

Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations

11 January 2021

Statement by Mr John R McGregor, Chair JCIE and JSCFE

Dear Candidate

Joint Surgical Colleges Fellowship Examinations (JSCFE) 2021

I write to update you with respect to the planning of JSCFE examinations for 2021. This communication immediately follows a meeting I had on Friday 8 January with the Presidents of the four surgical Royal Colleges of Great Britain and Ireland.

I do not need to remind anyone that we remain in the grips of the coronavirus pandemic and that the situation has deteriorated markedly since December 2020. Recent experiences serve to illustrate just how unpredictable and precarious the global situation is. Based on this and current pandemic modelling, the Joint Surgical Colleges and the Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations have agreed a course of action that is outlined in this statement. All of us appreciate that the decisions will be disappointing to you, but I trust that you understand that they have been made out of necessity and on account of factors beyond our control. For reasons that will become evident, I will start with Section 2 Examinations.

Section 2

You will all be aware that the pandemic has prevented the JCIE from staging any Section 2 JSCFE examinations since January 2020. The JCIE again apologises for the late pandemic-induced cancellation of the Cardiothoracic Section 2 examination in February 2020. Since then, we have been constantly monitoring the global pandemic situation, the status of international travel, and international entry/quarantine requirements but we also must be cognisant of the impact that Covid is having on examiner leave, which is an essential requirement for exams to go ahead. Furthermore, Section 2 examinations require a minimum of 3 to 4 months of advance planning and it goes without saying that the JCIE must be confident about these factors before it can announce an examination sitting. Taking this all into account, the JCIE in conjunction with the four College Presidents, reluctantly must advise all candidates that it will not be possible to organise JSCFE Section 2 examinations for the first half of 2021. The JCIE will continue to monitor the situation and provide updates whenever it can, but at this stage we anticipate that it will be May at the earliest when we can plan for the latter part of 2021.

I do appreciate how disappointing this will be but please bear with us and we will update you in May, or earlier if circumstances permit. In the meantime, I would ask that you refrain from calling the JCIE/JSCFE Offices for updates – the Secretariat are all working remotely and, in any case, will not be able to provide any additional information.

Section 1

As you know, Section 1 must be passed to gain eligibility to proceed to Section 2. Courtesy of the JCIE being unable to run Section 2 examinations, there are substantial numbers of candidates who are already awaiting a Section 2 place. There was already a waiting list in March 2020 when all examination activity was temporarily halted but this has been added to by candidates who were successful in the Section 1 examinations that were held in the second half of 2020. The late 2020 Section 1 examinations were staged in good faith on the belief that Section 2 examinations would resume during the first half of 2021 but, as alluded to already, the rapid acceleration of the coronavirus pandemic is now preventing that planning. The waiting list for Section 2 places is such that for many specialties, it will take more than one Section 2 examination to clear the backlog.

With no clear indication when Section 2 examinations may recommence, the JCIE and the four College Presidents have therefore taken the decision to cancel the Section 1 examinations that were scheduled to take place between March and June of 2021. The examinations that are advertised for September 2021 onwards will remain in place for now but may be subject to review, depending on when we can organise Section 2 examinations. Assuming the late 2021 Section 1 examinations do proceed, the JCIE will explore capacity issues with Pearson VUE to accommodate candidate demand. However, to ensure that we will be able to include all candidates displaced from the March to June examinations in addition to individuals who have already applied for examinations scheduled for September onwards, with immediate effect we will close the Section 1 examinations scheduled for September to November 2021 to new applicants.

Summary

In summary therefore, the status with respect to JSCFE examinations is now as follows:

1. Section 1 - no examinations until September 2021. If you are affected by the March to June cancellations, there is nothing you need to do at present as we will automatically enrol you for the equivalent examination later in the year.
2. Section 2 - no confirmed date for examinations but there will be none until the second half of 2021 at the earliest. An update will be provided by May.

Once again, all of us at the JCIE apologise for having to convey this information. We do, however, hope that once we get through the first few months of 2021 and vaccination programmes have been rolled out, the global situation will improve and that we will be able to come back to you with some better news. In the meantime, I hope you and your families all remain safe and well.

Yours sincerely



JOHN R MCGREGOR

CHAIR – JOINT COMMITTEE ON INTERCOLLEGIATE EXAMINATIONS