
Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations

25 May 2021

Statement by Mr John R McGregor, Chair JCIE and JSCFE

Dear Candidate

Joint Surgical Colleges Fellowship Examinations (JSCFE) 2021

When I last wrote in early January of this year, I gave an undertaking to update you this month as to the planning of JSCFE examinations for 2021 and beyond. I had hoped that by this stage I would be able to provide you with a definitive timetable of examination staging but unfortunately, as has proved to be the case on many occasions over the past 15 months, the unpredictable course of the coronavirus pandemic mitigates against this. I do not need to remind anyone that the world remains in a precarious position and for most of us international travel remains very difficult, if not impossible.

The limiting factor for the Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations (JCIE) in terms of examination planning is the ability to stage face-to-face JSCFE Section 2 examinations in Covid-safe environments and clearly international travel is an integral component of that. The majority of Section 2 examiners and all of the Secretariat are based in the UK and Ireland and it is essential that there are 'green' travel corridors (i.e. no requirement for quarantine in either direction of travel) between the UK/Ireland and examination venues for Section 2 exams to proceed. Furthermore, the JCIE Head of Operations and I are in regular contact with our Section 2 hosts in Kuala Lumpur and we have been informed that there is no possibility of considering examinations in Malaysia until March 2022 at the earliest because of Covid-19 case numbers.

We are actively exploring alternative venues, but similar travel/quarantine restrictions and Covid-19 infection rates preclude us being able to confirm any definitive plans at this point in time. The following is as much of an update as we are able to provide.

Section 2

a) Dates and Venues

As mentioned above, the Secretariat cannot confirm any arrangements at present. We do have Secretariat capacity to deliver Section 2 examinations in General Surgery and Trauma & Orthopaedic Surgery between October and December 2021 with the other three Section 2 specialties (Urology, Neurosurgery and Cardiothoracic Surgery) to follow in early 2022. However, we cannot confirm any arrangements until there is confidence over international travel and suitable examination venues have been secured. Given that examination staging requires considerable advance planning, the JCIE undertakes to provide a definitive update with respect to General Surgery in mid-July and Trauma and Orthopaedics towards the end of August. Information on the three other specialties will follow thereafter. Please note that we have not yet reached the stage of having a sufficient number of eligible candidates to consider a Section 2 examination in Otolaryngology, but further information will be provided in due course.

b) Examination Format

When the JCIE is in a position to re-start JSCFE Section 2 examinations, there will be a modification to delivery for General Surgery, Trauma and Orthopaedic Surgery, Neurosurgery and Cardiothoracic Surgery in the interests of safety for all participants. In keeping with the practice adopted in the UK for the Intercollegiate Specialty Board Examinations, there will be no patient involvement. Patients within the clinical examination sections will be replaced by Clinical Scenarios which are augmented by clinical images and radiology. There will be no physical examination but candidates will be asked to talk through patient communication and clinical assessment. Full details will be provided once the JCIE is able to confirm examination dates but I can reassure all candidates that the assessment is every bit as robust and that examination preparation should not be altered. The Urology Section 2 examination, being devoid of patient participation, is not affected by this Covid-related measure.

Section 1

The JCIE can confirm that the Section 1 examinations between September and November 2021 that are currently listed in the JSCFE website calendar will proceed as planned, although they are clearly subject to any significant pandemic changes. As previously intimated, these diets are accommodating candidates who were displaced from the cancelled Section 1 sittings between March and June 2021.

If you have a confirmed place in one of these examination sittings, then your examination is currently going ahead. The sittings between September and November 2021 are, however, closed to any additional examination entrants and until the JCIE can stage Section 2 examinations no further Section 1 dates will be advertised. The reason for this is quite simple and is related to already significant waiting lists for Section 2 places.

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

Section 1

One examination in each of the six specialties between September and November 2021 with entry restricted to candidates displaced from cancelled Section 1 examinations earlier in 2021. No further examination dates will be released until such time that Section 2 examinations can take place.

Section 2

No confirmed date for examinations but the JCIE is endeavouring to explore possibilities for General Surgery and Trauma and Orthopaedics between October and December 2021 with Neurosurgery, Urology and Cardiothoracic Surgery to follow in early 2022. The next update will be provided in mid-July 2021.

On behalf of the four surgical Royal Colleges of the United Kingdom and Ireland, the JCIE apologises for the ongoing uncertainty. Everyone is aware of the impact that this is having on your surgical careers and on family life but as I am sure that you appreciate that it is secondary to factors well beyond the JCIE's control. I do hope that I can come back to you with better news in July.

I thank you for your understanding and I hope that you and your families remain safe and well.

Yours sincerely



JOHN R MCGREGOR

CHAIR – JOINT COMMITTEE ON INTERCOLLEGIATE EXAMINATIONS