissible to submit a recent and relevant thesis, prepare a suitable dissertation or a detailed casebook as well as taking the option to sit a practical examination. All candidates are also required to take part in an oral examination.

It is worth re-iterating that Membership of the College is intended to demonstrate that a candidate has achieved the status of a specialist and the ability to train and supervise junior pathologists in their chosen specialty. The responsibility of the examiners for the Part 2 is to satisfy themselves that these requirements have been met.