

Changes to MCQ assessment on RCUK Life Support courses – FAQs

Why has Resuscitation Council UK removed the post-course MCQ?

RCUK reviewed the role of the post-course multiple-choice question (MCQ) across our Life Support courses. Although an established mechanism for many years, current educational evidence has shown it added time, pressure and fatigue at the end of the course and provided limited additional educational value. Candidates complete a pre-course MCQ and are assessed throughout the course on their ability to apply their knowledge and skills. Removing the post-course MCQ reduces duplication and allows greater focus on practical learning.

The change does not remove the requirement to demonstrate knowledge. Instead, it shifts knowledge assessment to a point where candidates can engage with the learning materials, identify gaps in understanding and achieve the required standard without the additional pressure of a timed examination at the end of an intensive course day. The aim is to encourage learning and preparation rather than test memory under examination conditions.

Does removing the post-course MCQ make the assessment less rigorous?

No. Candidates must achieve at least 80% in the pre-course MCQ before attending. During the course, their understanding and ability to apply their knowledge and skills are assessed, including through the relevant summative practical assessment. Passing the pre-course MCQ alone does not guarantee successful completion. Together, these elements provide assurance of underpinning knowledge and its practical application.

This change recognises that the ability to locate, interpret and apply information is often more valuable in practice than recalling facts under examination conditions. The pre-course MCQ confirms that candidates have engaged with the course materials and achieved the required standard of knowledge before attending, while course-based assessments confirm their ability to apply that knowledge safely and effectively.

What has changed about the pre-course MCQ?

The pre-course MCQ:

- is mandatory and must be passed before attending the course
- has a standardised pass mark of 80% across all applicable courses
- is completed open book
- can be attempted more than once until the pass mark is achieved.

Why is the pre-course MCQ open book and why are multiple attempts allowed?

The pre-course MCQ supports preparation and ensures that candidates reach the required standard of underpinning knowledge before attending.

The open-book format allows candidates to use the course manual and learning materials to identify gaps and revisit relevant content. Multiple attempts allow further study where knowledge is less secure to achieve the 80% pass mark.

What happens if a candidate has not passed the pre-course MCQ?

A candidate who has not achieved the 80% pass mark cannot attend the course. Candidates should therefore complete the MCQ early enough to revisit the learning materials and make further attempts if needed.

Why was the pass mark standardised at 80%?

Pass marks previously varied between courses. A standard 80% pass mark provides a clear and consistent approach across the RCUK course portfolio and establishes the level of underpinning knowledge expected before course attendance.

Will removing the post-course MCQ shorten the course?

The scheduled course programme will still be followed. Removing the time needed to organise, invigilate and mark a written examination should help courses run more closely to schedule and reduce pressure at the end of the day.

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