

## Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations

8 September 2020

### Statement by Mr John R McGregor, JCIE Chair

Dear Candidate

#### **Intercollegiate Specialty Board Examinations Section 2 – November/December 2020**

Very soon you will receive details of the arrangements for your forthcoming Section 2 Intercollegiate Specialty Examination. All of us at the JCIE apologise if your examination sitting has been delayed by the enforced postponements earlier in the year but I am sure you appreciate that matters were not under our control. Rest assured that a lot of effort has gone into bringing these re-arranged examinations to fruition in difficult and unpredictable times. Some changes to examination delivery are, however, required for the safety of all concerned. The purpose of this communication is to provide you with some advance information to assist you in your preparation for the assessment. With that in mind the JCIE is copying this information to your Principal Referee and would recommend that you reflect on the details together.

In developing the operational plan, the JCIE has engaged with the General Medical Council (GMC), the Scottish Government, Public Health Scotland (PHS), the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC) and the four surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain and Ireland. Along with the JCIE Head of Operations I have also met with the Presidents of ASiT and BOTA and the JCIE representatives of both Associations on two occasions.

With respect to the safety measures, it is important that everyone reads the information in advance and adheres to the arrangements that have been put in place. Please therefore consider the following section carefully and bear it in mind when making travel and accommodation arrangements to attend the examination. Failure to disclose symptoms will be considered a serious probity issue. Candidates are strongly advised to travel alone and to book hotel accommodation rather than stay with friends.

#### **Safety Measures**

1. All candidates will be required to sign a declaration when they attend for registration at the start of the examination. Examiners, assessors, and JCIE Secretariat will have to do likewise. The declaration will include confirmation that:
  - You have had no Covid-19 related symptoms in the previous 14 days. \*
  - You have not been living with anyone that has been advised to self-isolate within the past 14 days. \*
  - You have complied with all work-related safety measures including the use of relevant PPE.
  - Away from your working environment, you have not been in contact with a confirmed case of Covid-19 in the past 14 days.
  - In travelling to the examination you have complied with all guidance relating to social distancing, hygiene and the wearing of face coverings and that you will continue to do so for the duration of the examination.
  - That you will report any new symptoms that develop during the examination.

\*A negative Covid test that post-dates either of these two criteria will permit examination entry but documentary evidence of that Covid test **must** be presented at candidate registration. This will be scrutinised by the Board Chair.

2. All attendees will have a non-contact temperature check at the start of each day. A fever will exclude the individual from entry and for candidates this will mean that the examination attempt is nullified, irrespective of whether it is the first or second day of your examination. In line with the current JCIE guidance, this will be deemed a withdrawal due to medical reasons and the examination fee will be transferred to the next sitting of the examination
3. Fluid resistant masks must be worn at all times within the examination venue. We want you to be comfortable during the process and you are therefore welcome to bring your own mask but please note that it must meet Type 11R specification. A plentiful supply of suitable face coverings will, however, be available at the venue.
4. All attendees must adhere to social distancing measures, to all relevant signage, and to the use of hand sanitisers etc.
5. There will be no handshakes or similar courtesies.

In addition to the above personal measures, each examination station will be sanitised between candidates and catering stations will be organised to minimise groupings and to ensure distancing. We would also ask that you comply with all relevant guidance when it comes to travel and accommodation arrangements you need to make to attend the examination.

### **Examination Delivery**

When it comes to the conduct of the examination, the oral examinations will be unaltered but there will be some deviation from what would normally be expected in the clinical examinations. The reason for this is once again safety. Were normal Section 2 clinical examinations to be staged in the Covid-19 era, the multiple episodes of close physical contact that would occur between volunteer patients and candidates/examiners who have travelled from all parts of the UK and Ireland would not only raise patient safety concerns but are considered morally inappropriate. With the approval of the GMC, the JCIE has therefore made the following changes to the clinical components of the forthcoming Section 2 examinations.

1. Volunteer patients will still be recruited for long/intermediate case clinical stations (encounters 15 minutes in duration or longer). These patients will be carefully selected to avoid the most vulnerable and they will be utilised for communication purposes only. The clinical section will take place in the same venue as the oral section (hotel or College) rather than a health care facility and a Perspex table-top screen will be placed between the volunteer patient and the candidate/examiners. No physical examination of the patient will take place but will be replaced by the examiners asking you to talk through your normal approach. Communication can be expected to include history taking, explanation of a diagnosis and relevant investigations, and the informed consent process. The remainder of the long/intermediate case will focus on management discussion and review of relevant investigations as per normal.
2. For the short case stations, patients will be replaced by structured clinical scenarios that will mirror the normal clinical material. Relevant radiology and investigative results will be available and where appropriate will be supplemented by props. The non-questioning examiner may role play the patient for any aspects of history taking and other related communication. As for the long/intermediate cases, you will be asked how you would conduct the physical examination relevant to the scenario but will not be asked to carry it out.

The one exception to the long/intermediate case plan above is Paediatric Surgery. The nature of clinical conditions that tend to be used for complex long cases in this specialty places patients in the vulnerable category. Furthermore, with children as patients, parents, carers, and play assistants are generally required which would increase the number of individuals around an examination table. It is

therefore felt appropriate in the current circumstances to use scenarios rather than patients in all clinical sections of the Paediatric Surgery examination.

All examinations remain mapped to the relevant ISCP curriculum and similarly the examination syllabus is unaltered. You should therefore proceed with your preparations as you would normally. The JCIE and the GMC do, however, recognise that this is a short notice change to examination delivery and, as such, should any candidate be unsuccessful in the Section 2 examinations taking place this year, it will not count towards his or her maximum number of examination attempts.

### **Potential Impact of Local/Regional Travel Restrictions**

Clearly the course of the coronavirus pandemic remains unpredictable. At the time of writing, anyone travelling back to Ireland from the UK would need to quarantine for 14 days. Local lockdowns are also an issue we may face. As long as they are not contravening any local or national guidelines, candidates will be expected to travel to the examination venue for face-to-face examinations but the JCIE has agreed that any candidate affected by local/regional travel restrictions that are in force 21 days prior to the start date of his/her examination will be accommodated by remote delivery. Similarly, individuals who are shielding for medical reasons will be offered a remote examination. Any candidate falling into either of these categories should contact the relevant Specialty Manager at the appropriate time (21 days pre-examination for authority enforced travel restrictions and as soon as possible for those with medical reasons) along with appropriate supportive evidence.

Please note that remote delivery cannot be offered to candidates who fall outside of these groups and that when remote delivery is conducted, the candidate will require to be in a regional invigilated centre rather than at home.

Please note, however, that these provisions will not apply if a full second national lockdown were to ensue. If such a scenario were to arise, the arrangements outlined in this communication would be void and alternative planning would be required.

I do hope this information is both of assistance and reassurance to you. The JCIE intends to have examination packs distributed in the near future and these which will outline the arrangements in more detail.

May I wish you every success in your forthcoming Section 2 Examination.

With best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'J. McGregor', with a horizontal line underneath.

**JOHN R MCGREGOR**

CHAIR – JOINT COMMITTEE ON INTERCOLLEGIATE EXAMINATIONS