

Information and Frequently Asked Questions

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A) General Course Information

What is the course?

The ISA Primary Viva Course, run by Imperial School of Anaesthesia Consultants and Registrars, is for Imperial Trainees only preparing to sit the next sitting of the Primary FRCA SOE. It was set up to invest in the trainees that we will be working with in the future and enable a level of consistency in exam preparation to all Imperial trainees irrespective of their individual training environment.

What makes this course different to other exam courses?

1. It runs over a prolonged period of 5-6 weeks in the run up to the exam, allowing candidates to develop their viva technique over this period.
2. The course is completely **free** to Imperial trainees, but if candidates do not give more than 36 hours notice of a session cancellation without good reason, then this will be referred to the Head of Imperial School of Anaesthesia as a probity issue.

When and where does the course run?

The course runs once to twice a week during the 5-6 weeks prior to the exam, on Tuesdays and/or Thursdays between 18.30 and 20.30, at Charing Cross Hospital Anaesthetic department.

How do the sessions work?

Candidates are examined by Imperial Consultants or Registrars, with a ratio of 1-3 candidates per examiner. Ideally we aim to have no more than two candidates per examiner but this can occasionally vary from course to course dependent on demand.

The main aim of the course is to improve viva technique rather than to impart knowledge, although this does also occur. In this respect, candidates are expected to have revised extensively themselves in order to obtain the most benefit from the sessions.

Who can attend?

Candidates: those attempting the Primary FRCA SOE at the current sitting

Observers: CT1/2 trainees who are either sitting or have passed the Primary FRCA MCQ but who are not taking the Primary FRCA SOE.

Examiners: post-fellowship FRCA registrars and Consultants

Due to high demand, this course is only offered to Imperial School of Anaesthesia trainees. Trainees from other regions are welcome to express interest and we will add them to a cancellation list, in case last minute spaces become available, however we cannot guarantee any sessions in these circumstances as these are offered to Imperial trainees first.

How many sessions should I attend?

Candidates: we suggest you sign up for as many sessions as you are available, to ensure you are allocated as many dates as possible.

Observers: we suggest you attend one to two sessions over the course period.

Examiners: ideally we would like you to attend a minimum of two sessions for the course duration.

How is feedback given?

Each candidate will receive real time feedback following their viva from their examiner. If any further questions or feedback is required, you can contact the course organisers directly via email isaprimarviva@imperial.ac.uk or in person.

At the end of each session candidates will also be asked to complete feedback on each examiner anonymously. At the end of each course, all examiners will be given a formalised written summary of their personal feedback to add to their portfolios.

ALL FEEDBACK WILL BE ANONYMISED. Only the course organisers will have access to the feedback and it will only be used to give individual information to each examiner for the respective course.

General advice

We have found recently that those candidates who have been attempting the Primary FRCA MCQ by only studying previous MCQ questions and MCQ books, struggle significantly with the SOE and OSCE components in the exam. We therefore recommend that from the start of revision (prior to the MCQ) candidates study from textbooks to gain the underlying knowledge. In that way they will have the best chance at passing the exams at their first sitting as well as gaining the most from the course.

Furthermore ST3 job applications include scoring for passing the Primary FRCA on first attempt and we therefore recommend studying for at least 6 months prior to attempting the exam.

B) Specific Candidate Information

Candidate Requirements;

- Please only sign up if you definitely intend to take the Primary FRCA SOE at the next sitting.
- You need to have prepared knowledge prior to the sessions.
- We ask that you honour your commitment to your confirmed sessions as a professional courtesy to the course examiners who are giving up their valuable time to help you.
- In return you will send us a list of your exam questions following the exam.
- Signing the course agreement (sent via email with session confirmation).

How much preparation is required to sit the Primary FRCA SOE?

From experience, we would suggest that trainees normally require around 6 months solid revision to pass the MCQ, viva and SOE components of the exam.

Recommended reading prior to the course;

We suggest that candidates read fully the relevant textbooks in Pharmacology, Physiology, Equipment and Physics.

In addition, we suggest reading;

- Cross, ME and Plunkett, EVE. Physics, Pharmacology and Physiology for Anaesthetists: Key Concepts for the FRCA. Cambridge University Press
- Erdmann, AG. Concise Anatomy for Anaesthesia. Cambridge University Press

C) Specific Observer Information

Aims of observer places

1. To understand the depth and breadth of knowledge required for the Primary FRCA SOE exam.
2. To understand the viva technique required.
3. To gain insight into the “real” exam experience and the stressors associated with this.

We also hope the course will demonstrate the amount of work required to successfully negotiate the exam and motivate trainees to commence revision early.

Observer requirements

- honour their commitment to the sessions they have been allocated
- complete a post session evaluation form

D) Specific Examiner Information

Examining on the course is useful to show teaching experience on your CV and also for your ARCP review.

What we ask of you;

- Aim to attend two sessions during the course
- Post-FRCA
- Have prepared a number of questions prior to attending the course on Pharmacology, Physiology, Physics and Clinical.

If you are not sure which topics to prepare, please contact us and we can give you a number of common topics to prepare questions for.

What you will gain from examining;

- Experience in teaching
- Revision of Primary FRCA knowledge
- Certificate of examining signed by the Imperial School Regional Advisor including the number of hours you have given to the course.
- Formalised feedback for you ePortfolio on your teaching