

MRCP(UK) PACES examination

Some preparatory advice and information offered by the Associate Medical Director for Clinical Examinations MRCP(UK)

The PACES exam is a high stakes clinical examination with an unashamedly high standard, providing candidates who are successful in the overall diploma with a well-deserved and internationally recognised level of accreditation as a highly competent physician.

The Clinical Examination Board is responsible for setting and maintaining the standard of the examination. Whilst the Board will not compromise on the standard, it is keen that all candidates maximise their opportunity to pass by being helped to effectively demonstrate to the examiners the skills that they possess. In short both the Board and individual PACES examiners are keen for candidates to pass and we do celebrate success.

As you approach the day of the exam you are likely to be feeling a little anxious which is a natural emotion in this context. That anxiety is likely to be heightened on the day of the exam itself. It is very important that you try to relax into the exam once it is underway so that you can demonstrate to the examiners how you conduct yourself as a doctor in your usual day to day practice.

You should make sure that you familiarise yourself with the exact location of the examination venue and try to arrive in good time.

On arrival, once the identification check has been completed and you have signed in, you will be asked to complete a full set of 16 mark sheets with your examination numbers and the centre number. Please do this carefully ensuring that you use the 2B pencil provided to write on the sheets and shade the appropriate lozenges. There will be plenty of time to complete this as you will have been asked to attend at least one hour before the start of the exam itself. We always aim to start the exam on time, but sometimes there can be an unavoidable delay, in which case you can expect regular updates on the revised anticipated start time and simple refreshments will be available.

Before the exam you can expect to be greeted by the host examiner or chair of examiners who will briefly emphasise a number of points which we believe should enhance the chances of a good candidate having a successful outcome. I have listed these points below and would encourage you to consider them carefully in advance of the examination.

- Undue anxiety can compromise performance. Try to relax into the exam and regard each encounter as a new opportunity to demonstrate your skills. Avoid dwelling on stations that you have completed as it is difficult to judge your own performance and it will only distract you from the new task in hand with a fresh set of examiners.
- Examiners are keen for candidates to pass the exam. They will not attempt to trip you up or ask trick questions, but have been trained to draw out information from candidates to allow them to assess all of the skills tested at each encounter.

The Federation of the Royal Colleges of Physicians of the UK – global leaders in physician education

- Examiners may on occasion appear to cut across your answers. You should not regard that as rude or dismissive as this is invariably done in the interests of time to allow questioning on all of the skills that need to be tested, so that appropriate credit can be given
- Please listen carefully to the questions asked by the examiners and try to answer those questions precisely. Most examiners will frame their questions around a particular skill that they want to assess and precise answers will greatly assist them in that task.
- Do have confidence in your own clinical acumen. In advance of the exam the examiners will have independently examined the patients in the clinical examination stations without knowledge of the expected signs or diagnosis. You will only be expected to elicit signs that both examiners have independently agreed to be present and such signs are usually clear cut. Do not report clinical signs that you cannot find simply to fit a presumptive diagnosis as that is unprofessional and will usually result in the award of unsatisfactory marks for Skill B. Examiners are as interested in your ability to have confidence over the absence of a finding as they are in your ability to detect positive abnormal physical signs.
- When performing a physical examination you should never examine directly through clothing of any sort. Candidates who do so will usually receive unsatisfactory scores for Skill A in the relevant encounter. All patients participating in the exam expect to be examined with appropriate exposure. With their permission you should ensure adequate exposure whilst maintaining dignity.
- In the Communication and Consultation encounters use the five minutes pre encounter reading time to read the written material carefully and be clear over the task that you have been given. You should use that time to plan your interview. You can make notes that you can take into the encounter with you.
- In both the Communication and Consultation encounters be aware of the concerns that the patient may raise. You must both acknowledge and address the concerns in a realistic way, and you should do so as soon as they are raised, however disruptive that is to your own agenda. Not to do so is disrespectful to the patient and may leave you with insufficient time to address them later in the interview and hence have an adverse effect on your scores for Skill F.
- In the two Communication encounters make sure that towards the end of the interview you sum up what you have agreed with the patient and agree a way forward. This will greatly assist the examiners in assessing you Clinical Judgement, Skill E.

For further information on examination preparation, please see:

[PACES | The Federation](#)

[Candidate guide notes PACES23 - Ver24JAN25.pdf](#):