

UK Foundation Programme (UKFP 2020)

Deferrals Policy for COVID-19 Related Reasons

1. Introduction

Deferring the commencement date for foundation 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 reasons for requests for delayed start dates and deferrals, and how these requests should be managed.

2. Reasons for Deferral Requests

The following section outlines the possible reasons for requests for deferrals and delayed start dates.

2.1 Primary Medical Qualifications (PMQ) (two-year programmes)

Due to social distancing measures, not all applicants will qualify from medical school in time to obtain provisional registration and to commence their training programmes on the scheduled start date.

The majority of medical schools in the UK were able to adjust their assessment schedules, but in the cases where students are still required to complete practical assessments, qualification dates have been extended into the autumn. This also applies to some overseas medical schools.

Whilst trainees cannot be permitted to commence in training without having qualified and without provisional registration, deferrals should be considered to allow applicants to meet the qualification and registration requirements.

2.2 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. This is most likely to impact appointments to F2 Stand-alone positions where successful applicants are currently residing outside of the UK.

For newly qualified doctors, the GMC has made alternate arrangements. However, there may still be delays in obtaining provisional registration as travel restrictions may mean that applicants are unable to take PLAB 2 as they need to attend this part of the assessment in person.

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

2.3 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.

2.4 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.

2.5 Immigration Restrictions

2.5.1 Tier 4 Visas

Applicants for two-year programmes can submit their application for Tier 4 to the UK Home Office, but there are likely to be delays in the processing of applications. However, it has been confirmed that trainees can commence in post providing an application is in progress and as long as this was made before their current Tier 4 (student) visa expires. In cases where students have had their sponsorship removed as a result of their course ending early, this will mean that they will have to wait for their new Tier 4 visa. If they are outside of the UK, this may also affect their ability to return to the UK.

2.5.2 Tier 2 Visas

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.

3. Managing Requests for Deferral

For all non-statutory, COVID-19 related deferrals, applicants will be required to request this through the foundation schools. Foundation schools will then have the option to either arrange for an ad hoc start date for the trainee(s) and agree with the employer for an induction to be carried out part-way through a rotation. Alternatively, there would be the option for late starters to commence at the start of the next rotation when all other trainees on the programme are due to rotate specialties and departments will have already planned local inductions.

Requests for full year deferrals, in recognition of the longer-term implications of commencing foundation training part-way through the year, should be submitted to the UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO) via email to helpdesk@foundationprogramme.nhs.uk.

3.1 Evidence Required

Primary Medical Qualification (PMQ)	Letter from qualifying university
General Medical Council Registration	Evidence of PLAB booking for the cancelled test(s)
Travel Restrictions	No evidence required
Relocation Delays	No evidence required
Immigration restrictions	Evidence that application for Confirmation of Acceptance for Studies (CAS) or Certificate of Sponsorship (CoS) has been submitted to the Overseas Sponsorship Team (in the relevant nation for CoS)