

MRCPCH Examinations Guide

*Written by Hannah Coakley,
On behalf of the West Midlands Paediatric Trainee Committee 2020*

This guide is aimed at providing information about the MRCPCH exam and to pass on helpful tips from trainees who have passed their exams in the West Midlands.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, there have been some changes to the format of exams from September 2020.

This includes the ability to sit theory exams at home with online invigilation, as well as clinical exams being sat remotely with changes to the format and number of stations.

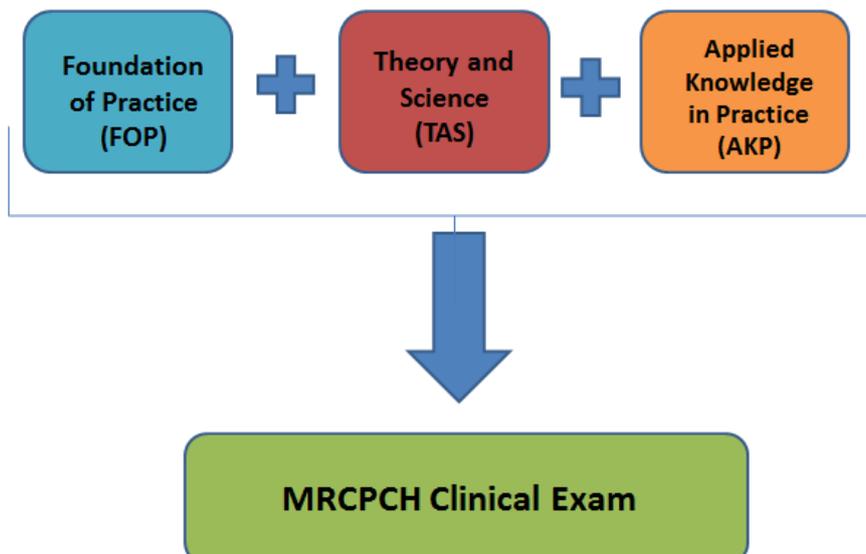
For the latest updates please check the RCPCH website

What is the MRCPCH?

To progress in UK paediatric training it is a requirement to pass four postgraduate examinations in order to become a member of the RCPCH. The MRCPCH includes three theory exams, which are computer-based and have multiple choice questions, followed by one clinical exam which is sat in a hospital with a combination of patients and actors playing young people or carers. It is usually expected that you pass all your exams before you progress to level 2 training and work as a registrar.

The four examinations are:

- Foundation of Practice (FOP) – theory exam
- Theory and Science (TAS) – theory exam
- Applied Knowledge in Practice (AKP) – theory exam
- MRCPCH Clinical exam

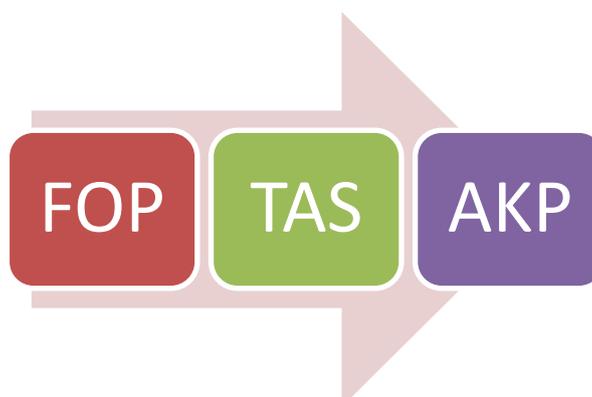


General Tips for MRCPCH exams

- Start thinking about your exams early in your paediatric training. This will give you enough time to complete your exams during your level 1 training and help to reduce the stress of trying to complete them all before you become a registrar
- Don't panic if you don't pass your exams first time. Many good paediatric trainees fail one or more of their exams. These exams are not a reflection of your abilities as a paediatrician; in particular the theory exams are about learning facts and being able to recall this in the exam. So if you don't pass first time, please don't worry!
- It will be more difficult to revise for exams whilst working a busy on-call rota, as compared to revision for exams during medical school, so make sure you account for this when planning your revision
- Most trainees start revising for about 6-8 weeks before each exam, this should give you enough time to consolidate the information needed. A lot of trainees tend to use a combination of a textbook and an on-line question bank (more information on these resources will be discussed later). However every person revises differently, using different resources; don't panic if you use different things to other people.
- If you have any questions about the format of the exam, don't forget to check the RCPCH website which provides all the information you need to know about when and how to apply for each exam, as well as what you can expect during each exam
- The exams are timed, and although there is enough time to answer all the questions during the allocated time, don't waste precious time on questions you cannot answer. There is no negative marking so give each question a go!
- Make sure you know about your allowance for private study leave for each exam. Check the most recent Health Education England guidance for the allowance, but appreciate that you will have to arrange with your rota coordinator when it would be convenient to take this study leave, and be aware that there are a maximum number of days per year allowed for private study leave, not per exam attempt
- Ask your supervisor as well as senior trainees for help and support. People are usually happy to answer any questions and provide advice about exams. Please just ask!

Theory Exams

There are three theory exams (FOP, TAS and AKP). They can be sat in any order; however you must have passed all three theory exams in order to be eligible to apply for the clinical exam. Most trainees tend to do their theory exams in the following order:



All three of the theory exams are computer based multiple-choice questions, and held three times each year in a variety of locations around the UK. FOP and TAS exams are one paper each and are scheduled on the same day; FOP in the morning, and TAS in the afternoon. Some trainees do both exams at the same time, others do their exams during different sittings; this is an individual choice. AKP is two separate papers, one sat in the morning and the second in the afternoon.

The multiple choice questions are a combination of best-of-five answers, where there are five possible answers to a stem question; and extended matching questions, where there is a list of ten or more possible answers. No negative marking is used in any exam. There are a number of data interpretation questions in each exam, which may contain pictures or graphs.

There are a few sample questions for each of the theory exams on the RCPCH website, it will give you opportunity to practice using the computer system used in the exam, as well as give you ideas as to the type of questions you may be asked.

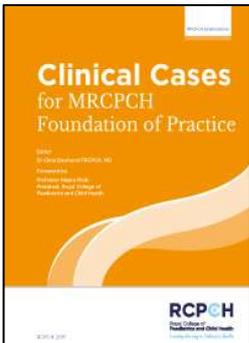
Foundation of Practice (FOP)

- Tests the knowledge, understanding and decision making abilities of a person entering level 1 paediatric training (SHO). It is also the same exam sat by GP trainees as part of their Diploma of Child Health
- It contains questions including the most likely diagnosis, investigation of choice and best treatment option

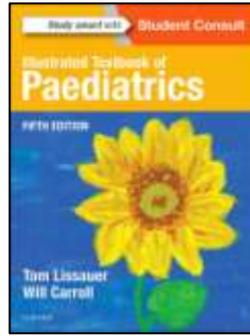
Theory and Science (TAS)

- TAS tests basic scientific, physiological and pharmacological principles of clinical practice, and of evidence-based practice
- This is often the exam that trainees find the hardest to revise, and hardest to pass. It will require going back to revise scientific first principles and how it applies to paediatric medicine
- There are also a few topics that you won't use in your everyday clinical practice including statistics, embryology and mechanism of action of drugs.

This is not an exhaustive list of the resources available for FOP/TAS, but some suggestions you may like to try. A textbook is often useful as a reference guide and a question bank can be helpful in testing your knowledge in exam conditions and consolidating your knowledge.

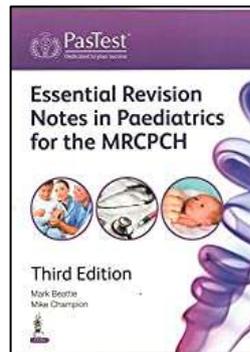
<p>Books</p>	<p>Clinical Cases for MRCPCH Foundation of Practice (RCPCH)</p>		<p>This contains example questions, in the format of the FOP exam which can be useful for getting practice at the types of questions you may get asked, and explanations for the answers. This is written by the FOP examiners.</p>
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Illustrated Textbook of Paediatrics
(Lissauer and Carroll)



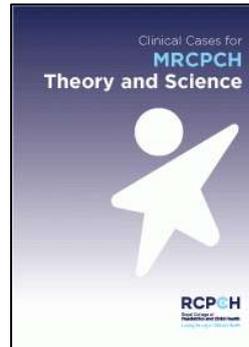
This is a good overview of the main concepts in paediatrics. It has lots of pictures/diagrams and is a good introduction to paediatric diseases. Although it might not be in lots of detail it can be a good starting point for revision for FOP.

Essential Revision Notes in Paediatrics
(Beattie and Champion)



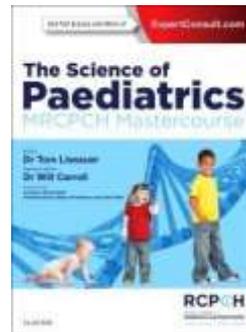
A good reference book which has lots of detail about paediatric conditions. There are no pictures and it has lots of lists which you may love or hate. This book has enough detail for FOP, TAS and AKP; however not all concepts are described in lots of detail.

Clinical Cases for MRCPCH Theory and Science (RCPCH)



This contains example questions, in the format of the exam which can be useful for getting practice at the types of questions you may get asked.

The Science of Paediatrics (Lissauer and Carroll)



This is an excellent comprehensive overview of the topics covered in TAS. It explains the scientific principles behind the paediatric conditions and has example questions in each chapter. Very useful for revision for TAS and highly recommended.

Question Banks

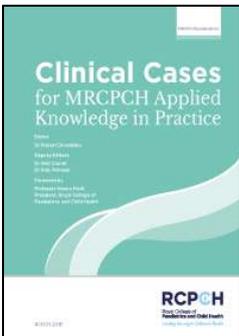
Pastest

A large number of questions in the same format as that used in FOP and TAS with separate subscriptions for each exam. Some questions are more difficult than those used in the FOP exam; but if you can answer these questions you will likely do well in your exam. The TAS questions are similar to those in the exam. Most questions have good explanation as to why the answer is the correct one, which helps with technique and framework on how to answer the questions.

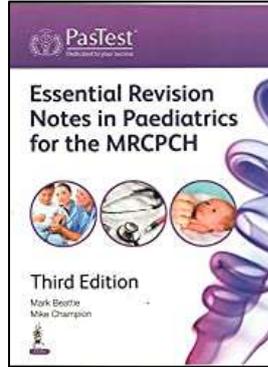
	<p>BMJ OnExamination</p> <p>This has a combined subscription for FOP/TAS which has a range of questions; however not all questions are in the same format as those used in the exams. Some questions can be slightly easier than the questions in the actual exam, so you may have to aim for more correct answers to have a comparable experience with the exam. However there are a wide range of questions which are still useful for revision.</p>
<p>Other Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <p>RCPCH Theory and Science Lectures</p> <p>Available from the RCPCH website, there are a number of online lectures designed to help with areas that previous candidates have found most difficult in TAS. You will get continued access to the online content for the following two sittings of the exam.</p>

Applied Knowledge in Practice (AKP)

- Tests the knowledge, understanding and clinical decision making abilities based on the standard of someone entering their core specialist training
- This used to be the part 2 exam (so when seniors refer to part 2, this is to what they are referring)
- This exam is more clinical in its focus and it tailored to test your knowledge before you become a registrar. It is probably a good idea to have done at least 6months general paediatrics, and 6months neonates before you tackle this exam as it will ensure you have a good grounding in clinical paediatrics
- Be prepared to have to interpret data including blood gases, CSF results, and blood tests, as well as interpret images including X-rays, MRI scans, ECGs and EEGs. The images are not always good quality so be aware of the major pathologies that may be seen in images.

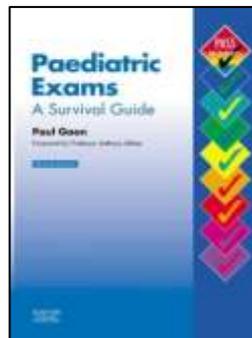
<p>Books</p>	<p>Clinical Cases for MRCPC Applied Knowledge and Practice (RCPCH)</p> 	<p>This contains example questions, in the format of the exam which can be useful for getting practice at the types of questions you may get asked, as well as an explanation as to the correct answers.</p>
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Essential Revision Notes in Paediatrics
(Beattie and Champion)



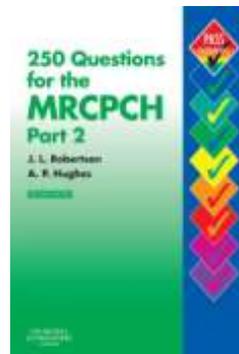
A good reference book which has lots of detail about paediatric conditions. There are no pictures and it has lots of lists which you may love or hate. It also has a good explanation of cardiac catheter data which often comes up in the exam, as well the appropriate urological investigations following paediatric urine infections

Paediatric Exams, A Survival Guide
(Gaon)



Although out of print you may be able to find this book in a library, or find a friendly senior who still has a copy! This is a good addition to your revision, covering topics that are not always found in other textbooks including EEG interpretation and cardiac catheter data

250 Questions for the MRCPCH Part 2
(Robertson and Hughes)



A good selection of questions similar to those used in the AKP exam, and includes helpful explanations which is good for your learning

Question Banks

Pastest

A large number of questions in a similar format and standard to those used in AKP. There are also good explanations about the reasoning behind answers with relevant background information which is helpful for revision.

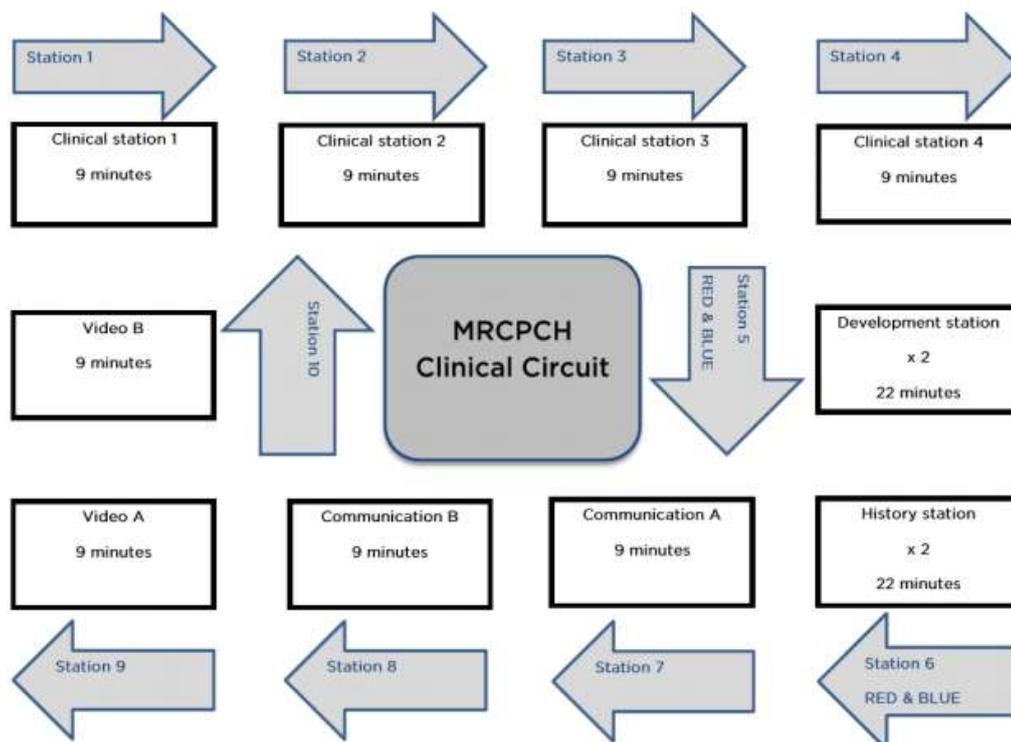
BMJ Onexamination

Advertised as containing a number of extended-matching questions and data interpretation questions with explanation of learning points. Some of the questions are not in the format of the exam including 'free text' questions but covers topics in the exam curriculum.

Clinical Exam

The clinical exam is the last part of the MRCPCH and aims to assess whether candidates have reached the standard in clinical skills that would be expected of a new registrar (ST4). It is conducted at hospital sites across the country, and every candidate completes a circuit of 12 different stations which test a number of skills including communication, history-taking, physical examination, clinical judgement and professional behaviours.

- The best way to pass your clinical exams is to practice, practice, practice!
- Be confident performing clinical examinations on children of a range of ages, with a wide range of pathologies. Make sure you ask your seniors to observe you examining patients in a timed setting. This will allow them to give feedback and you can practice in exam conditions
- Find out if there is an RCPCH clinical examiner in your trust, they will be best placed to offer help and support as they are used to examining for the clinical exams
- Make sure you read the RCPCH clinical exam guidance. The marking and format of the exam was changed in 2019 so lots of your seniors will have done the old exam format. Although the stations are similar, it's important to know exactly what will be expected of you in each station and how it is marked
- Candidates are assessed in their performance in a number of different domains (skills) in each station; these include physical examination, identification of clinical skills, communication skills, clinical reasoning and rapport. Each clinical domain is marked as meet standard (2marks), borderline (1mark) or below standard (0marks). These scores are added together to give a total score of 82 and the pass mark is set at 63marks.



The clinical exam consists of:

- 4 x **clinical** stations (10 minutes each)
 - Candidates will be expected to examine real patients and answer questions on their clinical findings and interpretation of signs
 - You will not know what system you are examining until you enter the exam room. You could be asked to perform any combination of clinical exams between the four stations
 - You will not be asked management questions in this station

- 1 x **development** station (22 minutes)
 - Candidates should take a full developmental assessment including taking a history from the carer, including the impact on the child and family, and examine the development in one or more domains for the first 13minutes
 - The child and carer will leave the room and for the remaining 13minutes, questions will be asked on their findings and the child's management
 - There are usually set items you will have to test the development of a child including bricks, picture books and crayons; you can practice using these on the wards or with any children you know to recognise stages of development

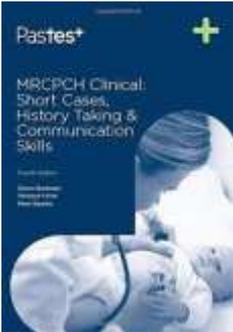
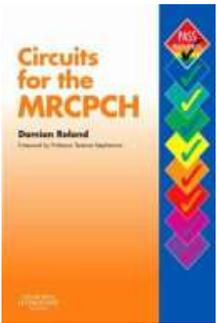
- 1 x **history** station (22 minutes)
 - Candidates have 13minutes to take a history from a parent or adolescent
 - The remaining 9minutes will be spent answering questions from the examiner on their findings, likely diagnosis and management plan

- 2 x **communication** stations (9 minutes each)
 - Usually with a role player, candidates may be asked to talk to a parent, adolescent, medical student or health professional
 - There are six possible types of communication scenario: information giving, breaking bad news, consent, critical incident, ethics or education

- 2 x **video** stations (9 minutes each)
 - Candidates will have 3minutes to watch a video lasting between 30-90seconds, and will 6 minutes to to answer set questions on your observations, differential diagnoses and management plan

Resources for Revision

Revising for clinical exams is often very different to revising for theory exams. It will require a combination of revising clinical examinations, and practicing identifying clinical signs for a range of conditions. It is also important to practice a wide variety of communication and history taking stations; this is most effective with a small group of others so you can be observed and critiqued.

<p>Books</p>	<p>MRCPCH Clinical: Short Cases, History Taking and Communication Skills (Pastest)</p>  <p>Circuits for the MRCPCH (Damian Roland)</p> 	<p>This is a very good overview of all the different stations that you might expect to find in the clinical exam. It discusses the expectations for each clinical examination, as well as the cases you might expect to encounter. It also has a good selection of example history and communication stations which are useful to go through and practice with others.</p> <p>This has a good selection of example clinical exam circuits. Although based on the old exam format the stations are very similar, and the topics covered are useful to go through and practice with others.</p>
<p>Courses</p>	<p>There are a wide range of available courses around the country which offers candidates to practice all the stations of the exam, often under exam conditions. They range in length, format and price so have a think about whether this would be useful for your revision and what you would hope to get out of a course.</p> <p>The RCPCH have their own 2day course based at their headquarters in London. The RCPCH Clinical Exam Preparation Course focuses on the format of each station, as well as the mark scheme with opportunities to practice in small groups. The course is run by MRCPCH clinical examiners and has workshops covering every station of the exam. Although there are no patients it provides opportunities to practice the stations and offers tips on the skills needed to do well at each station.</p>	
<p>Other Resources</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> London School of Paediatrics Clinical Revision Website and Youtube Channel https://mrcpch.paediatrics.co.uk 	<p>An excellent resource with information and tips about the clinical exam. There are examination guides for each clinical system, along with example cases and videos which are great to watch for examination technique and to try and spot the clinical signs. A must find for those preparing for clinical exams.</p>