

How the Covid-19 pandemic will affect undergraduate medical electives

FAQs for medical students

Through the Medical Schools Council, the [MSC Electives Committee](#) brings together the expertise of electives leads from across UK medical schools. Medical schools have had to adapt rapidly to changing circumstances due to Covid-19 pandemic. The Electives Committee has provided answers to some common questions medical students may have about the elective.

In light of the constantly evolving Covid-19 pandemic and its effects nationally and globally, we fully expect that further updates to this guidance may need to be incorporated.

The Elective is an integral part of the undergraduate medical course in all UK medical schools. It gives medical students some choice in the topic area they want to pursue for further study. Traditionally, a number of students use this opportunity to experience healthcare in a different setting, which may involve overseas placements.

The Covid-19 pandemic has affected the elective plans of many students. Some of you may not have been able to start an elective placement, which you had planned some time ago. Others may have been able to travel to the elective placement, but were then stranded abroad.

I have not been able to complete my elective placement, which I had planned. What will happen now?

Medical schools have been looking at the best way to enable medical students to continue their studies without delay. The individual approach of your medical school will depend on when the elective occurs in the course and on the specific learning outcomes and regulations for the electives. Some schools have had to make substantial modifications to the final part of the medical course in order to enable graduation in unprecedented times. Other medical schools have allowed elective projects which could be achieved through remote learning. Assessments will have been adapted accordingly. Some of you may have incurred financial losses, which cannot be recovered by insurance or other measures. If this is the case, you should follow your medical school policy.

Will I be able to do an elective?

It is becoming very clear that the Covid-19 pandemic is likely to have an impact on medical courses for some years beyond the acute infection waves. Some of you may have missed core clinical placements, which will restart only gradually over the next few weeks. Others may experience delays in progression with the course, which may mean that less time is available for clinical placements. In order to minimise the impact on student education, your medical schools may consider repurposing parts of the elective period so that students can catch up with clinical learning.

Students often use the elective period to gain some further clinical experience. Therefore, elective time may be potentially used for clinical learning. In order to make the most of this learning opportunity, it is desirable that it occurs in a familiar setting at a local institution.

There may be some students who will be concerned about missing out on a learning opportunity they would have had if they had been able to choose the location of the elective. Medical schools understand that this may be disappointing for some students. Medical schools will try to provide some choice in the clinical elective placements, but this will be dictated by local healthcare needs and availability of elective placements.

Will I be able to achieve my learning outcomes for the elective?

Each course element including the elective contributes in its own way to your learning so that you can meet the requirements set out in the General Medical Council's *Outcomes for Graduates* at the end of the course. Medical schools will look at the best way students can achieve the learning outcomes of the elective for their course if changes need to be made to the elective period. We anticipate that in some cases, this may involve creating some additional learning opportunities, such as online learning resources in global health. Elective programmes vary in timing, length and nature of experience across the UK. Therefore, each medical school will have its unique approach depending on the focus of their elective programme.

Will an elective placement be the same as before?

In the near future, it is likely that elective placements will be different. The electives may be shorter in duration and take place at a local institution. Medical schools may decide to offer a menu of pre-arranged options for clinical placements locally. These may also include non-clinical options including remotely delivered project-based work. Medical schools will look at the best way to provide you with some choice in your learning in the current situation.

Will I be able to arrange an elective myself?

At the moment there are lots of uncertainties, which makes it difficult for students to arrange a placement themselves. Most international and national institutions are facing a great number of challenges due to the pandemic. Clinical services have been disrupted in many locations and it will take some time to get back to normal. Placement capacity is often reduced, and priority will usually be given to local students. There is the possibility of new waves of infection over the next few months. We do not know how the pandemic will evolve further, therefore it is not possible to predict the situation of travel and placement availability in the near future. Insurance companies are unlikely to reimburse elective cancellations due to the pandemic.

When will I be able to plan an elective abroad?

Medical schools will not approve any elective placements which do not fulfil health and safety criteria. Wider organisational structures within universities are in the process of reviewing their individual approach to considering placements involving travel. Due to uncertainties about how the pandemic will evolve, it is difficult to predict whether a student would be able to start an elective placement abroad in the near future. Even if travel restrictions are lifted, the situation may change rapidly again. Medical schools will keep you updated on any changes about which types of elective placements are possible.

Non-UK students who wish to spend the elective period in their home country should check the available options with their medical school.

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