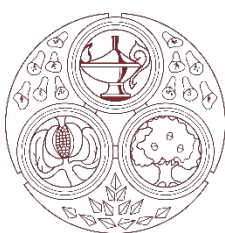


# Examinations Handbook

Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine

Guidance and Regulations for Candidates  
and Supervisors



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Pharmaceutical  
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# Section one: Guidance Notes for Candidates and Supervisors for the Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine

## Preface

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These notes are intended to provide guidance to physicians studying for the Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine (candidates). It is hoped that these notes will clarify the requirements and avoid misunderstandings, thereby enabling candidates to prepare themselves adequately and efficiently. These guidance notes should be read in conjunction with the Syllabus for Pharmaceutical Medicine and the Examination Specification, both of which are available on the FPM website, along with the Examination Regulations and Procedures in Section Two of this handbook.

## Introduction

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From 1976, the three UK Royal Colleges of Physicians awarded the Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine (DPM). In 1994, five years after the creation of FPM, responsibility for the Diploma examination was transferred to FPM which has continued to be responsible for it ever since.

From its inception until 2012 the Diploma was a single examination comprising several different papers, all of which had to be passed at the same time to achieve an overall pass. In 2013 the structure of the Diploma changed such that is now a two-part examination, the parts of which must be passed sequentially for a candidate to be awarded the DPM. From 2019, physicians have the option of taking first part of the DPM as a stand-alone examination to gain a Certificate in Pharmaceutical Medicine (CPM).

The examination is intended to test knowledge and its application relating to all parts of the Syllabus, though more weight is given to those areas for which a pharmaceutical physician is likely to be responsible or which have a direct impact on the physician's decision making.

In terms of career progression, passing the examination indicates that the individual has reached a certain level of achievement. Possession of the Diploma allows pharmaceutical physicians to apply for Membership of the Faculty of Pharmaceutical Medicine (MFPM). For those pursuing a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) or Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR) in the specialty of Pharmaceutical Medicine in the UK, success in the examination (or a recognised equivalent examination) is a requirement for completion of Pharmaceutical Medicine Specialty Training (PMST).

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*Each part of the examination is held once a year,  
Part 1 in September and Part 2 in October*

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## Eligibility

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The Diploma examination is open to doctors who have entered pharmaceutical medicine and received structured training in the discipline.

Eligibility of candidates to sit the Diploma examination will be assessed at the time of registration for Part 1 of the examination. The criteria are given in the Examination Regulations and Procedures in Section Two of this handbook and are explained below. Where there is doubt, prospective candidates, particularly those from outside the UK, are encouraged to seek advice from FPM early in their

preparation for the examination, rather than at the time of submitting their application to sit the examination.

FPM admits only medical graduates to sit the Diploma examination. In this regard, it accepts undergraduate training that leads to the award of a medical qualification recognised by the General Medical Council (GMC) in the UK. All candidates must be registered as medical practitioners.

FPM also strongly advises candidates to have completed full-time training in pharmaceutical medicine for a minimum of two years prior to taking Part 1 of the Diploma examination, regardless of whether they are enrolled in PMST. This experience is best acquired within the pharmaceutical industry, in a contract research organisation or in a drug regulatory authority. Time spent in research within an academic department of a medical school or hospital is rarely appropriate.

Applicants for Membership of FPM or for specialty registration are reminded that they must meet additional eligibility requirements. Success in the Diploma examination is necessary but not sufficient.

## Educational Supervisor

Candidates who are undertaking PMST must have an Educational Supervisor to help them prepare for the Diploma examination. Whilst other candidates for the Diploma examination are not required to have an Educational Supervisor, it is strongly recommended that they do so. Educational Supervisors should meet the criteria that have been set for Educational Supervisors in Pharmaceutical Medicine Specialty Training. These are available on FPM's [website](#).

It is advisable for the Educational Supervisor to be employed in the same organization and/or within the same locality as the candidate. This aids communication, facilitates a one-to-one teacher-pupil relationship, enables the candidate to gain access to personnel and information of relevance to their training and preparation for the examination and helps the candidate obtain the necessary time and resources for their training.

The role of an Educational Supervisor is important. The supervisor should assist in devising the training of a novice pharmaceutical physician, taking into account his or her earlier postgraduate training and past experience. A programme can be outlined to remedy deficiencies in exposure to particular areas of the syllabus. Attendance at training courses, congresses or symposia, provision of CPD teach-in material, distance learning and secondment to other departments of the company or to an external institution may all be considered. The programme should be tailored to the individual's needs and will take into account his or her likely career development. Thereafter, the supervisor should monitor the programme, helping to identify other needs that come to light and how they can be met. The supervisor should also assist the trainee by suggesting reading material, discussing recent developments in pharmaceutical medicine and issues often not covered in textbooks, and providing feedback on practice examination questions

## Preparation for the Examination

A Diploma candidate should plan a training programme in pharmaceutical medicine, where appropriate with the advice of his or her Educational Supervisor. The training in pharmaceutical medicine should involve courses, distance-learning packages, other tuition and personal study. Candidates are not required to have attended a postgraduate course covering the syllabus for pharmaceutical medicine, though most do.

Personal study should supplement other approaches to learning. Study of a current edition of one of the published comprehensive texts is highly recommended as preparation for the examination. Textbooks on key topics in the syllabus such as clinical trials, pharmacokinetics, medical statistics,

safety assessments, etc, are also essential reading. Regulatory guidelines, particularly those issued by ICH, can also be a valuable source of up-to-date information.

Candidates are advised to study past Short Answer Question and Critical Appraisal papers, which are available from the FPM office at no charge, though, as with all examinations, they should not be taken as an absolute guide to future examinations. It is particularly helpful to practice answering past questions under conditions mimicking the examination and obtain feedback from an Educational Supervisor or compare one's answer with those of colleagues. Past MCQ examination papers are not available to candidates as some questions may be used again.

A valuable exercise by way of preparation for the Critical Appraisal Paper is to undertake critical review of published clinical pharmacology studies, larger clinical trials and epidemiological studies. Making a detailed record of one's views about the Methods and Results before reading the Discussion section makes the process active rather than just accepting the views of the authors. It is particularly useful to critique a paper that forms the subject of an accompanying editorial, again completing the exercise before reading the editorial, which serves as feedback. Comparison of one's responses with those of a colleague can add great value to this exercise.

In addition to reviewing published papers, much can be gained by spending time with colleagues working in different areas of the industry. Like any other medical specialty, pharmaceutical medicine is learned through examples in practice.

The examination tests knowledge and its application relating to ALL parts of the syllabus and, in aggregate, a combination of these approaches to preparation must cover all elements of the syllabus. However, some sections are given greater emphasis in the examination and, therefore, require more study. More weight is given to those areas for which a pharmaceutical physician is likely to be responsible such as the management and reporting of issues related to drug safety.

## Format of the Examination

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The examination is prepared by panels of examiners and the Officers of the Board of Examiners. Core features of the answers and the allocation of marks are also prepared before the examination and distributed for guidance to examiners when the scripts are marked.

Consistent with several other Royal Colleges and Faculties, the DPM examination has adopted a remote electronic format since 2020, utilizing the TestReach platform. Candidates are required to register and verify their access to the TestReach system in advance, with the opportunity to practice test questions to familiarize themselves with the format. On the exam day, candidates can choose to take the electronic exam from a location of their preference, such as their workplace or home. Additionally, candidates have the alternative option of a paper-based exam at the faculty; however, availability is limited, and early requests are necessary. Remote invigilation is conducted by TestReach, incorporating a secure identification process with live monitoring through webcam and microphone.

The Diploma is a two-part examination. Part 1 consists of a multiple-choice question (MCQ) paper and Part 2 comprises a Short Answer Question paper and a Critical Appraisal paper. The two parts of the exam are set on two separate days approximately 4 weeks apart.

Part 1 consists of an MCQ paper of 375 questions (75 stems each with 5 completions) all to be completed in 2 hours 30 minutes;

Part 2 consists of:

- a Short Answer Question (SAQ) paper of ten questions all to be completed in 2 hours 30 minutes;
- a Critical Appraisal paper (CAP) in which candidates have 2 hours 30 minutes to study a published paper and answer questions on it.

The time allowed for the written (or online) examination is sufficient to complete the papers working at a reasonable pace. The SAQ and CAP are held over two consecutive days.

Candidates may apply to sit both Parts 1 and 2 in the same year but only candidates that achieve a Pass in the Part 1 exam will be allowed to sit the Part 2 exam.

Once a candidate has passed the Part 1 exam, they will not have to resit it, even if they do not take/pass Part 2 in the same year. In Part 2, a candidate who passes one of the papers but fails the other (and therefore fails the Diploma overall) does not need to retake the paper they passed at the next sitting. A pass in one of the papers will be valid for a maximum of 3 opportunities to take the Part 2 examination. If a candidate does not pass the outstanding paper after four opportunities to take it, then they will be required to resit the whole of Part 2.

## MCQ Paper

Each MCQ has a stem followed by five completions, any number of which may be true. The candidate is required to identify which are 'true' and which are 'false'. Each correct response earns one mark (maximum of 375 marks overall), no response receives zero marks and an incorrect answer receives zero marks.

The MCQ paper is marked by computer.

## Short Answer Question Paper

The questions in the Short Answer Question paper can test either discrete pieces of knowledge, or can bring together several issues and subsections of the syllabus. The candidate is expected to identify the major relevant points and thereby show their understanding of the topic. Candidates should read each question carefully and answer the question asked. Each answer should be written in note or bullet point form. In total, 10 marks are available for each question (100 marks for the full paper). Candidates should note any guidance provided on the distribution of marks within a question and, if a question consists of more than one part, take care to answer every part.

It is important to attempt every question since 10% of the possible marks will be lost for each question not answered. Candidates who do not attempt or fail to score on three or more questions will fail this paper (and hence the whole examination) whatever their aggregate score is on the remainder of the paper.

## Critical Appraisal Paper

The Critical Appraisal Paper is designed to test the ability of candidates to summarise and criticise the important components of work published in a scientific paper of direct relevance to the role of a pharmaceutical physician. Candidates are given 2 hours 30 minutes to review the paper and answer the questions on it. Each answer should be written in note or bullet point form.

Some questions will test understanding of the paper such as subject selection criteria, study design, analysis and results. Others will focus on discussing the merits of the chosen design and analysis and how it could have been improved, the interpretation and relevance of the results for clinical practice,

and suggestions for further research. Candidates are not expected to have detailed knowledge of the therapeutic area that was studied.

The question paper will include information on the distribution of available marks, with more marks being allocated to challenging the trial and re-design sections. Candidates should note this information and ensure that they allocate their time appropriately.

## General

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It is emphasised that no credit is given in any part of the examination for irrelevant information or discussion of topics outside the scope of the question. Where a question has more than one part, all parts must be answered to gain maximum marks. Marks may be deducted for important errors of commission, particularly if they relate to statements of unsafe and/or unethical actions.

Answers must convey clear meaning; however, there is no penalty for poor spelling or grammar.

## Assessments

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Standards for the written papers are set using an objective criterion-referenced procedure to determine the pass mark. The procedure takes into account the difficulty of the paper and the standard expected of candidates at Diploma level. There is no limit to the number of candidates who may pass.

The MCQ paper is marked by computer.

Each question in the Short Answer and Critical Appraisal papers is marked independently by at least two examiners using the core features of the answer and guide to allocation of marks provided. Each question is marked by the same examiners for all candidates to maximise standardisation unless the number of candidates or other factors make this unfeasible. A moderating procedure exists for any individual questions for which a discrepancy arises in the marks awarded.

Throughout the examination process candidates are identified by their candidate numbers only.

## Adjudication

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A meeting of the Officers and Panel Convenors of the Board of Examiners is held to adjudicate after each of the two parts of the examination.

Adjudication of the Part 1 takes place approximately 2 weeks after the examination. Candidates will be notified of the outcome immediately afterwards.

Adjudication of the Part 2 examination takes place approximately 2 weeks prior to a full meeting of the Board to award grades for each part of the written examination. The performance of all candidates in both papers is examined carefully, but particular attention is paid to candidates who are close to the boundary between pass and fail in one or other of the two papers.

The final decision on 'Pass' or 'Fail' is made at an adjudication meeting of the full Board of Examiners held about six to eight weeks after the examination. Candidates are identified by their candidate numbers only throughout the examination until after the adjudication.

Candidates must achieve a pass grade in the MCQ paper to Pass the Part 1 examination, and a pass grade in both the short answer and critical appraisal papers to pass Part 2.

The Board of Examiners will award the Diploma to candidates who have passed both Part 1 and Part 2 and may award the Diploma with Distinction to candidates who obtain consistently high marks in the examination. Candidates who pass the Part 1 examination are awarded the Certificate (CPM).

After completion of the adjudication, a detailed review of the overall results and of the examination procedures is conducted. Re-marking of written examination papers after completion of the moderation and adjudication processes will only be undertaken at the request of the Appeals Panel in response to a well-founded appeal.

Appeals may be submitted based on the following grounds:

1. Exceptional personal circumstances that arise at the start of or during the examination; the candidate is required to promptly inform the invigilator/examiners of such circumstances.
2. Deviation from the examination procedures (including the policy for candidates with Special Requirements) that puts the candidate at a disadvantage.

## Section Two: Examination Regulations and Procedures

### Diploma Examination

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- A.1 The Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine (DPM) is awarded by FPM on the recommendation of the Board of Examiners.
- A.2 The Diploma Examination is conducted annually by the Board of Examiners at fixed times and places announced by FPM.
- A.3 The Certificate examination (CPM) consists of one exam paper which also makes up Part 1 of the Diploma examination.
- A.4 Candidates wishing to take Part 2 must have passed the CPM examination
- A.5 Candidates must attempt both the SAQ and the CAP together the first time they take the Part 2 examination. Candidates who pass one paper of the Part 2, but fail the other, do not need to retake the paper they passed at their next attempt; they will only need to retake the paper they failed. A pass in that paper will be valid for 3 further opportunities to sit the Part 2.

For example, if a candidate passed the SAQ paper, but failed the CAP paper in 2023:

- The next 3 opportunities to resit the CAP paper are 2024, 2025 and 2026. Therefore, if a candidate does not attempt or does not pass the CAP paper by 2026, then the SAQ will need to be repeated together with the CAP in 2027.

- A.6 Situations such as long-term sickness may prevent a candidate from re-sitting Part 2 in a particular year. In this case, the candidate may be entitled to an extension of the validity of their pass in one of the papers. The extension of the validity of the pass will be considered on a case by case basis by the Officers of the Board of Examiners. Candidates should contact the FPM Examinations and Standards Manager ([exams@fpm.org.uk](mailto:exams@fpm.org.uk)) with their justification if they wish to request an extension.

**GMC Exam Guidance:** Candidates are further reminded that the GMC has issued guidance on “[Expectations about the number of attempts at examinations](#)”. This states that no candidate will normally be allowed more than six attempts at an examination after 6 failed attempts a candidate must provide evidence of additional educational experience to the royal college for each re-sit (including those not currently in GMC approved training programmes). Therefore, applicable to both PMST and non PMST candidates, no candidate will be allowed more than 6



attempts at each of Part 1 and Part 2 without permission from the Officers of the Board of Examiners and for PMST trainees, additionally from the Pharmaceutical Medicine Deanery.

- A.7 The two parts of the examination must be passed for a candidate to be awarded the Diploma.
- A.8 The Diploma candidate is required to sit two written examinations.
- A.9 Membership of FPM may be granted to pharmaceutical physicians who possess the Diploma, meet other eligibility criteria, and have their application approved by the FPM Education and Standards Committee (see A.46).
- A.10 FPM will provide all the necessary information such as *Guidance and Regulations, Syllabus for Pharmaceutical Medicine and the Examination Specification*. These documents are available on the website.

## Eligibility of Candidates

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- A.11 Eligibility of candidates to sit the Diploma examination will be decided by the Board of Examiners.
- A.12 Candidates must possess a medical qualification recognised by the General Medical Council (GMC) in the UK or be included on an appropriate medical register in their home country.
- A.13 Eligibility will be determined when a candidate applies to sit the Part 1 examination.
- A.14 Candidates must inform FPM if there has any change in their status that might affect their eligibility at the time of submitting an application to sit Part 2.

## Certificate Registration

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- A.15 Candidates must complete the online application form and submit payment by the announced closing date.
- A.16 When attending an examination, candidates are required to provide photographic identity (e.g., passport, driving licence, identity card) at registration.
- A.17 When submitting the application for Part 1, candidates must provide evidence of registration as a medical practitioner by provision of their GMC registration number. Candidates not registered in the United Kingdom should provide the original or a notarised (legally validated) copy and translation of their medical registration certificate. If this does not show current registration, then a certificate of good standing will also need to be produced.

## Educational Supervisor

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- A.18 Candidates who are enrolled with FPM and Joint Royal Colleges of Physicians Training Board (JRCPTB) for Pharmaceutical Medicine Specialty Training must have an Educational Supervisor to assist in planning their training in pharmaceutical medicine. In addition, a Senior Specialty Adviser will be allocated to these candidates. It is recommended but not required that candidates who are not enrolling for Pharmaceutical Medicine Specialty Training also have an Educational Supervisor.
- A.19 It is recommended that a Diploma candidate should have completed, by the time of the Part 1 Diploma Examination, at least two years in a post that provides practical experience and training in pharmaceutical medicine.

## Syllabus

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- A.20 The Syllabus for Pharmaceutical Medicine is presented in detail on FPM's website.
- A.21 A Diploma candidate should expect questions during the examination on all sections of the syllabus. A guide to the approximate distribution of questions is provided in the Examination Specification. The discipline of pharmaceutical medicine is ever evolving, and a Diploma candidate should be aware of important recent changes and current issues.

## Examination

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- A.22 The examination is held as two parts. There will be an interval of approximately 4 weeks between the Part 1 and Part 2 examination days in any given year. The times are available from FPM about 10 months before the examination and are advertised about 3 months before the closing date for registration.
- A.23 Part 1 of the examination is comprised of a single Multiple-Choice Question (MCQ) paper. All 375 questions (75 stems each with 5 completions) should be answered in 2 hours 30 minutes
- A.24 Part 2 of the examination is comprised of two separate written papers:
  - A.25 Short Answer Question paper. All ten questions should be answered in 2 hours 30 minutes
  - A.26 Critical Appraisal paper. Candidates will be given 2 hours 30 minutes to study the set published paper and to answer questions on it.
- A.27 The final selection of questions for the examination papers is made by the Officers and Panel Convenors of the Board of Examiners. The Board ensures that the examination as a whole covers the syllabus appropriately. Core features of the short answers and critical appraisal papers are checked and agreed.
- A.28 Exam protocols for online remote invigilated exams are provided, they include information on computer requirements, the process prior to the exam and how the exam is conducted.
- A.29 Candidates will be remotely supervised under examination conditions throughout the exam and the entire exam is recorded. The recording of the exam is destroyed 6 weeks after the date of the exam unless it is to be used as evidence in a case of misconduct. Candidates have the right to request a copy of their exam recording.
- A.30 Candidates are advised to be in their chosen exam location 20 to 30 minutes before their scheduled exam start time in order to login, enter exam and go through the system checks. Candidates will be permitted to commence the exam up to 30 minutes after the scheduled start time. The duration of their exam remains the same. If a candidate has not connected within 30 minutes, their exam will expire, and they will not be able to do the exam.
- A.31 Mobile phones, calculators, smart watches and other electronic devices that can access the internet may not be used during the examination. Only ordinary 'clock face' watches will be allowed.
- A.32 When sitting an online remote invigilated exam, candidates must not record the exam, retain or share any of the exam questions or access (or try to access) another website or document during the examination.

## Assessment

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- A.33 The multiple-choice questions are marked by computer and pass/fail grades are then assigned according to pre-set standards. An anomaly monitoring system (AMS) may be used to detect instances of copying or collusion by looking for anomalous patterns of responses by candidates, the answers of one candidate being more similar to those of another candidate than would be expected by chance alone.
- A.34 Each question in the Short Answer and Critical Appraisal papers is marked independently by at least two examiners. Individual questions will be marked by the same examiners acting independently for all candidates unless the number of candidates or other factors make this unfeasible. A moderating procedure exists for any individual questions for which a discrepancy arises in the marks awarded.

## Adjudication

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- A.35 A meeting of the Officers and Panel Convenors of the Board of Examiners is held for standard setting and adjudication after each of the two parts of the examination.

- A.36 Adjudication takes place within 1 week after the Part 1 examination. Candidates will be notified of the outcome shortly afterwards.
- A.37 Adjudication of the Part 2 examination takes place approximately 3 weeks prior to a full meeting of the Board to award grades for each of the papers that constitute Part 2. The performance of all candidates in both papers is examined carefully, but particular attention is paid to candidates who are close to the boundary between pass and fail in one or other of the two papers.
- A.38 The final decision on pass or fail for the Part 2 examination, and for the award of the Diploma, is made at an adjudication meeting of the full Board of Examiners held about six to eight weeks after the Part 2 examination.
- A.39 Each paper is assessed as either a pass or fail. A pass is required in the MCQ paper for a candidate to pass Part 1, and a pass in both the short answer and critical appraisal papers is required for a candidate to pass Part 2.
- A.40 Candidates are identified by their candidate numbers only throughout the examination until after the adjudication.

## Communication of Results

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- A.41 FPM will advise all candidates of the outcome via email. Unsuccessful candidates will receive a detailed summary of their performance in the different sections of the Syllabus.
- A.42 Candidates will be informed of the outcome of the Part 1 examination shortly after the adjudication meeting.
- A.43 Candidates will be informed of the outcome of the Part 2 examination immediately after the Board of Examiners AGM meeting. This takes place approximately 8 weeks after the Part 2 examination.
- A.44 A Certificate and Diploma certificate will be provided as appropriate following the Board of Examiners AGM.
- A.45 Candidates are not entitled to the return of their answer papers after the examination. Written papers will only be re-marked after the adjudication at the request of the Appeals Panel in response to a well-founded appeal. The Board of Examiners cannot enter into detailed discussion with a candidate but will try to be as constructive as possible in any correspondence.
- A.46 An unsuccessful candidate may resit the Diploma Examination up to five times.

## Membership of FPM

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- A.47 A pharmaceutical physician who has been awarded the Diploma in Pharmaceutical Medicine, meets other eligibility criteria and wishes to become a Member of FPM must complete an application form and submit it to the FPM office. The Certificate only does not lead to Membership.

## Fees

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- A.48 FPM will maintain a schedule of fees which will be available on the FPM website with the conditions that apply clearly stated.
- A.49 Separate fees are levied for the Part 1 and Part 2 examinations. Candidates who apply to sit both parts in the same year and who are unsuccessful in Part 1 will have the fee for Part 2 returned.

## Conduct

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- A.50 FPM may refuse to register a person as a Diploma candidate and may withdraw such registration at any time if the candidate's behaviour is prejudicial before or during the examination by not complying with examination regulations or instructions.
- A.51 FPM will investigate any suspected dishonesty or misconduct by a candidate in relation to the Diploma Examination and, if appropriate, revoke the Diploma and Membership.
- A.52 Any candidate who wishes account to be taken of exceptional circumstances or conditions present BEFORE the start of the examination that may affect his or her performance must refer to the Reasonable Adjustment Policy for Candidates with Special Requirements, details of which are available on the FPM website or from the FPM office. Such circumstances must be notified to the Chair of the Board of Examiners or the Examinations Administrator BEFORE SITTING the examination; such information passed to FPM after sitting the examination cannot be taken into account. This information will be kept confidential.
- A.53 Any candidate who wishes account to be taken of exceptional conditions or circumstances arising AFTER THE START of the examination must make the invigilator / examiners aware of such circumstances AT THE TIME of the examination AND make representation in writing as described in the Appeals Procedure. Information provided after the day of the examination shall not be taken into account.
- A.54 The Appeals Procedure should also be followed for any representations by candidates on the conduct of the Diploma Examination. Details are available on the FPM website or from the FPM office.
- A.55 FPM of Pharmaceutical Medicine is committed to promoting equal opportunity and eliminating discrimination in all areas of its activity.