

## Elective Advisory Guidance

*This document aims to update previous guidance, which was developed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. No further updates are currently planned unless they become necessary due to changes of the Covid-19 situation.*

The elective is an integral part of the MB ChB course in all UK medical schools. In alignment with the Student Selected Component (SSC), the elective delivers core learning, but, in comparison to other parts of the course, it provides students with some choice in the topic area. For the elective, students are often encouraged to experience healthcare in a different setting, with many students taking this as an opportunity to gain experience in an international setting. Across the UK, elective programmes vary in the timing, length and nature of the experience. Some schools may place more emphasis on clinical learning, whereas other schools encourage project-based work, research or give students the opportunity to engage in activities that are not patient-facing. In some schools, electives are closely linked to the global health learning of the course.

The pandemic has had a considerable impact on elective programmes and medical courses. As a result, modifications have been made to elective programmes in medical schools over the past two years. Most importantly, options for international electives have been limited, with some schools having not permitted such placements at all and other schools having limited the availability of international placements to a small group of students fulfilling specific criteria. Most schools have recommended UK-based electives.

The past few months have seen improvements in the Covid-19 situation and international travel has opened further, resuming some normality. However, it is important to note that some uncertainty remains in how the pandemic will evolve over the next year.

### **Considerations for the elective**

International travel has resumed to a considerable extent with entry requirements being eased in many countries. Therefore, international placements are now becoming increasingly an option for the elective again.

The planning of international electives requires time and often financial commitments at an early stage. There are still risks of sudden changes in the foreign travel advice, which may result in cancellations at short notice, unforeseen costs, or financial losses, as insurers may not reimburse pandemic-related elective cancellation costs, or curtailment. However, unpredictable events have always affected some international electives requiring changes in elective plans. Pandemic-related risks seem now to have become comparable to other risks.

Students should balance carefully benefits and risks before making a decision on their elective plans. As before, they should undertake a risk assessment as part of their elective proposal considering pandemic-related and all other risks. A pre-approved backup plan, such as a desk-based project, may be prudent where travel outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Although international placements are increasingly becoming an option for the elective again, medical schools should also draw on new insights gained during the pandemic when designing elective programmes. Innovative initiatives have been developed, which have enriched UK-based electives in particular. Medical schools should highlight the variety of opportunities, which exist for international and UK-based electives, and encourage careful and responsible planning.

Medical schools should continue working together to share new ideas and innovations to the wider UK medical school community.