

ENGLAND – SPECIALTY TRAINING ONLY

Deferrals Policy

Covid-19 Related Deferral Requests

Deferring the commencement date for specialty training programmes is generally only permitted for statutory reasons (e.g. maternity leave, sick leave, paternity leave). With the Covid-19 pandemic, there are likely to be a number of successful applicants who are unable to commence training on the advertised start date, for a number of non-statutory reasons.

This paper outlines the possible reasons for deferment and how these requests should be managed. Although trainees can request a deferral it is up to the discretion of the local HEE office to agree.

1. Reasons for Deferral Requests

1.1 General Medical Council Registration

The General Medical Council has cancelled sittings of the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) test, a prerequisite for obtaining GMC registration for many overseas applicants.

Whilst trainees cannot be permitted to commence in training without GMC registration, deferrals should be considered to allow applicants to meet the registration requirements.

1.2 Training competences

During the pandemic, many junior doctors have been redeployed to the frontline to assist with treating those with Covid-19. This will result in some trainees being unable to complete all the required competences of their training programmes in time.

Deferral requests should be considered where successful applicants have been unable to complete their training programme requirements due to assisting with Covid-19 duties.

1.3 Travel restrictions

With travel restrictions in place, successful applicants may be unable to enter the country in time to commence their training programmes. Deferral requests should be considered until such time as travel restrictions are lifted, but also to give applicants time to find accommodation and settle once they are able to enter the country.

1.4 Relocation Delays

Some applicants will have met all the training requirements to allow them to progress to the next stage of training but may need additional time to relocate to a new region once the pandemic is over. For trainees who need to move region, there is currently no way of looking for suitable accommodation, schools etc. due to social distancing measures.

1.5 Career Break

There will be applicants who have been working on the frontline during the Covid-19 pandemic who do not fit any of the above categories but who still wish to delay their entry to specialty training. Requests should be considered on a case by case basis, with applicants needing to detail the reasons why they wish to defer their entry.

2. Other Factors

2.1 Immigration Restrictions

The Home Office has confirmed that trainees will be able to commence in post whilst awaiting their Biometric Residence Permit (BRP) providing they have been issued with a Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) and they have submitted their application before their current visa expires. It is therefore expected that most applicants will be able to commence in post on time.

2.2 Postgraduate Membership Examinations

Examination diets have been cancelled due to Covid-19, preventing trainees from sitting the examinations they need to pass in order to progress to the next stage of training.

Agreement has been given to trainees commencing in training posts, even where completion of the required examination is outstanding. Trainees in this situation are expected to complete the outstanding examination in the first year of training. Deferrals should not be permitted for this reason.

3. Requests for Deferral

For all non-statutory, Covid-19 related deferrals, applicants will be required to request this through the local office that they have been allocated to and provide the following evidence:

Immigration restrictions	Evidence that application for Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) has been submitted to the Overseas Sponsorship Team
Training competences	Letter from Training Programme Director confirming applicant was on course to complete their competences prior to Covid-19 redeployment
Postgraduate membership examinations	Deferrals are not considered for this reason
General Medical Council Registration	Evidence of PLAB booking for the cancelled tests
Travel restrictions	No evidence required
Relocation delays	No evidence required
Covid-19 related career break	Statement to confirm reasons why applicant is requesting a deferral and the likely duration of the deferral requested

Local offices should log both the number of requests received and the number approved, together with the reason for deferral. This data should be fed back into the national MDRS team.