

Medical Student FAQs (Updated 15 March 2020)

Why did the University decide to withdraw students from clinical placement in years 1-4? Why is the final year Assistantship being maintained?

The University took this decision after close consultation with the Sub-Deans and Medical Directors in all the Trusts, senior General Practitioners, and with the approval of colleagues in the Department of Health. In order to alleviate the pressures on the Northern Ireland Health Service as it continues to tackle the COVID 19 pandemic, we agreed to suspend clinical placements for 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th year medical students with effect from 14th March. This decision will free up medical staff from supervisory and training duties so that they can focus their efforts on treating patients, which, for everyone, is the number one priority.

Final year students will be working as F1 doctors from the end of July, and we want to ensure that they are as prepared as possible for this important role.

These decisions align with recent advice from [Medical Schools Council](#); most UK medical school have made similar decisions.

How will the Medical School continue to teach year 3+4 students?

We are developing contingency plans for the delivery of the undergraduate curriculum. Additional extensive online resources will be made available. Year 3 and 4 module coordinators are working with colleagues to provide as good a learning experience as we can. Further information on these assignments will be communicated in the coming week.

I am a final year Assistantship student. I am worried that, because of personal exposure or travel or illness, I may be placing patients at risk. What should I do?

Self-isolate in line with the [PHA](#) advice. You do not need to call NHS111 or your GP to go into self-isolation. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after seven days, seek medical advice by phone. If you have an underlying health condition and develop symptoms do let your GP know. You should inform the Centre for Medical Education (CME) (pao@qub.ac.uk), your clinical supervisor and module lead. Also copy in coronavirus-guidance@qub.ac.uk. You should return to the course as soon as you are well and complete the normal self-certification process.

I am a final year Assistantship student and need to self-isolate. Who do I need to contact?

Self-isolate in line with the [PHA](#) advice. You do not need to call NHS111 or your GP to go into self-isolation. If your symptoms worsen during home isolation or are no better after seven days, seek medical advice by phone. If you have an underlying health condition and develop symptoms do let your GP know. You should inform the Centre for Medical Education (CME) (pao@qub.ac.uk), your clinical supervisor and module lead. Also copy in coronavirus-guidance@qub.ac.uk. You should return to the course as soon as you are well and complete the normal self-certification process.

If final year medical students still on clinical placement need to self-isolate or are quarantined, will they be able to meet the attendance requirements of the assistantship? What happens if any student has to miss an exam due to self-isolation?

The medical school will apply the normal attendance procedures in the first instance for any absence. The 75% attendance rule normally applies to clinical placements. Students should apply for exceptional circumstances if they need to miss examinations. There is remedial time and repeat examinations available for students in all years to make up for time they have missed through no fault of their own. For example, for final years this is after the Assistantship period and before the final Pathway Review Examination Board in June. The medical school will ensure that no student is academically disadvantaged as a result of self-isolation.

Will final year students with underlying health conditions such as asthma, diabetes or who are immunocompromised be exposed to patients with COVID-19 on the ward?

All students, including those with any of these conditions, will not be directly involved in the care of someone with suspected or proven COVID-19.

Will final year assistantship students receive face fit testing for masks and training to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)?

Students will not be directly involved in the care of someone with suspected or proven COVID-19 and will not be required to work in an area where they need to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or a mask. As part of the normal Assistantship programme, final year students are normally fit tested for masks. However, given the pressure on the Trusts to fit test all staff, this may not occur this year.

Will “clinical” medical students be drafted in to help deliver care and support trusts? Do I have to be involved in the care of someone with suspected COVID-19?

The nature of the medical course is that students are increasingly involved in patient care, under supervision, as the course progresses. For example, final year Assistantship students will, under supervision, clerk patients, take blood, and check results. The medical school will continue to closely monitor the impact of COVID-19 on clinical placement sites, and ensure that students will only be placed where they are adequately supervised. Students will not be directly involved in the care of someone with suspected or proven COVID-19.

Will medical students be withdrawn from placement areas where there are positive COVID-19 cases?

Students should remain on their programme whenever possible. Students will not be directly involved in the care of someone with suspected or proven COVID-19. Where the situation is judged to be safe and appropriate, students may participate in the giving of care as long as an appropriate level of supervision of training is maintained. Should a clinical placement be considered unsuitable or unsafe, students will be removed from placement or reallocated to another area until it is considered safe for them to return.

What will happen to year 1-4 OSCEs? What about final year students resitting their exams?

Most of our OSCE examiners are practising clinicians. In order to alleviate the pressures on the NHS, we will not run year 1-4 OSCEs during this academic year. Progression to the next year will not depend on passing a clinical examination.

The second sitting of the final year OSCE will proceed for the small number of students who need to take it, although it is likely that the format will change and we will provide timely advice on the format to the students involved. No student will be educationally disadvantaged by any of the changes made.

Will there be any changes to the written component of assessments?

The University may need to make decisions regarding the type and timing of written assessments. We do not envisage major changes to the timing of examinations. We cannot currently confirm details of the written assessment format but we will update you as soon as possible. The University is activating emergency regulations to ensure that no student will be educationally disadvantaged as a result of any change. There will be no adverse impact on your progression.

What about elective students? Should they change their plans?

We know that, for a considerable and growing number of medical students, electives have already been cancelled due to Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) advice, withdrawal of the opportunity by the host country or institution, or new visa restrictions. Students affected by this should contact electivesmed@qub.ac.uk for advice, or to obtain a letter if needed for travel insurance. We recognise that, in the current uncertain environment, reorganising electives at this short notice may not be viable. We also know that hastily arranged electives may incur additional costs and may be of limited educational value. For this reason, we have agreed that students who are unable to complete a clinical

elective will undertake an alternative activity to gain the relevant academic credit. This is likely to take the form of a written project; we will provide details in due course.

Remember, students are not permitted to complete electives in countries that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) advise against travel to. As the list of such countries is changing rapidly, elective students are advised to review the [FCO advice](#) frequently. Students may wish to consider changing or cancelling their plans to avoid last-minute disruption.

Should I change my upcoming travel plans over the next few months?

Travel to a country which the FCO advise against travelling to is not permitted. Final year students who are still on clinical placement are currently advised that you should consider carefully where you are planning to fly to over the next few months, or Easter break as this may impact on your ability to attend the programme on return to Northern Ireland and complete the course. This is a personal decision; please consider the potential disruption to your learning through becoming stranded in another country, becoming unwell or being required to be quarantined or to self-isolate.

In light of the changing arrangements for clinical placements for other year groups and, in the face of developing travel restrictions, we recognise that some international students may wish to return home over Easter, including prior to the end of term. **The decision to travel is ultimately yours, but we recommend that you make a well-informed decision.** International students should contact the Centre for Medical Education (pao@qub.ac.uk) before making any decision to return home and to advise us of your expected departure and return dates.

If you are a student on a Tier 4 visa, we recommend that you seek specific advice from International Student Support (iss@qub.ac.uk)

Students with significant pre-existing medical conditions or taking medications that may impair their immune function should seek medical advice to determine whether they would be at significantly increased risk of a more severe illness were they to encounter COVID-19 and factor this in their decision about travel.