

Time Out of Training

GMC position statement - November 2012

Purpose of this document

1. To provide clear guidance to Postgraduate Deaneries, Medical Royal Colleges/Faculties and trainees on the management of absences from training and their affect on a trainee's Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) ¹date.
2. To supersede all references to time out of training (also known as exceptional leave) that are in existing curricula.

Who is covered by the revised requirements?

3. All Postgraduate trainees in GMC approved training, including fixed term posts such as locum appointments for training or Fixed Term Training Appointments are covered by this position statement. It is not dependent on the trainee working towards a CCT. This position statement does not cover Foundation trainees who are covered by a separate statement for provisionally registered doctors and also the UK Foundation Programme Reference Guide 2012.

Background

4. Prior to the Postgraduate Medical and Education Training Board (PMETB) being set up in 2005, curricula were time based with each specialty defining the length of time that a trainee needed to spend in the specialty before they were eligible to be awarded a Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST – the certificate prior to the introduction of the CCT). Individual Colleges had different rules for the amount of time that a trainee could spend out of training without it affecting their CCT date.

¹ Where CCT is referenced this also refers to Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist/GP Registration via the combined programme route CESR/CEGPR (CP)

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5. PMETB introduced a move to competency based curricula underpinned by indicative timeframes. All curricula became competency based by 2010.
 6. In parallel to the curriculum changes trainees' hours of work have reduced with the implementation of working time regulations.
 7. Individual College rules around time out of training were in many cases not altered to reflect the move to competency based training and the changes to working hours.

The current legal position

8. Sections 34J and 34K of the Medical Act outline the minimum training times for general practice and specialist training respectively and section 34L outlines that in order for the GMC to be able to award a CCT it must be satisfied that the individual has satisfactorily completed the approved course of training. This allows the GMC to determine the arrangements for certification.

Issues

9. Absence from training, other than for study or annual leave, may have an impact on a doctor's ability to demonstrate competence and the satisfactory completion of the curriculum and assessment system to enable them to be awarded a CCT.
10. Absence is being treated differently across specialties and deaneries and there is a need to ensure fairness whilst recognising the different indicative lengths of each curriculum.
11. Historical allowances have not been updated to reflect the move to competency based curricula or shorter working hours.

Consultation with key interests

12. All stakeholder groups have been consulted, Deaneries, the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, Colleges/Faculties and junior doctors groups.

Position

13. The General Medical Council has determined that within each 12 month period where a trainee has been absent for a total of 14 days or more (when a trainee would normally be at work), this will trigger a review of whether the trainee needs to have their CCT date

extended.

14. The administration of the absence and any extension to training will be undertaken by the relevant deanery in consultation with the relevant College/Faculty where necessary. The GMC support deaneries implementing this guidance flexibly to reflect the nature of the absence, the timing and the affect of the absence on the individuals' competence. Examples of this flexibility are outlined in the FAQs. The GMC also support the use of targeted training to assist trainees in demonstrating the curriculum competencies without the need for an extension to training.

Equality

15. The absence includes all forms of absence such as sickness, maternity, compassionate paid/unpaid leave etc other than study or annual leave or prospectively approved Out of Programme Training/ research.
16. This statement is concerned with the effect of absence on a doctor's ability to satisfactorily demonstrate the competency requirements of the relevant curriculum. It is not concerned with the doctor's position as an employee and does not affect the doctor's right to annual, sick, maternity, compassionate or other leave.
17. It is noted that this policy may have a disproportionate affect on those who have a single maternity absence within their training as previously they would have been given (for some curricula) one block of three months exceptional leave. The GMC have noted however, in all circumstances a trainee is required to demonstrate the necessary competencies of the curriculum and this would have been the case whether the three month exceptional leave had been granted or not.
18. The flexible approach outlined in paragraph 14 will enable each trainee's circumstances to be considered on an individual basis and that any changes to CCT date will reflect the trainee's demonstration of competence.

Implementation

19. Implementation date 1 April 2013
- Existing "exceptional leave" provisions in individual curricula are no longer acceptable
 - Curriculum change submissions to reflect this statement
 - ARCPs undertaken after this date that are assessing a full year period from 1 April 2013 to include the review of absence.
20. Notwithstanding this implementation date, trainees are required to demonstrate the curriculum competency requirements.

Frequently asked questions

Colleges/Deaneries

1Q: Will Colleges need to amend their curricula to remove any reference to time out of training?

A: Yes, for any changes submitted to the GMC from 1 April 2013.

2Q: Will Deaneries and Colleges need to amend their websites

A: Yes, it is important that it is clear to trainees that extended absences are likely to lead to an amendment of their CCT date.

Trainees

3Q: I have been given three months “exceptional” leave for a period of maternity leave that I took last year. Will my CCT date have to be extended given this new guidance?

A: Where a trainee has already been granted absence under the previous guidance this will not be retrospectively removed. However each trainee is required to demonstrate the curriculum competencies and this may therefore require targeted training or an extension to training in order to enable the trainee to demonstrate the curriculum competencies.

4Q: If I am absent for more than 14 days (when I would normally be at work) will my CCT date automatically be amended?

A: The deanery will review each case of absence of 14 days or more in a single year and look at various factors:-

- timing of the absence - is it early in training or in the final months of the programme, is it immediately after a period of annual leave
- history of absence – has the trainee had periods of absence repeatedly
- nature of the absence – has the trainee been able to continue to participate in some elements of the training such as reading, online study etc.
- nature of the training that has been missed
- performance and assessments

The deanery will then consider whether the trainee has been able to demonstrate the curriculum competencies for the ARCP level, whether any deficiencies could be addressed through a period of targeted training or whether training needs to be extended. The deanery may wish to postpone this decision dependent on the following year's performance, that is, to give the trainee the opportunity to achieve the competency through targeted training.

5Q: How will the GMC ensure that deaneries implement this requirement fairly and consistently?

A: The GMC will monitor extensions to training via the review of ARCP data.

6Q: How will the deanery know about my absence?

A: It is each individual's trainee's responsibility under good medical practice to be honest and open and act with integrity and as such, to ensure that the deanery are aware of their absences through the deanery reporting requirements.

7Q: Will the Out of Programme (OOPT/OOPR) process still exist?

A: Yes, this position statement is for absences that fall out with study or annual leave and any prospectively approved Out of Programme Training or Research. The existing OOPE process as defined in the Gold Guide is not affected by this statement.

8Q: What do the GMC mean by "normally at work"?

A: A doctor's pattern of work will vary, with absences being blocks or weekends. Where a trainee is absent during their scheduled time away from work (work includes study leave) then this does not get counted within the period of absence.

For less than full time workers where they are absent during their scheduled non working time this does not count towards the period of absence.

Scheduled time away from work for full time or less than full time trainees cannot be amended to avoid counting absent time.