



# Obtaining the MFFLM in General Forensic Medicine

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## Preparation

The decision to undertake any postgraduate medical examination is not taken lightly. The Membership exam in General Forensic Medicine is no exception and in common with other Royal College examinations, obtaining them requires a considerable investment of time, effort and money.

It may feel as though the Membership is a 'nice to have' but the investment is certainly worth it. Studying for an exam focusses one's attention and captures your interest. It is easy to put off CPD by saying that you will read up on something 'later' but frequently clinical duties or other responsibilities will get in the way and the planned work falls by the wayside. Personally, I delayed taking my GFM membership examinations and regretted it, as there was so much that I learned that would have made me better at my job, earlier in my career.

A Forensic Physician's advice and expertise is automatically sought and by virtue of being a Doctor competence is often assumed. It is our responsibility to ensure that we are competent to fulfil a role and having studied for and passed the MFFLM GFM demonstrates this competence.

## Planning

As with much in life, timing is everything. To be eligible to sit the part 2 exam one must have been practicing in forensic medicine for 3 years. A pass for the part 1 is valid for 4 years. Further information on this is provided in the Regulations (available on the [FFLM website](http://www.fflm.ac.uk)).

Therefore, although one could take the part 1 after a brief spell in forensic medicine that would leave little time for further attempts at the part 2. Generally, I would recommend giving yourself at least 2 chances to sit the part 2 before your part 1 is no longer valid.

Application deadlines are outlined on the website but generally the closing date for the part 1 in October is in the preceding July and applications for the part 2 are in November prior to the examinations, which are usually held in March.

## The Part 1 Examination

The part 1 has a one-paper format consisting of 150 best-of-five multiple-choice questions to be completed within three hours. Candidates are tested on a wide range of topics in Legal Medicine as set out in the published syllabus. The examination is the same paper as the DLM and those passing the part 1 can use the post nominal AFFLM (DLM).

All written-exams (DLM, Part 1 exams and Part 2 SAQ exams) are online via the online Assessment Tool, TestReach. Candidates must read the available information for candidates on the TestReach's website; do not forget this as not being prepared on the day can add un-needed stress to the situation.

The syllabus for the Part 1 is comprehensive and very well defined. Most candidates use this as the starting point for revision. Some aspects will feel familiar and need less work, but other aspects may be unfamiliar and need intense focus.

The FFLM hold a revision day for the part 1 at least a month before the exam. I found it invaluable and very useful for highlighting areas of weakness in my revision. I would highly recommend it to any potential candidates and that you have spent some time revising beforehand to get the most out of the day. There are also webinars available on the FFLM website covering the exam itself as well as topics that are contained within the syllabus.

When looking at specific legislation I found it useful to use the government website [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk). The Crown Prosecution Service website [www.cps.gov.uk](http://www.cps.gov.uk) also had useful information about the legislation and how it is interpreted as well as being easier to digest than the legislation itself.



## The Part 2 Examinations

The format for the part 2 examinations underwent radical overhaul due to the Covid-19 pandemic and now much of the assessment is based online.

The Short Answer Question paper is an online exam consisting of 8 questions with multiple parts to each question.

If candidates have learning difficulties and may need extra time for this exam, please speak to the examinations manager to arrange this. Time management is critical in this exam, and although it may seem like you may have plenty of time, it will disappear quickly.

The Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE) examination is split between online stations and face to face stations. These consist of stations with an examiner as well as an actor playing the part of the patient in most scenarios.

Similarly to part 1, there is a suggested reading list and a syllabus available, but unlike SOM, there is no online e-learning course for GFM at present.

There are, however, a number of good quality text books available. Which ones you decide to use will of course be a matter of personal preference, but I found the following particularly useful:

- Simpsons Forensic Medicine, 14th Edition
- Clinical Forensic Medicine: A Physicians Guide, 4th Edition
- Oxford Handbook of Forensic Medicine
- Detainees with substance use disorders in police custody: Guidelines for clinical management (5th edition)

The full spectrum of general medicine is encountered in routine clinical forensic practice and this is – perhaps not surprisingly – reflected in the examination itself.

The [FFLM publications](#) cover a wide range of matters pertinent to clinical forensic medicine. There are publications on the management of specific conditions in custody as well as guidelines on most scenarios one may encounter in clinical practice. These are useful for everyday practice but are essential reading for the exam. They can be accessed online via the FFLM website and are regularly updated so make sure you are referencing the current version.

The SAQ is challenging in both its breadth and depth of clinical knowledge required. It is worthwhile using the syllabus to check that you have covered all aspects, some of which may not be part of your day to day practice.

The FFLM also run a virtual revision day for the part 2 exams, which includes a simulated patient/mock OSCE. This is particularly useful in gaining confidence and experience with how the OSCE works online and identifying any potential technical challenges.

The OSCE simulates what practicing doctors do in their every day work and so each patient you see is helping you to prepare for the exam. The exam intends to ensure that clinicians are competent in forensic medicine and so there are certain aspects of the role that are common and therefore likely to be part of the examination. As a doctor sitting the part 2 you are expected to have a greater depth of knowledge than your nurse and paramedic colleagues and this is reflected in the mark scheme. However, don't get too carried away imagining the most complex patient to ever possibly attend custody and how you might manage them; the examiners aren't that cruel!

## Summary

If you are considering taking the MFFLM GFM exams then you are likely already aware of the fascinating, varied and often challenging opportunities that a career in Forensic Medicine offers.

Presently, obtaining membership is not mandatory for forensic physicians, and all exam candidates will have a variety of motivating factors. Personally, I find the specialty fascinating and so I would have been doing a lot of the work anyway as part of my CPD. As a Forensic Physician I would be asked to provide senior advice in complex cases; I owe it to both my patients and my colleagues that that advice is sound and that I can demonstrate my competence.

The exams are not easy, nor should they be; as they are designed to provide a similar challenge to membership exams in other specialties. I would encourage any doctor working in the field to sit the MFFLM GFM and demonstrate the added value that a competent and skilled Forensic Physician can bring to a clinical team.

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