

## A Comparison of London and Dublin

This article is based on personal experience of sitting FRCA (UK) and FFARCSI (Ireland) and attempts to compare and contrast them without bias.

Candidates with primary can sit the final in either or both of the colleges. For those with primary exemption the same rules apply but we still advise you to check the individual college's regulations. These are available on the web sites and examination regulations publications.

The fees for the London examination currently stand at £615, compared to the Irish examination which costs €900 (almost comparable), but traveling to Dublin twice, once for the theory and again for the vivas, makes it more expensive.

Should you require a visa for travel to Ireland, allow roughly 10 to 14 days for processing. The visa can be obtained by post and personal application is not required. Return flights to Dublin are easily available, with competitive rates if booked early. That said, the flight for the viva cannot be booked before the result of the theory part is known.

In Dublin the theory examination usually takes place at the Davenport Hotel in Merrion Square. This is central and easily accessible. Staying here or the Alexander hotel just across the road saves a lot of hassle. On the viva day, the morning is spent at hospitals in and around Dublin and the second part is in one of the hotels.

Candidates have a choice of centres - London, Manchester, Cardiff, Scotland and Belfast – for the written component of the London examination. The Royal College has recently moved to its new address at Churchill house, 35 Red Lion Square. We assume that vivas will now be held there. Candidates from outside London often prefer to travel the night before the examination. The Grand National and Tavistock hotels are close and convenient, with car-parking available in the basement of Grand National Hotel (remember the congestion charge).

The two examinations are different in both their content and emphasis. Sitting one after the other is not merely a re-sit. It is a different examination in the same specialty. Thus it is important for individuals to decide which examination is more suited to them and prepare accordingly.

The London examination has four components whilst Dublin has five. There are minor differences between the first four components of these examinations (see boxes).

There appears to be a greater emphasis on pure basic sciences in the London vivas compared to the application of basic sciences in Dublin. The vivas in London seem slightly more structured than those in Dublin. Irish examiners appear to have more freedom to ask questions related to the original topic and candidates may be able to direct their own vivas within each question.

The fifth component in Dublin includes history taking, clinical examination and a viva incorporating the relevant medical or surgical condition of a patient. This is usually set up in a ward with a patient, at any of the hospitals in and around Dublin. We think this is a useful addition to the examination, which is designed to assess bedside clinical skills, communication, history taking and presentation.

The individual components of the examinations compare and contrast in the following way.

### Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

	London	Dublin
Number	90	40
Time	3 hours	3 hours
Marking	Negative	Negative
Topics	Medicine/surgery(20), anaesthesia/pain/basic sciences/statistics(40), criticalcare/physics/clinical measurement (20)	Very little on medicine and surgery
Timing	pm	am

### Short Answer Questions (SAQs)

	London	Dublin
Type	SAQ	ESAQ
Number	12	6
Time	3 hours	3 hours
Question Type	Single stem, usually one or two parts	3 sections, i) essay type, ii) 2 stems, iii) 3 stems
'Stems' per exam	12	12
Topics	As for MCQ	As for MCQ
Answer booklets	four	two

### VIVA 1 (Clinical)

	London	Dublin
Time	30 minutes	25 minutes
Preparation time	10 minutes (with data, on your own)	1 minute (in front of the examiners)
Style	Long case with data interpretation, three short cases including an emergency	Long case, questions on other topics which may include acute and chronic pain
Structure	Very structured	Less structured
Break between vivas	Yes	No
Atmosphere	Friendly	Friendly

# London and Dublin sittings of the Final FRCA

## VIVA 2

	London	Dublin
Time	30 minutes	25 minutes
Style	Each examiner asks two topics with questions on pure basic science leading to applied science	One examiner asks basic sciences, the other critical care. Questions usually clinically oriented from the start
Topics	Anatomy, physiology, pharmacology, physics/measurement	May be asked two of the four basic sciences
Structure	Very structured	Less structured

## CLINICALS (Irish only)

- Conducted on the morning of clinical viva examination day. Candidates have one hour for this part of the examination.
- Usually set up in a hospital ward, but at Beaumont hospital patients are called to an examination centre.
- 30 minutes are allocated for history taking and examination, and 30 minutes for viva and demonstration of clinical skills.
- One examiner asks about the history and candidates have to demonstrate clinical skills. Clinical skills examination may or may not be relevant to the case, for example, checking a JVP in a perfectly normal patient.
- The next examiner asks questions on medical or surgical aspects of problems. Candidates are offered chest X-rays, electrocardiograms and investigations, and finally they may be asked to justify whether it is appropriate to anaesthetise the patient or not.
- This section is less stressful than it sounds.

## MARKING

	London	Dublin
Marking system	Closed. 1 fail, 1+ marginal fail, 2 pass, 2+ excellent	Closed. 4 fail, 5 marginal fail, 6 pass 7 excellent
Pass mark	1+, 2, 2, 2	30 marks in total
Fail	1 in any section, more than one 1+	1 in any section, more than one 5
Near pass/fails	Papers will be reviewed by a separate examiner	5+ mark considered for those just below 30 marks

Those candidates who feel that clinical knowledge is their strongest point, might consider sitting the Dublin examination. This may also apply to candidates who have primary exemption due to overseas qualifications.



We must not forget that this is the accepted examination for our trainee colleagues working in the Republic of Ireland. Applications are allocated on a first come first served basis thus potentially disadvantaging Irish trainees if large numbers of UK trainees apply.

Best of luck.

This article is intended for guidance only and is correct to the best of our knowledge.

**This article is substantially based upon an original submission by Dr Kamran Khan and Dr Salena Samuel.**

Jane Sturgess Honorary Secretary GAT

## FURTHER READING

1. The Final FRCA guide by the Royal College of Anaesthetists London.
2. [www.ffarcsi.com](http://www.ffarcsi.com)
3. [www.rcoa.ac.uk](http://www.rcoa.ac.uk)
4. <http://www.coairl.org/anaesthesia/home.php3>

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