

Revised Entry Criteria for Examinations Administered by the Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations

The Joint Committee on Intercollegiate Examinations (JCIE) conducted a consultation and review exercise between the Spring of 2017 and the Autumn of 2019 to harmonise the entry criteria for Intercollegiate Specialty Board (ISB) examinations (commonly referred to as FRCS examinations) between candidates in approved UK/Ireland training programmes and not-in-training candidates.

The principal drivers for this were to address differential attainment by ensuring that not-in-training candidates were better prepared for the high stakes assessment and to contribute to the portfolio required of a submission for a Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR). In addition, it aimed to align assessment in surgery to the GMC's two publications, 'Excellence by Design' and 'Designing and Maintaining Postgraduate Assessment Programmes' by ensuring that an integrated framework of examinations and work-place based assessment applied to all surgeons in their preparation for independent practice.

The work included two meetings of Short Life Working Groups (SLWGs). Both meetings had SAS doctor representation with one meeting attended by BAPIO (British Association of Physicians of Indian Origin) and the other by a Lay Representative. All participants extended the consultation to the wider community they represented. The consultation process also included the four Statutory Education Boards of the UK, the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland, and the National Association of Clinical Tutors (NACT). The latter is affiliated to the network of Directors of Medical Education who are responsible for educational governance for all UK NHS employers.

There was unanimous support for the revised ISB entry criteria for not-in-training candidates that were proposed by the SLWGs and approved by the JCIE Committee. These were then endorsed by the four Surgical Royal Colleges at the Joint Surgical Colleges Meeting (JSCM) of October 2019.

A detailed communication that outlined the revised entry criteria was distributed to all key stakeholders, including all the Surgical Specialty Associations via their Federation, on 1 May 2020, and the criteria have featured on the JCIE website for some time ([Candidate Applications \(jcie.org.uk\)](https://www.jcie.org.uk)). They have also been highlighted in various presentations and this includes a Webinar for SAS doctors that took place on 17 August 2020 and which is still available for download on YouTube ([Supporting our SAS Surgeons through COVID-19 and beyond - YouTube](#)).

The initial intention was for the new criteria to come into force for all new ISB Section 1 entrants for examinations taking place from 1 January 2022 but in recognition of the difficulties imposed by the pandemic, an early decision was made to delay this to January 2023. It should also be noted that the GMC has been fully aware of the proposals, courtesy of them being included in assessment change submissions to the Curriculum Advisory Group throughout 2021 and 2022.

However, the closing dates for the January 2023 Section 1 examinations are rapidly approaching and it has recently become apparent that some prospective candidates and their referees are not fully aware of the revised criteria and the reasons for their introduction. While this is largely beyond the control of the JCIE and JSCM, the potential implications of this in the face of post-pandemic service recovery and the current NHS and Irish healthcare workforce crises are appreciated. After due consideration, the JCIE and the four Surgical Royal Colleges have therefore determined to delay the introduction of the revised entry criteria. Instead of applying to all new ISB entrants from 1 January 2023, the new criteria will now come into force **for all new entrants to Section 1 examinations taking place from 1 October 2023**. Allowing for distribution time, this communication therefore serves as a minimum of a year's notice of the revised entry criteria for all not-in-training ISB candidates who have not previously been fully aware.

The JCIE and Surgical Royal Colleges do, however, reiterate that they believe the revised criteria to be educationally appropriate and to be in the best interests of all surgeons as they prepare for ISB (FRCS) examinations. As such the JCIE supported by JSCM remains committed to their introduction and the delay until October 2023 is to allow prospective candidates to align to them. Communication and discussion will be ongoing via established forums such as the Intercollegiate Committee for SAS Education.

Signed on behalf of the JCIE and the JSCM, 29 August 2022.



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