



**Royal College
of Physicians**

Faculty of
Physician Associates

Physician Associate National Recertification Examination

Regulations for examination candidates

Applicable from 14 March 2022

1. Introduction

These regulations apply to the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination from 14 March 2022.

The Physician Associate National Recertification Examination will continue to change to reflect developments in healthcare, and candidates should refer to [Physician Associate National Recertification Examination website](#) for the most up-to-date information and examination regulations. By submitting an application for the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination candidates are confirming that they have read, understood and will abide by these regulations, the RCP Assessment Unit Candidate Code of Conduct, and the guidance on the Faculty of Physician Associates (FPA) website.

2. Format

The Physician Associate National Recertification Examination consists of an online knowledge-based assessment (KBA) made up of single best answer multiple choice ('best-of-five' format) questions. The written examination is split over two papers, each containing 100 questions. Candidates have 2 hours to complete each paper, with both papers being completed during a single day. The papers are sat online at an appropriate location (a candidate's home or office, for example)

The Physician Associate National Recertification Examination certificate is awarded on successful completion of the examination.

2.1 Marking system for the KBA

Candidates' overall results are calculated as an aggregated total of the points awarded in both papers. For the purpose of the exam and subsequent result processing, the two papers are considered a single exam, with candidates receiving a single overall mark for the KBA in its entirety.

The marking system is as follows:

- > One mark (+1) is awarded for each correct answer
- > No mark is deducted for an incorrect answer (ie there is no negative marking)
- > No mark is awarded or deducted if a question is left unanswered
- > The pass mark for the written exam is calculated using the Angoff method of standard setting.
- > One standard error of measurement (SEM) is then added to this total exam score to generate the total pass mark for each written examination¹.
- > To achieve a pass in the KBA, candidates must achieve or exceed this pass mark.

2.2 Results

Result letters will be sent to candidates via email from the RCP Assessment Unit. Certificates will also be issued to all candidates who successfully complete the KBA.

Anonymised result data will be used for the purpose of standard setting and quality assurance. This data may also be used for research purposes.

¹ Working process: For clarity, the working process will be that a non-integer (whole number) total pass mark will be rounded up to the next integer.

3. Entry requirements for the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination

The Physician Associate National Recertification Examination is designed to cover all core areas of practice that a physician associate is expected to maintain knowledge in, regardless of whether they are working in a specific specialty.

In order to remain on the Physician Associate Managed Voluntary Register (PAMVR) physician associates must pass the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination every 6 years.

The first opportunity will be at the beginning of their fifth year after successfully completing the PA National Certification Examination and they must pass the examination before the end of the sixth year.

3.1 Limited number of attempts

Candidates are permitted a maximum of three attempts during the relevant period of each 6-year cycle outlined above.

If any physician associate fails the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination on three occasions or does not pass the examination within the above timeframe, they will be removed from the PAMVR. They will then have to take the PA National Certification Examination (both KBA and OSCE components) and reapply for FPA membership and entry onto the PAMVR.

3.2 Application process

Details of how to apply are given on the [Physician Associate National Recertification Examination website](#).

All applications must be received by 23:55 (GMT) on the advertised closing date. Late applications will not be accepted.

3.3 Examination fee payments

Details of the current examination fees, examination dates, and opening and closing dates for applications are published on the [Physician Associate National Recertification Examination website](#).

Payment of examination fees can only be made via PayPal, and candidates who submit an application will be contacted once the application period has closed with details on how to make payment. Payments via cash or cheque/banker's draft are not accepted.

Any card details received in emails or as attachments will be deleted immediately and payments will not be actioned.

3.4 Identification

For the assessment, a candidate's identity will be verified during the boarding process. If the facial recognition software detects that the individual present on the day of the assessment does not match the image provided by the candidate during the installation process, then the candidate will not be permitted entry to the assessment. Additional identity checks may also be carried out by invigilators, at the discretion of the RCP Assessment Unit.

Name changes

Candidates who change their name by marriage or deed poll must submit the original or authenticated documentary proof of this if they wish to be admitted to the examination under their new name.

Candidates are advised to provide authenticated copies of any original documentation by email. The RCP Assessment Unit cannot accept responsibility for any items lost in transit.

Name format

RCP Assessment Unit records, and the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination certificate, show forenames followed by the family name, for example Alan John Smith. Correspondence will typically be addressed using the candidate's first name and family name, for example Alan Smith.

4. Candidate responsibilities

Candidates should:

1 Ensure that their application is fully complete

Candidates must submit the application within the application period.

An application is considered complete only upon receiving full payment of fees. And confirmation of a candidate's current place on the PAMVR. The RCP Assessment Unit will contact candidates to advise them of any outstanding information and will provide a deadline for receipt.

Candidates who submit an application and pay the required exam fee but are subsequently found to be ineligible, will have their application withdrawn and a full refund of their fees provided.

Eligible candidates will not be permitted to take the examination unless all outstanding fees have been paid in full.

If payment of fees is not completed by the provided deadline, the candidate's application will be rejected. Once rejected, an application cannot be reinstated.

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that any correspondence is sent securely and received within given deadlines.

2 Provide full contact details

It is the candidate's responsibility to provide full and accurate contact details (email address and telephone number) at the time of registration, and to ensure that any change is notified to the RCP Assessment Unit as soon as possible.

3 Read and act on any correspondence from the RCP Assessment Unit

Candidates must ensure that they read all correspondence issued by the RCP Assessment Unit up to and including the day of the examination.

On rare occasions changes to the examination arrangements may have to be made at short notice. The RCP Assessment Unit will use the email address provided to inform candidates of these changes. Candidates who are absent or late for an examination because they did not read such an email will not be automatically entitled to a refund.

4 Not give false information

Giving false information on the application form for any part of the examination will be regarded as an act of suspected misconduct and be investigated accordingly.

5 Be feeling well enough to undertake the examination

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure that they are physically, mentally, and emotionally fit to sit the examination. Should a candidate feel unwell prior to the start of the examination, they should inform a member of staff or an invigilator and consider withdrawing from the examination.

Candidates are reminded to be aware of their responsibilities as physician associates to take into account any risks that their own health may pose to others, such as candidates, examiners, RCP staff and patients.

4.1 Reasonable adjustments

Any candidate who has a physical disability, specific learning difficulty or any other condition that they believe would disadvantage them compared with other candidates in an examination, may be entitled to reasonable adjustments.

It is the candidate's responsibility to notify the RCP Assessment Unit of any reasonable adjustment request in writing at the time of application and provide supporting evidence in line with the RCP Assessment Unit [Reasonable adjustment policy](#).

Candidates should not assume that previously agreed reasonable adjustments will be carried forward to a future examination. Candidates must notify the RCP Assessment Unit of any request at each examination attempt.

If the requested adjustments cannot be implemented, the candidate may either withdraw from the examination or proceed without the adjustments.

Candidates who qualify for reasonable adjustments may not always be able to sit in the location of their choice.

Special arrangements purely for candidate convenience cannot be made. Candidate convenience includes provision for social events (such as holidays), courses, seminars and any other clinical commitments.

4.2 Candidate conduct

The standards of behaviour expected of those applying to and sitting the examinations are outlined in the [code of conduct for examination applicants and candidates](#).

Candidates are advised to be aware that any breach of the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination regulations will result in a misconduct investigation and the possibility of severe penalties.

The RCP Assessment Unit reserves the right to use various methods to identify candidates who attempt to copy, collude, or perform some other act that may be regarded as academic misconduct in the Physician Associate National Certification Examinations. This includes facial recognition, environment and device monitoring, and key stroke analysis that seeks to detect instances of misconduct or collusion by recording all candidates' actions and patterns of behaviour. Should it be determined that there is sufficient evidence of possible misconduct, then the candidate(s) concerned will be contacted and the formal [misconduct regulations](#) may be invoked.

5. Withdrawal, absence and cancellation of examinations

5.1 Withdrawal from the examination and refund of examination fees

Notice of withdrawal from any part of the examination must be given by email to the RCP Assessment Unit via PAExams@RCP.ac.uk.

Candidates should give their full name in their request to withdraw, along with their candidate number if known, to allow staff to identify candidates easily.

Examination applications and/or fees cannot be transferred from one examination to another.

Refunds will not be made where candidates submit their withdrawal request after the closing date unless there are circumstances deemed exceptional that can be substantiated. Any refund provided will be 90% of the exam fee (10% of the exam fee will be retained as an administrative charge).

Withdrawal will not count as an attempt at the examination.

5.2 Absence

Candidates who do not attend the examination, without notifying the RCP Assessment Unit, will be recorded as absent.

Refunds will not be made where candidates are absent unless there are circumstances deemed exceptional that can be substantiated.

Absence will not count as an attempt at the examination.

5.3 Cancellation of examinations

On very rare occasions, it may be necessary for the RCP Assessment Unit to cancel an examination. In these circumstances, the RCP Assessment Unit will refund the examination fee of any candidate allocated to the affected examination centre(s) and change the status of each affected candidate to 'withdrawn'.

Unfortunately, the RCP Assessment Unit cannot be responsible for any expenses (such as travel or accommodation) incurred by a candidate in the event of such a cancellation.

A cancelled examination will not count as one of the candidate's three attempts allowed for an examination.

6. Attending the Physician Associate National Recertification knowledge-based assessment

Any infringement of the following rules and regulations may be reported to the RCP Assessment Unit for consideration in accordance with the RCP Assessment Unit Candidate Code of Conduct.

6.1 Before the assessment

Candidates must download the required software and complete the installation process by the deadline stated. Candidates who fail to do so will not be permitted to take the assessment. No refund will be given, unless there are circumstances deemed exceptional that can be substantiated.

Candidates must comply fully with all the requirements of the online assessment software to complete the set-up process. This includes providing an image of themselves and their environment via their webcam, as well as allowing the software access to their device to capture screenshots (of both themselves and their interactions with the software) and undertake keystroke analysis for the duration of their assessment. Candidates must install the assessment software on the device they wish to use on the day of the examination. Once software has been installed the device cannot be changed.

The Royal College of Physicians observes sensitivity in the visual identification of candidates, but advance notice should be given by candidates of any anticipated difficulties.

Candidates must install the assessment software on the device they wish to use on the day of the examination. Once software has been installed on a device it cannot be transferred. Technical difficulties encountered during the installation process should be reported using the help facility within the software as soon as possible so support can be provided in resolving these ahead of the assessment.

It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that the device they use for their assessment meets the minimum specification required. Candidates who choose to use devices which do not meet the minimum specification do so entirely at their own risk. The RCP Assessment Unit accepts no responsibility for technical issues encountered by a candidate which are caused by devices which do not meet the minimum specification.

6.2 On the day of the assessment

Candidates should start the boarding process for their assessment at the time indicated in their pre-assessment information email. Candidates will not be permitted to sit the assessment if they start the boarding process more than 30 minutes later than the indicated time, unless they have been affected by technical difficulties.

6.3 During the assessment

Examination content must not be copied or recorded in any way. If an invigilator suspects that a candidate is attempting to copy assessment content, they will contact the candidate, ask them to stop any activity, and make a report of the incident to the RCP Assessment Unit.

Candidates are permitted to use blank paper for making notes (a maximum of six loose pages, i.e., not bound in a notebook). These must be shown to the invigilator at the start of the assessment and destroyed in front of the invigilator at the end of each examination paper.

Candidates must not switch off their webcam during the assessment or attempt to disable any feature of the software. Technical difficulties should be reported using the help facility as soon as possible during the assessment so support can be provided in resolving these. Candidates should report any issues encountered to the RCP Assessment Unit after the assessment so these can be taken into account during results processing.

Candidates must:

- Ensure that they are in an appropriate environment for sitting the examination with no other people present and demonstrate this to the invigilator prior to starting.
- Accept the Non-disclosure agreement prior to starting the examination
- Complete both examination papers in the correct order on the same day or their results will not be counted.

Candidates are permitted to:

- Submit their answers and exit from the assessment software if they finish before the advertised end time. They are not required to stay online for the full duration of the paper if they have completed it. Candidates will not be permitted to re-enter a paper once they have submitted their answers.
- Use devices connected to their computer to ensure uninterrupted internet connectivity during the examination. These devices should not be capable of storing information, accessing the internet, or communications and MUST be declared prior to commencing the assessment.
- Take breaks during the examination. They should indicate to the invigilator that they are taking a break, but do not need to wait for permission before leaving their examination environment. Invigilators will keep records of any breaks taken by candidates. No additional time be added to the examination to compensate for breaks (unless agreed prior to the assessment as part of a reasonable adjustment request)
- Have drinks or snack on their desks.

Violations

To prevent academic misconduct during online assessments, and to ensure that they are not interrupted by invigilators or the monitoring software, candidates are NOT permitted to:

- Look at a mobile phone, tablet, or any other device capable of communication or storing information. All such devices must be removed from the assessment environment prior to starting, and this must be confirmed with the invigilator during initial checks. Candidates can use mobile phones in the event of encountering technical difficulties during the examination.
- Wear any of the following items (this will be checked during the registration process):
 - earplugs or headphones
 - any clothing that can be used to hide materials, i.e., hooded jumper. Items worn for religious purposes are permitted and discretion will be exercised in conducting ID checks
 - Sunglasses (unless permitted for medical reasons) or smart glasses
 - Watches (including smart watches)
- Switch off their webcam or attempt to disable any feature of the assessment software
- Access other applications on their computer, including internet browsers
- Take screenshots of or copy examination content
- Talk to anyone outside the room or attempt to communicate with anyone else sitting the examination using phones or email
- Use multiple screens
- Use a calculator
- Have textbooks or notes in the examination environment (blank paper is permitted)
- Sit in a room that is too dark (your face must be clearly visible at all times)
- Angle their laptop or camera upwards or have their face obscured
- Vape or smoke

If invigilators identify any of the above behaviour, they will make a record of this, and it will be reported to the RCP Assessment Unit. Candidates will also be reported if they are seen to be looking away from their screens repeatedly or looking at their hands or wrists.

Candidates are reminded that in all RCP Assessment Unit assessments and examinations statistical methods are used to detect anomalous candidate behaviours which may be regarded as academic dishonesty. In the online version of examinations these will be supplemented by the detailed analysis of 'click streams' so that candidates' progress through the examination can be monitored and assessed and can be compared with video and other records of candidate behaviour

6.3 Invigilation

Where an invigilator suspects a candidate or candidates of infringing Physician Associate National Certification Examination regulations, he or she may speak to the candidate(s) involved, making clear what is causing concern, and reminding them of the relevant regulations and instructions.

Invigilators compile a written report of the examination for the RCP Assessment Unit, including any incidents of suspected misconduct.

Invigilators are empowered to refuse to allow a candidate to continue with the examination on grounds of misconduct.

6.4 Paper-based assessments

To ensure that no candidate is disadvantaged in their examination by virtue of their disability or other special need it may be necessary to conduct the KBA via a traditional paper and pencil format. Where this is the case, this will be clearly communicated to the candidate(s) in good time ahead of the examination date.

The following apply to all paper-based assessments:

- 1 All the required stationery, including the pencil to complete marksheets, will be provided by the RCP Assessment Unit. Candidates must use only the stationery provided.
- 2 Pens, including highlighters, are not permitted unless they have been given prior approval as a reasonable adjustment. Any rough work must be completed on the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination question booklet.
- 3 Candidates must not bring to their desk any papers, bags, textbooks or documents, or items of any kind other than those specifically allowed for that particular examination and previously notified to them.
- 4 The possession of calculators, mobile phones, pagers, personal stereos, smart watches or any other such devices that are audible, make calculations, store information or can be used for communication are strictly forbidden on or around candidates' desks. These items must be switched off and stored with candidates' belongings in the designated area at the examination venue. Where examination venues do not have secure areas to store personal items, any coats, bags or other item(s) brought into the examination venue should be stored as directed by the invigilator(s).
- 5 Any unauthorised items or material will be confiscated and a report detailing the incident and identifying the candidate will be submitted to the RCP Assessment Unit.
- 6 With prior approval (via submission of a request for reasonable adjustments), candidates may bring into the examination venue aids that will enable them to remedy a disability, eg of sight and/or hearing, or a medical condition, eg a glucometer for diabetes.

- 7** If a candidate has unwittingly brought any unauthorised item into the examination venue, this should be handed to the invigilator(s) before the examination starts or at the earliest possible opportunity thereafter.
- 8** Answer sheets are individually numbered (with candidate numbers) in the top right-hand corner. Candidates must sit at the desk where the answer sheet is marked with their candidate number.
- 9** Candidates must not start reading or answering the examination questions until the start of the examination is announced by the invigilator(s).
- 10** Candidates must comply with all instructions given to them by invigilator(s). Such instructions may include the instruction to leave the examination venue and not to return during the period of the examination.
- 11** A candidate will be prevented from proceeding with the Physician Associate National Recertification KBA if it is the chief invigilator's view that they are too unwell to continue, or their conduct is likely to endanger the safety of, cause distress to or disrupt the work of other candidates.
- 12** It is the duty of a candidate to comply with an invigilator's instruction even if they judge the instruction to be unreasonable. There is the right of appeal if a candidate considers that the invigilator has not acted in accordance with these regulations.
- 13** While in the examination venue, a candidate must not attempt to read the work of any other candidate or communicate in any way with any other candidate or any other person without the express permission of the invigilator.
- 14** Candidates have a responsibility to help safeguard the security of the examination and their own work. Candidates should make efforts to ensure their work cannot be seen by another candidate, including when leaving the examination venue temporarily to visit the toilet.
- 15** Candidates have a duty to report to an invigilator or the RCP Assessment Unit any concerns they have that another candidate was attempting to read their work, or any other instances of possible misconduct they notice.
- 16** Candidates who wish to attract the attention of the invigilator(s) during the examination should do so by raising a hand.
- 17** Candidates should bring to the attention of the invigilator any factor (eg distracting noise) that is adversely affecting them during the examination. Where necessary they should communicate the same in writing to the RCP Assessment Unit immediately following the examination concerned.
- 18** Candidates must not leave the examination temporarily, during the period of the examination, unless given express permission by the invigilator(s) to do so. If such permission is given, they must be accompanied by an invigilator and must not attempt to contact any other person or consult any material relating to the examination while outside the examination venue.

- 19** Candidates may finish their examination at any point but are not permitted to return to the examination room once they have left. A candidate who leaves the room permanently will be considered to have finished the paper in question. Candidates wishing to end their examination early should clearly state this to an invigilator.
- 20** Candidates should immediately stop working and stop using pencils/erasers when instructed to do so by the invigilator and remain in their seats in silence while papers are collected.
- 21** Any candidate who is observed to be continuing work on their paper after the end of the examination has been announced will be reported.
- 22** Candidates must not remove from the examination venue any papers or examination materials. All Physician Associate National Recertification Examination questions are confidential and are under the copyright of the Royal College of Physicians. The RCP reserves the right to initiate civil action and/or criminal prosecution if theft of intellectual property is suspected.
- 23** Question papers or any part of them, including individual questions, must not be copied or removed from the examination venue.
- 24** Candidates must not communicate any question or part of a question to any other person or organisation. Candidates should inform the RCP Assessment Unit if they are asked to divulge examination content by any individual or organisation.
- 25** When authorised to do so by the invigilator(s), candidates should leave the examination venue in an orderly manner.
- 26** Candidates should note that if any information comes to light at a later stage that indicates that examination regulations have been breached, the RCP Assessment Unit reserves the right to invoke the misconduct procedures retrospectively.

7. Completion of the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination

Once a candidate has successfully completed the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination, a certificate will be posted to them. Details of successful and unsuccessful candidates will also be passed to the Faculty of Physician Associates (FPA) so they may update their records accordingly.

8. Additional regulations and procedures

Details of other Physician Associate National Certification Examinations regulations for candidates are available [here](#). These are as follows:

- > Code of conduct for examination applicants and candidates
- > Examination appeals regulations
- > Examination complaints procedure
- > Misconduct regulations
- > Reasonable adjustment policy

9. Language requirements

All parts of the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination are conducted in English.

As all assessments are conducted in English, the Royal College of Physicians advises that in order to be sufficiently prepared to sit the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination, candidates' English language ability should be equivalent to International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Level 7.5. However, candidates do not need to have taken IELTS or any other language examination to sit the Physician Associate National Recertification Examination.

The Physician Associate National Recertification Examination cannot be used to demonstrate competence in the English language.