

Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations

8 January 2021

Dear Candidate

Intercollegiate Specialty Examinations – February/March 2021

Following a meeting first thing this morning with the Presidents of the four surgical Royal Colleges, I write to update some of the information that was contained in my communication of 24 December 2020. I will summarise where we are at present as follows.

Section 1 examinations in February 2021

As was the case earlier this week for the relevant specialties, we intend that the Section 1 examinations that are scheduled to take place in early February will proceed as planned. These comprise General Surgery (2 February) and Trauma & Orthopaedic Surgery (3 February). Pearson VUE has ensured appropriate social distancing and sanitisation. Many test centres will be closed for the delivery of tests for other organisations, but Pearson VUE is maintaining their service for JCIE candidates in its UK centres. The JCIE has confirmed with Pearson VUE that it considers its testing as essential which Pearson VUE has acknowledged. Pearson VUE has therefore agreed to its own test centres being open for the Intercollegiate Specialty Examinations.

The situation in Dublin is a little different, however, in that Pearson VUE computer-based testing is restricted to a third-party affiliate rather than being part of the Pearson network. As such the test centre can make independent decisions as to whether the venue should remain open. Although the JCIE has registered the Intercollegiate Specialty Examinations as essential testing with Pearson VUE, this is outside of a third party's obligations. It may be, therefore, that the JCIE will need to make the same arrangements for Ireland based General Surgery and Trauma & Orthopaedic Surgery Section 1 candidates as was implemented earlier this week for other specialties and that is attendance at the Pearson VUE test centre in Belfast. The JCIE is liaising with Pearson VUE and if this change is required, relevant candidates will receive a revised booking confirmation from Pearson VUE. The JCIE understands that cross-border travel is permitted for examination purposes and you will already have received relevant supportive travel documentation (also available on the JCIE website news page).

For candidates scheduled to have paper copy version of Section 1, the intention is that these will also go ahead as planned. Paper copy examinations, however, do require JCIE staff to travel from Edinburgh to various locations around the country. Should such travel be barred by further enhancements to the current travel restrictions the JCIE will have no alternative but to cancel the paper copy examinations. If this were to be required, we will be in contact at the earliest opportunity.

Section 2 examinations in March 2021

I intimated in my last communication that the JCIE would update relevant candidates six weeks in advance of start date of each Section 2 examination. The first specialty scheduled to have an examination in March is Plastic Surgery commencing on the 1 March. Six weeks prior to that would mean a decision being announced on 18 January.

Following this morning's meeting, however, the JCIE and the four College Presidents have agreed that we defer a decision in relation to the March Section 2 examinations until the Joint Surgical Colleges Meeting (JSCM) that takes place on Wednesday 27 January. The Presidents are in regular dialogue with the four UK Chief Medical Officers and, prior to JSCM, the JCIE Head of Operations and I are meeting with the office of the Scottish National Clinical Director, given that the Section 2 examinations are being staged in Glasgow and Edinburgh. All relevant parties will therefore be in an informed position to decide about the March Section 2 examinations at the JSCM Meeting and the outcome will be communicated to you on Thursday 28 January.

I do appreciate the anxiety that uncertainty creates but rest assured all of us are doing our utmost to maintain examination activity in difficult circumstances. As intimated in my update of 24 December 2020, if a Section 2 examination has to be cancelled as a consequence of the ongoing pandemic the JCIE will arrange a replacement diet. In the meantime, however, the JCIE advises that you continue your preparation for the March examinations but please do not make any travel or accommodation arrangements until the status is confirmed on 28 January. Similarly, examination packs will not be distributed by the Secretariat until after that date.

In the meantime, can I please ask that you refrain from calling the office or emailing the Secretariat for further information. The staff are all working remotely and, in any case, will not be able to give you any more details.

Finally, please find attached the link to an updated supportive statement from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges.

<https://www.aomrc.org.uk/statements/exams-academy-statement/>

Kind regards

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