Academy of Medical Royal Colleges

12 principles for running online and remote exams more inclusively

The move to remotely delivering examinations and assessments happened rapidly as a result of the social distancing requirements in place during the COVID-19 pandemic. This was necessary to ensure that doctors in training could continue to progress in their careers.

As a result, many assessments moved online i.e. instead of being paper-based, they were delivered on computers using software packages developed specifically for running examinations. In addition, instead of large numbers of candidates sitting exams together in examination halls within their institutions, smaller (remote) locations were used, including:

— commercial test centres or colleges, with either face-to-face or remote invigilation/ examination/assessment

— candidates' own homes or workplaces where invigilation/examination/assessment was conducted remotely via a webcam

— a hybrid environment

Colleges were keen to understand both the positive and negative impacts of remote and online examination delivery in the context of equality, diversity, and inclusion and whether any candidates with protected or other characteristics, might have been inadvertently disadvantaged by these changes.

The Academy convened a short life working group and developed a common set of questions for colleges to survey their trainees.

Key findings were reported back by colleges to identify any cross-specialty commonalities, and the following 12 principles for delivering fair online and remote exams were agreed by colleges.

Colleges are encouraged to publish these principles on their websites as well as share anonymised findings from their survey as appropriate with trainees.
Findings from college surveys can also be used as an EDI impact assessment for submission to the GMC as part of any permanent approval process for an exam to be delivered online.

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1 There should always be the option for a candidate to identify an alternative venue in which to take their exam other than their home setting. Statutory education bodies and professional bodies should support trainees to ensure candidates have an adequate environment in which to sit an exam

2 Ensure candidates know to request access to basic facilities e.g. water, notepaper, breastfeeding and prayer rooms etc, in advance of the exam if necessary

3 Provide effective and accessible communication to candidates regarding the test centre set-up, exam software and technical support available to them

4 Ensure candidates know how and when to request reasonable adjustments. Policies should be easily available and accessible

5 Ensure where practical, candidates who need reasonable adjustments are not negatively impacted financially by travelling further to attend exam venues that meet their requirements

6 Offer demonstrations of how the online platform works in advance of the exam, e.g. using video tutorials, webinars etc

7 Provide a pilot run for candidates to check the suitability of their computer equipment ahead of the exam, with adequate time to address any issues that arise

8 Ensure good channels of communication are available for candidates to the relevant college/faculty department to discuss any challenges or seek support before and during an exam

9 Ensure that invigilators and examiners are well briefed before exams take place, appropriately skilled in the delivery method, and where possible, have received training on conscious and unconscious bias

10 Devise a plan for extraordinary circumstances if an exam venue is no longer able to offer a sitting, e.g. an unscheduled public bank holiday. If an exam needs to be rescheduled, alternative dates should be offered as quickly as possible after consultating with candidate groups

11 Regularly review private contractor services, e.g. test centres, online invigilators and exam platforms. Ensure any issues identified are addressed

12 Regularly review the exam delivery method to ensure those with protected or other characteristics are not disadvantaged. Introduce measures to address this as required