



The Society of Apothecaries of London

Diploma in Forensic Medical Sciences (DipFMS)

Administrative Guidance for Candidates

EXAMINATION TIMETABLE: 2019/20

Owing to public health concerns relating to COVID-19, the date of the written paper is being rescheduled – A new date is yet to be confirmed but will not be before September. Applicants will be kept informed. Please continue to adhere to the existing deadlines below, including submission of application forms, and dissertations. Submit everything via email to examoffice@apothecaries.org.

Deadline for receipt in the Examinations Office of application form and full fee - see important note below regarding fee* (please submit your completed application and fee electronically please)	5.00pm on Thursday 23 April 2020
Due date for submission of dissertations - this is the date by which the dissertations must have arrived at Apothecaries' Hall. (please submit a single electronic copy ONLY)	5.00pm on Thursday 28 May 2020
Written paper	Thursday 18 June 2020 New date to be advised

EXAMINATION FEES

1. The examination entry fee is £780.
2. The re-entry fee for the whole exam is £780.
The re-entry fee for the written paper only, is £430.
The re-entry fee for the dissertation only, is £390.

***IMPORTANT NOTE.** An application is not complete without the due full fee. Candidates whose employers are paying for their examination entry, who may therefore need an invoice from the Examinations Office to prompt a payment, should note that the full fee **must** have been paid by the application deadline – you are advised to plan well ahead accordingly.

WITHDRAWING FROM THE EXAMINATION

3. Candidates who wish to withdraw from the examination must notify the Society in writing. Withdrawal penalties are detailed in the table below.

If the date of receipt of notification of withdrawal falls-	The penalty incurred will be...
Before the application deadline stated above.	No penalty
In the 2 weeks after the application deadline	£120
Within 6 weeks of the start of the examination	£225
Within 2 weeks of the start of the examination	Full Fee

Continued overleaf.....

PAST EXAMINATION PAPERS

4. A booklet of past examination papers is available from the Exam Office at a cost of £15.

PAYMENTS

5. Payments can be made via: -

The Society's website: <https://www.apothecaries.org/shop/>

Direct transfer: To use this method of payment you must send **your name , the examination** for which you are paying and **the date of the examination** by email to the Exam Office; examoffice@apothecaries.org

Sort Code: 18-00-02

Bank Account number: 05957192

IBAN: GB16COUT18000205957192

Swift/BIC Number: COUTGB22

Account name: The Worshipful Society of Apothecaries of London

Coutts & Co, 440 Strand, London, WC2R 0QS

The payment must be made identifiable by the inclusion of the diploma abbreviation and candidate's surname (e.g. DFMS Smith)

Cheque: Made payable to '**The Society of Apothecaries**' in Sterling. Please write your name, address and the diploma name on the back.

Candidates from overseas should ensure that their cheques/transfers yield the correct fee in Sterling AFTER deduction of bank charges. Only bankers' drafts drawn on a UK bank are accepted. Bankers' drafts should be valid for at least 3 months after the examination date.

CURRENT DISSERTATION TOPIC

6. **Title:** Describe how cognitive bias can influence the preparation, presentation and perception of expert evidence and how its effects may be mitigated.

Guidance statement:

These notes supplement the general guidance and regulations relating to the dissertation which you can find in the Society's document "*Guide to The Diploma in Forensic Medical Sciences (DipFMS) Incorporating the Regulations and Syllabus*" which you should also read carefully before starting work on the dissertation. In past years not every candidate has adhered to the regulations to their detriment.

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The psychology of how we acquire and analyse data and use it, consciously or unconsciously to come to decisions has been an area of research for many years. One of the areas of study has been that of “cognitive bias”. This was well defined in a PCAST report in 2016:

*“Cognitive bias refers to ways in which human perceptions and judgments can be shaped by factors other than those relevant to the decision at hand. It includes “contextual bias,” where individuals are influenced by irrelevant background information; “confirmation bias,” where individuals interpret information, or look for new evidence, in a way that conforms to their pre-existing beliefs or assumptions; and “avoidance of cognitive dissonance,” where individuals are reluctant to accept new information that is inconsistent with their tentative conclusion”.*¹

Cognitive bias has been particularly studied in the “pattern recognition” disciplines of forensic science, such as finger print matching and tool marks, but more “objective” disciplines, such as forensic toxicology, are not immune. The concept has attracted judicial notice in the UK; a search of the BAILII website came up with 14 hits. For an international perspective the American Academy of Forensic Sciences (AAFS) website has a search engine that gives searchable access to abstracts from its annual scientific meeting.² A Medline search for “cognitive bias” produced over 1400 hits. Restricting the search to “cognitive bias” and “forensic” reduced the number of hits to 40.

How you tackle this dissertation is up to you. One approach might be to read around the subject and then reflect on how cognitive bias might apply to your own area of practice and how its effects might be mitigated, whether it be as a provider of opinion evidence to the Courts or as an advocate.

For full details of the requirements for the dissertation refer to the **Guide to the Diploma in Forensic Medical Sciences (DipFMS) incorporating the Regulations and Syllabus** (available at www.apothecaries.org).

¹https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/PCAST/pcast_forensic_science_report_final.pdf

² https://webdata.aafs.org/RefLibrary/Ref_Search/Search.aspx