

Guidance for HEE Postgraduate Deans

Exercising discretion to enable an exceptional OOPE for trainees affected by the cancellation of the MRCS(A) examination

1. Introduction and background

- 1.1 Due to a security breach the next scheduled sitting of the MRCS (A) examination (January 2022) has been cancelled which will result in an increased number of CST year 2 trainees (104) potentially at risk of not being able to sit MRCS parts A&B by end of planned training. The number of trainees affected is a predicted maximum of 104 across the four UK Statutory Education Bodies (SEBs): HEE, HEIW, NES & NIMDTA.
- 1.2 It is proposed to have the next sitting of MRCS (A) at the end April / early May 2022, with an extra sitting of MRCS (B) in July, and the results available by end of the month. This should mitigate against and replace the lost opportunity to complete satisfactorily, allowing most / all impacted candidates the opportunity to undertake the exam prior to the current expected end of core training date.
- 1.3 If not, for those candidates who otherwise would have satisfactorily completed their core surgical training, it is proposed to enable an exceptional period out of programme for experience (OOPE) to allow trainees time to complete examination, outside of training whilst retaining the national training number (NTN).
- 1.4 This has the advantage of avoiding an ARCP O4 (release from training) which might be perceived as “punitive” given the incident that has impacted on the training was outside of the trainee’s control.
- 1.5 Similarly, trainees affected by this incident may not usually be eligible for additional training time (ATT) using an ARCP O3, but the Postgraduate Dean has discretion to enable an O3 if there are exceptional mitigating circumstances conditional on capacity and other relevant factors. The “No fault” COVID Outcome 10.1/10.2 may not be applicable as the incident is not directly related to the COVID Pandemic, however, the Postgraduate Dean has discretion and may consider a 10.2 (as an alternative to O3) given the impact of COVID on how examinations are delivered.

- 1.6 For trainees already undertaking a period of extension to their training, if there are other capabilities outstanding in addition to the examination, it is likely that the extension would be extended provided the total additional training time (ATT) does not exceed the permitted limits as defined in GG8:4.105. If the reason for the extension was solely due to the examination, then further additional training might not be offered and options 1.3 – 1.5 should be considered. The Postgraduate Dean continues to have discretion in exceptional circumstances (GG8:1.12)
- 1.7 Using this approach, once examination is undertaken trainees will have will a further ARCP to review examination outcome/result and give an appropriate ARCP outcome.

2. Guidance on enabling an exception OOPE

- 2.1 The requirements for OOPE are set out in GG8: 3.168 – 3.169. In accordance with GG8:3.162 *“Occasions where OOP is granted to core trainees are likely to be exceptional given the length and nature of their training”*.
- 2.2 Trainees are normally required to give reasonable notice (defined in each SEB OOP Standard Operation Procedure - SOP), seek prospective approval from the Postgraduate Dean and the OOPE would normally be for a period up to a year.
- 2.3 Provided that affected trainees submit their application for an OOPE as soon as practically possible, Postgraduate Deans can exercise the discretion allowable under GG8:1.12 recognising the exceptional mitigating circumstances of the exam cancellation due to the security breach.
- 2.4 Postgraduate Deans have discretion and can waive the usual notice period to enable the OOPE to start in a timely way, provided it does not impact on service capacity and patient safety.

3. Additional recommendations

- 3.1 It is advised that the length of the OOPE should be sufficient to allow the exam to be taken, the result known and an ARCP review to take place.
- 3.2 It would be helpful where possible for ARCPs related to this issue to be completed ahead of the main cohort of ARCPs in the summer of 2022.