

Sarwar's Guide for revising for MFOM Part 2

As I write this, it has been a number of months and I am finally tidying away my notes and reflecting on what has been quite a crazy 1.5 years or so with covering material for the exam battling the covid pandemic changes as well as my personal situation which really did cause a huge amount of external stress.

However, I made it through the exam and at the time of writing I finally got my AFOM certificate from FOM, and what I can tell you is it feels so damn good! If I can get through the exam with the situation I found myself in with my baby being born 4 days before the OSPE exam then you can too!

This guide is to give you my thoughts on how to prep for the exam, what I did right, what I feel didn't really help and overall provide some structure to preparing for a mammoth amount of information and topics which you can get tested on. You may find this guide useful or not useful, but I hope it can focus your revision to reduce the risk of wasting time and missing core topics the exam may cover. Your other predecessors have done a similar thing, but as you know FOM are ever updating the exam structure and content, thus this will hopefully provide some thoughts from the 2021 exam.

So let's get stuck in!

Written Exam MCQ/MEQ/Hygiene Resources

Firstly, it is important to start with time required. Some colleagues started late as they decided to sit the exam late, or whether they had other life matters taking up their time. For me, I will not give a firm figure as it depends on your current situation and level of experience/knowledge. What I would advise is looking below at what needs to be covered and then working backwards for how much time you need to cover it. This allows you to plan ahead and adjust to your situation, whether you're part time, have family commitments, are doing other studies like MSc/CESR or whether you are just not as experienced as others or a slower reviser and need more time.

In terms of resources, the way I split it up was to think of 'background knowledge' and then 'exam specific knowledge'. This is because there is such a wide array of topics you need to be able to have an idea of and ones which you need to focus your attention on and have more 'short term' memory to peak at the right time for the exams.

For background knowledge, I undertook the Manchester MSc as I was sponsored to do so by my OHS. The first 2 years of this covered a huge amount of core knowledge and helped with topics such as epidemiology and global OH matters, in addition to hygiene and occupational disease specifically. At the time of writing the new Cordell course over 9 months is underway and I believe this is covering the majority of the syllabus for core knowledge and may be something you may wish to explore. I got an AdvDipOccMed by doing the first 2 years and as I am doing CESR the research competencies were being covered by the 3rd year dissertation thus this made sense to me. One thing is certain, that whatever you use for your 'background knowledge', you will for sure need to focus your revision to more 'exam specific' knowledge on top. This is why the time required to revise for the exam needs to accommodate this.

Spaced repetitive learning/Quizlet: -

I was advised by some of my work colleagues that the 'new kids' on the block are using apps not to break down revision and aid learning. I was told about 'Anki' and when delving deeper I learned about a newer concept called spaced repetitive learning which is essentially taking 'flashcards' to a new level. It would repeat ones you got wrong and then 'archive' ones you got repetitively right and this was a more effective way to retain information and improve pattern recognition and memory triggering.

In view of this I created a quizlet account which does the same thing as Anki and was not surprised to find a lot of our US and AUS OH colleagues had already put together flashcards. I myself did my own ones and put together several hundred! Have a look on the following link as a present to you from me... <https://quizlet.com/gb/509001304/occupational-medicine-mfom-revision-flash-cards/>

Just a note that this should not entirely replace your 'background knowledge' but is useful as an 'intermediate' prior to moving on to more 'exam specific' knowledge as highlighted below.

The Google drive/past papers: -

Sadly I no longer hold the google drive which was full of past papers and other nuggets of info collated together. As you may know, I was unfortunately on the receiving end of a bitter individual who reported me to the FOM and was investigated for alleged misconduct. Whilst I got through that largely unscathed as there was no basis and only *primi facie* evidence, what I did learn is that the misconduct policy is clear on 2 things.

- 1(b) Any attempt to gain or pass on information about the contents of the examination during or in advance of the date of the examination
- 2, 1(k) Removal from any examination of any materials other than those specifically permitted

Whilst this may not be specific to the google drive, it is unlikely to be worth the risk, as I would not want anyone else to go through what I did with risk of GMC investigation and forfeiting your exam result. However, what I have heard is some smart individuals may have downloaded the google drive many moons ago, and I would suggest looking extremely hard/asking around to get access to it or parts of it.

The google drive has many nuggets of information, where my fellow examinees and I undertook weekly study sessions and wrote down model answers to past questions with MEQs. Also to note are other people's recollections from past recent exams which are useful to cover content/topics the exam may test you on. There are also lots of OSPE topics and mark schemes which can help focus your revision specific to the exam. What I would be clear on is that you really need to have the 'background knowledge' sorted first before embarking on more 'exam specific' stuff like the google drive.

If you manage to get access to it, in particular are the weekly study meetings, past papers and OSPE topics and a whole host of hygiene paper stuff with photos and diagrams of equipment and what it is used for. Whilst the military/naval OH colleagues may have their own courses and content, I am aware that there is a whole host of information from their previous courses and I would definitely give this a look through as they have pictures, formula, calculations and things which really are great for the hygiene paper.

One thing that I would note is NOT useful are the past MEQ papers dating back before 2008 or so where the questions style is different to what it is now, which is more subcategorised. I wouldn't spend hours doing that, but the weekly study meetings folder does have some nuggets that we put together for those coming after us for the exam and will help focus your knowledge and content required for the exam. It is not unheard of, for the FOM to reuse topics that tested others on previously as the core curriculum is unlikely to change significantly.

Lastly, if you want a list of topics to cover overall in terms of all the exams, hygiene, occupational diseases, stats/epidemiology and other random topics then I did upload a picture of a whiteboard that I wrote a huge list out on. I went through this in the last 2-3 weeks to ensure I hadn't missed out any big topics e.g. COMAH. If you get access to this, have a look for the images, and remember the list is not exhaustive so feel free to amend the list further and share with your colleagues to make sure you haven't missed anything else out.

Online, Books and Courses: -

For exam specific knowledge, before going on to past papers, google drives and specific topics to cover; it is important to note the following books and resources which are essential in my view to get a good grasps of more specific topics.

- *Fitness to work* is something I read all the way through (yes it's a huge book) and I would strongly emphasise this is a MUST as specific percentages and topics on elderly workers for example are directly tested on in the MCQ exam. You can do the grey parts and 'key points' but honestly I would just spend about 2 weeks to go through all 36 chapters and make notes on the relevant parts. Whilst you don't need to know every state and table in that book, you will find great paragraphs explaining certain aspects.
- *Pocket Consultant Occupational Health* is great for specific biological/chemical/physical hazards and their health risks. There are specific tables covering IARC specific chemicals, aliphatic and aromatic compounds, organic metals and other ones, which give an idea how to monitor for it, how it effects the body and what processes might give rise to this. Specifically I recall a question on Ozone and Vanadium in the written exams and both of them are in this book.

- FOM ethics guidance is essential and well worth the £40 or so. They directly quiz on specific parts of it and it's very useful to understand the changes from Brexit, the difference between common law and GDPR/DPA2018 and other important legislation and how it effects advice you give for fitness for meetings. I specifically remember being asked about a whistle-blower and which legislation covers it, and things like the Medical Act and how GMC has power to get certain information was new but important information to learn.
- Nicholas O'Keefe 500 MCQs were also very important to get used to understanding rare chemicals and their effects, topics such as flying/diving and fitness for work questions. Although it's not specific to MFOM part 2 it's certainly a good one for some background knowledge and at the time of writing the only resource for MCQs for MFOM part 2.
- www.legislation.gov.uk was a great website to understand the core text in certain laws.
- HSE website and ACOPS for every key legislation also very useful and has certain schedules/regulations which summarise aspects of the legislation beautifully e.g. IRR and the boundaries.
- Fitness to drive DVLA medical guidelines is a must and you definitely don't want to be caught short of some of those marks that are easy to get by knowing the guidance. You can also apply this to other safety critical work like heights, rail etc... and yes you need to know the whole guidance as they quiz you on some random ones like 'which condition automatically bars you from Group 2 licence forever...'.
- Prescribed diseases schedule – really important as it helped with hygiene and MEQs which specifically attributed conditions with occupations and when it would be compensatable. Learn all of the PDs and the chemicals etc... and you won't be far off knowing which are IARC group 1 for example or which are schedule 6 COSHH chemicals.
- In addition to PDs, learn which ones are notifiable under PHA. There is a huge list for both of them but even if short term memory can serve you some recollection, you will find some MCQs slightly easier if you can rule out 1 or 2 answers and allow pattern recognition to
- The travel medicine examples MCQs were useful to cover rarely tropical diseases, food poisoning and they give answers. The website should be readily available and I remember specific question actually coming from that website.
- SOM MFOM revision presentations which have been repeated and are from senior consultants and some previous directors of examinations/training who have been directly involved in writing questions and structuring the exam to cover the curriculum and ensure the AFOMs/MFOMs are of an appropriate standard. A great basis to more exam specific content.
- Cordell MFOM Revision course (4 week one) was new at the time I sat it, but was great in terms of understanding how MEQs should be written and structured, gave great model answers and allowed questioning. The stats and epidemiology in particular was very useful and I could not find a great resource until this course which summarised the pros and cons of different studies, working out sensitivity/specificity/NPV/PPV and other things like PMR/SMR well. Highly recommend and this course gives links to other sources which were useful to consolidate learning.

What I didn't find useful:-

- Oxford handbook of occupational medicine – too brief, not enough detail for MFOM part 2 and often outdated
- Clare Fernandes MCQ book – too basic for MFOM part 2 level and more for MFOM part 1/DOccMed
- ABC of Occupational and Environmental Medicine – repeated a lot of the information other books and courses did. Not that useful when considering the time constraints, but others found it useful. There aren't that many pictures as I first thought and thus would avoid to save time.

OSPE Resources

So as you know there are about 4 weeks in-between the written and OSPE exams. After the gruelling 8+ hours of the written exam, my first advice as told by others similarly, is to give yourself a break for about 2-3 days as your brain will be fried! The good news is that the majority of the written exam prep helps for the OSPEs and thus the OSPE 'background knowledge' largely overlaps with the written requirements. I honestly and genuinely did not start OSPE revision until after the written and this was enough time even with a heavily pregnant wife and losing 4 days near the end with an early baby arrival!

It's important to note you don't need to go through ALL of the written exam prep for the OSPE. However, FOM ethics, fitness for work, DVLA etc... are useful for OSPE too and I mention a few of them specifically below. Don't throw your notes away and keep them in a systematic way after the written paper as you will find you go back to them when covering certain topics.

I would add a few resources to the 'background knowledge' parts for the OSPE. You need to know the basics of doing examinations of many of the 'systems' of the human body and taking histories for mental health for example. I would encourage 'geeky medics' as a resource which many others have used and it is at a reasonable level. I personally got out my medical school book 'OSCE teaching manual for medical undergraduates by Ruth Bird' which was a 'giant mark scheme' for all different types of history taking and examinations. It had a good amount of background knowledge of what to look for and why we are looking for it, and was great when quizzed in the 'viva aspect' of each short case OSPE station. The oxford handbook of clinical examinations was useful also as a basis, but honestly covering the main body systems should be enough and no need to go into more detailed examinations. Think about what they can test you and look at the google drive if you can for previous topics, and make sure you can exam that occupational problem well i.e. joint examinations, cognitive examinations and respiratory/cardiac would be key as well as dermatology descriptions of skin rashes etc...

Regarding exam specific knowledge:

- *Fitness for work was used again, where the chapters of MSk, Cardio etc... had many occupationally related conditions which they could easily test you on. Marfans, PkD, Ank Spond, Occupational Lung manifestations etc... are just some of those found within that book and give you a nice list of 'background conditions' to read up on*
- *NICE guidelines of diagnosis and treatment of the 'background conditions' was useful when answering examiners questions about what treatment is likely and its efficacy.*
- *DSM/ICD was particularly useful with the mental health conditions on their criteria and what treatment/concerns functionally and in terms of work could be a concern e.g. PTSD*
- *DVLA guidelines again was useful as they can easily quiz you on fitness to drive of any condition as this would be a mainstay of any occupational health assessment.*
- *Cordell revision course did 1 day on OSPE and structuring your answer and the types of cases that could come up and ways to think from an 'occupational health' perspective. Cannot thank the Cordell's enough for their input for the MFOM exam, where at the time of writing they had only just created the revision course. This alone was great and well worth the cost.*
- *If you can get access to the google drive, there is a folder I created a while ago with OSPE specific stuff and some predecessors wrote their recollections on that. Although they may use similar stations and in fact some pictures where those from a google search, it is important to cover all general aspects of clinical medicine and then focus on the occupational relevance, rather than the other way around!*

MCQ exam

So I also just wanted to give my 2 cents on the actual exams and how they were to take and any exam technique wisdom I can pass on for you all. Starting with MCQ exam, I can tell you this was fairly time pressured and like with most MCQ exams, my initial advice is always to go through all the questions and answer the ones you definitely know the answer or can select from pattern recognition and do NOT star them. The ones which you are not 80% sure of, I would star and go back through. You will not get time to go back through all the questions 3 times and 2 times is quite pressured. So getting the majority of the answers down and done is key.

In terms of content, I was worried about the MCQ and the randomness of the questions and unfortunately I was right! I think some people recalled some of the more difficult questions which might be on the google drive (I am not sure), however generally speaking there were quite a few questions I had no idea about. The hygiene questions you can normally get through elimination or through pattern recognition, however the fitness for work type questions were much more difficult. This is why I cannot recommend the Fitness for work book enough as good background AND exam specific knowledge. Random stats, older worker questions, ethical considerations were a good few questions. Overall a tough exam but one that is good to get done first.

Hygiene exam

So as you may know, this exam couples with the OSPE to give you an overall mark, but don't let that lower your guard. Although, you don't have to pass this exam specifically, doing well can put you in a great position for the OSPE, and I will tell you know my OSPE was the lowest grade out of the 3 total marks I received!

You should get a calculator and have a piece of paper ready to write down the formulas and things you can recall like TWA and AFP etc... The exam is HUGELY time pressured and I made the mistake of assuming all 10 questions were equally weighted. THEY ARE NOT EQUALY WEIGHTED! So my Q10 was actually like 13 marks whereas one of the questions in the middle was like 6 marks. So when looking at the clock, make sure you don't equate each question as a set amount of minutes, otherwise like me you will panic when you see a large question near the end of the paper! Overall though, it was a fair exam but the time pressure aspect is just not required in my view. The pictures they use are similar to ones in the past, and the prep suggested above should be enough, the military/naval stuff is particularly useful for this if you can get your hands on it (I think this was on the google drive also).

MEQ exam

I recall this exam so well as it was in the afternoon and was the longest exam. It was 31 degrees and I had a fan and was typing so fast my palms were sweaty. However the good news is you will probably have done so many past questions and learned to structure your answers well. Unlike exam questions for many years ago, the 10 mark questions are long gone and they are broken into much smaller segments, so it is easier to tackle them. The time was more than enough for this exam, however note mine was remote and I am a reasonable fast typist. I know some of my colleagues did not find it as easy in terms of time. The questions are thankfully evenly distributed in terms of marks i.e. each one is 18 marks giving a total of 180 marks (unlike the hygiene paper). Invariably one question will be stat/epidemiologically related so hopefully your prep will make this one relatively straightforward unless you get something like SMR/PMR. The questions were fair and the time goes quickly even if you think that 3 hours is a long time. Normally most do well in this exam, so hopefully you will too!

OSPE

The stations are not ordered in a systematic fashion, so don't necessarily expect 4 short cases then 2 long etc... the wait times in-between are not enough to do last minute revision so I would use them to relax and maybe grab a drink or go to the toilet.

Short cases go fast, and I would just blast through the exam and summarising the exam at the end is a waste of time. I would summarise and mention things I would find along the way. Time is so short and you want to max the time the examiners can ask questions. The topics are similar to those that came a few years ago, but for certain it is amount time management more than knowledge, as the knowledge will be there. If you don't know just move

on to the next question, and if you want to make a logical guess then say it is a guess so the examiner can move on accordingly.

Long cases go even faster. The problem with them is that if you get a particularly chatty 'actor/actress' then you can lose time. I would give appropriate empathy and explain things reasonably, but also be mindful of the level of content you need to cover. The explanation to the employee should require a lot of time as they may ask questions. I made a mistake with this and was time pressured and lost time with the mental health case. However, the examiner did ask later what the overall fitness to work advice would be and what I would have recommended, although I am unsure this would replace the actual act of doing so within the time specified. The examiners I got were incredibly specific with certain questions so I would be sure to know your stuff well and then move on if you don't. If you are a reasonably experienced OHP you will be fine with the consult part, but the questioning can be in-depth with a little topic e.g. excessive daytime sleepiness, AHI score etc...

Final words

Overall I will not lie and say the exam is a huge one. It's most frustrating as we do not have a huge bank of question or lots of courses like other membership exams thus this relies on actually knowing the knowledge very well and spending time covering the vast spectrum of topics. The google drive was the closest thing to past papers, but sadly I had to give this up, however I would be fairly certain someone somewhere has a copy so I would suggest asking around.

You can do this exam. You can pass it. It will require a monumental effort but it is possible and I am proof of that. I did this with the most difficult year of my life in terms of personal circumstance, but I was determined and I used early mornings, late evenings and odd weekends/spare days to systematically cover the resources suggested above. The key thing I did was leave 3 weeks before the exam to relearn the core information rather than go to the last minute doing practice questions, as reconsolidation of knowledge is the most important. You will forget things as there is just too much to learn.

I will make it very very clear that you cannot do this exam alone however. You need a study partner or group. Find a small niche of colleagues who are on your level and set up weekly meets, regular whatsapp chats and with OSPEs go nuts with practising taking histories on each other to the time it is required in. It is the best way, you will spur each other on as this is truly a marathon not a sprint. I wish you well and remember that although others want to see you fail, there are those of us who have walked the path you are walking and want nothing but success for you. We need more specialist OHPs in our field and I wait to welcome you into that category with open arms! Best of luck and nail it!