

20 March 2020

## COVID-19 and Recognition of Trainee Progression in 2020

Dear Trainees

We know that at this time the uncertainties around work, training and examinations are causing anxiety. Trainees' welfare is of utmost importance to the College and we hope that the following provides clarity and will allow you to plan for the coming months. Given the rapidly changing nature of things, however, even this advice may need to change.

Although there are some specific learning opportunities that may be delayed in your training, in these unprecedented times there are lots of other skills and professional capabilities you will be acquiring, not least around teamwork and leadership, which will be of great value to you as consultants in the future.

It is important that you feel supported during this stressful time and are able to seek advice. Many trainees have expressed concern around the level of protection recommended when assessing patients. There is guidance on the College website including that normal surgical masks may be worn at the slit lamp, particularly with prolonged exposure time at the slit-lamp and about the use of breathguards <https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/2020/03/covid-19-update-and-resources-for-ophthalmologists/>. This repository of advice is regularly updated. If you have any specific concerns about clinical matters, such as assessing patients, these should be directed to your Clinical Lead/Medical Director and Infection Control team.

Ophthalmologists in common with doctors in other specialties will be redeployed to work in other areas of your hospital. Being asked to work outside of your normal role may feel stressful. You should receive adequate training and supervision for this and always work within your scope of competence. The BMA have published FAQs to help in this situation [your-terms-and-conditions-all-doctors](#).

The attached appendix explains how we intend to minimise the potential impact on training and progression. If you have concerns about training and assessment please contact your TPD/ Head of School or contact the college directly.

As we receive further information from the regulator (GMC), Deans and the Education bodies of all four nations, we will send further updates. Otherwise please regularly check the COVID-19 website page for updates.

As the medical profession comes under increasing pressure due to the pandemic, we need to support each other where we can. Importantly, please ensure that you continue to look after your own health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely



Miss Fiona Spencer FRCS (Glas) FRCOphth DM  
Chair – RCOphth Training Committee



Varo Kirthi  
RCOphth Chair – OTG

## **Appendix: Impact of COVID-19 on Training**

The pandemic of COVID-19 will lead to changes in learning opportunities for trainees in Ophthalmology both in terms of experiences and in assessments, particularly where elective surgery or outpatient reviews are cancelled. The College recognises this and that trainees are concerned that this will have an impact on their progression through training.

The current situation has caused the cancellation of the Part 2 Oral examination planned for end of March, early April and the Refraction certificate which was scheduled for 14-16 April.

<https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/2020/03/covid-19-rcophth-news-office-closure-events-and-examinations/>

All trainees who had registered for the exams will have received individual notification of this.

All Royal Colleges have similarly had to cancel their exams and we aim that trainees in programmes will not be disadvantaged by missing exams because of circumstances outside their control.

### **Joint Academy, Four Nation, GMC statement on Exams**

I am pleased to say that [our statement on exams](#) has been agreed by the GMC and the four nations via COPMED. There are some minor changes in wording from the final version circulated to members.

### **ARCPs**

We are requesting that Heads of School take a flexible approach at ARCPs and ensure trainees are supported to minimise any disadvantage to you. Here is a link to the [statement from the four nation statutory education bodies on ARCPs which advises about how ARCPs could be undertaken this year](#).

Those trainees who will not be able to take the Refraction Certificate will still be allowed to progress from ST3 to ST4 providing they have shown evidence of progression otherwise in their portfolios. Similarly, trainees who have not been able to complete all the WpBAs requirements due to lack of opportunity, but have other evidence of development and commitment to learning, will be able to progress. E.g. ST2s unable to complete 50 phaco cataract operations will still be able to progress if there is documented evidence of their surgical development throughout the previous year.

At the following ARCP, it may be expected that trainees will have achieved a pass in their exams in order for further progression to occur.

This position has been supported by Guidance from the Education Leads in the Four Nations and Colin Melville, Medical Director of the GMC, regarding medical education and training and Coronavirus, previously circulated to all Heads of School and Training Programme Directors (TPDs).

A separate letter from Sheona MacLeod of HEE to Trusts and GP practices in England giving guidance on the management of medical training programmes in England in relation to Coronavirus has also been circulated to training leads.

These are accessible through the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges website.

<https://www.aomrc.org.uk/atdg-papers-reports/atdg-update-for-trainee-doctors-regarding-covid-19/>

### **For trainees who develop COVID-19 and lose time from training as a consequence:**

Consideration must also be given to any trainee who develops Covid-19 and has lost time from work as a result of ill health. No trainee should be disadvantaged by such circumstances and progression will be based on the

evidence of trainee development and progression to date. Affected trainees must have shown prior engagement with the training process and have some evidence of this in the e-Portfolio. Such evidence will include completion of at least some of the necessary WPBAs.

**For trainees who are Out of Programme:**

It is recognised that out of programme time, whether for research, teaching or other experience, can be an important part of training and at the present time it is not suggested that trainees should return immediately to clinical training. This, however, will remain under review and it is possible that advice around this may change in the future. The advice is that trainees should discuss with their supervisor(s) the best course of action to take. For any that do suspend their OOP time to return to clinical training we would look at supporting individuals to resume their OOP as soon as possible as the present pandemic resolves.