

Medical Student FAQs (Updated 30th March 2020)

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

A: 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. The Assistantship was maintained to prepare final year students as much as possible for their important role as Foundation doctors. These decisions aligned with advice from Medical Schools Council.

Q: What is happening to the Assistantship? When will it finish? When will I be provisionally registered with the General Medical Council? Will I have to start work immediately as an F1?

A: Following the Ministerial announcement on 19 March 2020, and recognising the crisis caused by COVID-19 and potential shortfall in the workforce, the university has agreed to curtail the Assistantship to a total of 6 weeks. We believe this is the minimum period required (allowing for illness) for you to prepare for the role of an FY1 doctor, and to satisfy the learning outcomes of the course. *Most students will complete the Assistantship by April 17th 2020.* Following satisfactory completion of the Assistantship, and in the absence of any significant outstanding fitness to practise issues, the University will inform the General Medical Council of students who have successfully completed the course. We anticipate that early provisional registration will be possible by early May for the majority of students. Such provisionally registered doctors will be offered the opportunity to take up an interim FiY1 post in Northern Ireland. Accepting such a post is voluntary. You are not obliged to begin work in May. Full FY1 will begin as normal in August 2020. Further information is available from the [GMC](#). A statement from the GMC, Postgraduate Deaneries, Departments of Health and the Medical Schools Council governing these processes is available [here](#).

Q: I am a final year student repeating my finals or taking deferred finals. When will I be provisionally registered? When will my Assistantship end?

A: The Assistantship for these students ends on 17th April. The exam period will be as already scheduled. We anticipate that provisional registration will be possible by mid-June.

Q: I am a final year Assistantship student and need to self-isolate. I am worried that, because of personal illness, I may be placing patients at risk. What should I do? Who do I need to contact?

A: 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.

Q: If final year Assistantship students need to self-isolate, will they be able to meet the attendance requirements? What happens if any student has to miss an exam due to self-isolation?

A: 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. Satisfactory completion of the Assistantship will be judged by an ‘in the round’ assessment of your performance by your clinical supervisor; we will take a flexible and pragmatic view of attendance in the current circumstances. Remedial time and repeat examinations are available for students to make up for time they have missed through no fault of their own should it be necessary. The medical school will ensure that no student is academically disadvantaged as a result of self-isolation.

Q: Will Assistantship students be withdrawn from placement areas where there are suspected or positive COVID-19 cases? If not, how do I stay safe?

A: As the pandemic spreads, students may inevitably be involved in the care of someone with suspected or proven COVID-19. Students may participate in the giving of care as long as appropriate PPE is worn, and an appropriate level of supervision of training is maintained. Appropriate PPE for non-Aerosol Generating Procedures (AGPs) consists of plastic apron, surgical mask, gloves, and in some circumstances eye-protection. Instruction on donning and doffing of PPE required for non-AGPs is available [here](#). Please alert your supervisor if appropriate PPE is unavailable for your use. Remember that effective hand-hygiene is the most effective means of preventing COVID-19.

Will final year Assistantship students receive face fit testing for masks and training to wear full Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)? Will they be involved in ‘Aerosol Generating Procedures’?

A: Face ‘Fit-tested’ masks are only required for staff caring for COVID-19 positive patients in environments where ‘aerosol generating procedures’ (AGPs), such as suction or insertion of an endotracheal tube, are being undertaken. This is usually in an ICU setting. Students *are not permitted* to take part in AGPs. 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. For those who would like to know more, instruction on donning and doffing of full PPE in the context of AGPs is available [here](#).

Q: 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?

A: The medical school has reviewed the list of final year medical students that it is aware of having an underlying health problem, to screen and contact those who may be at higher risk for COVID-19. If you are concerned that your underlying health condition should pose a risk of severe infection, then contact your clinical supervisor and the Centre for Medical Education (CME) (pao@qub.ac.uk) immediately.

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

A: We have developed contingency plans for the delivery of the undergraduate curriculum. Additional online resources will be made available, including online tutorials where possible. Year 3 and 4 module coordinators are working with colleagues to provide as good a learning experience as we can. You should receive regular updates from your module coordinator who you can contact using the email addresses available in the Year Handbook on the portal.

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

A: Most of our OSCE examiners are practising clinicians. In order to alleviate the pressures on the health service, 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; 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.

Q: Will there be any changes to the written component of assessments in year 1-4?

A: Alternative assessments for each year of the course have been planned, and details provided to you in an email on 21st March 2020. We do not envisage major changes to the timing of examinations. Further detail on timings and format will be made available in due course.

Q: What about elective students? Should they change their plans?

A: 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.

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

A: 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 during the 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.