

# COVID MITIGATIONS FOR MBBS

Following approval by the Education Quality and Strategy Board and the University Senate, QMUL announced a set of University Covid Mitigations in early February 2021 for assessments in the 2020-21 academic year. Staff, BLSA and QMSU representatives have had extensive discussions to apply these to MBBS students. This paper summarises the current position and supersedes any previous communication in relation to MBBS mitigations. These measures apply in the **2020-21 academic year only**.

1. **Resits:** all students in any year who fail (i.e. achieve less than 50% on the adjusted score or fail to meet the OSCE criterion of number of stations passed) on their first sit of an exam/paper will, as usual, be able to take a second sit later in the summer. It is recognised that students' experiences will have been changed as a result of the pandemic but that it will be impossible to quantify different levels of impact for different students. Accordingly, the impact of the pandemic will be taken as acceptable extenuating circumstances for all such students. Hence, **if they fail their second sit, they will automatically be allowed an exceptional third-sit**, starting this September 2021. This means students will be able to repeat the year with an uncapped single final attempt of all exams/papers (a fourth attempt in this repeat year will not be offered).

- 1.1. **The only exceptions are for students who are already on an exceptional third sit in the academic year 2020/21 or who claimed Extenuating Circumstances and therefore were unable to take a first or second sit** in Summer 2020. Such students will be considered on a case-by-case basis, but as much flexibility as possible will be adopted.

- 1.2. Any **student failing at the second attempt will also be discussed on a case-by-case basis for consideration of a first-take rather than an exceptional third-sit**. A first-take involves repeating the year in attendance with both a first and re-sit opportunity (ab initio). This essentially means, if granted a first-take, a student will repeat the year as if it were their first time in that year. Students currently not in good-standing will not be considered for a first-take.

## 2. **Assessment design and delivery:**

- 2.1. **Coursework deadlines:** as per [QMUL Covid Mitigations policy](#), there will be more **flexibility for coursework deadlines where appropriate**. Many deadlines have already been extended in light of Covid but students should **submit extenuating circumstances for an extension if needed** (e.g. for SSCs or essays).

### 2.2. **Written exams:**

As is usually the case, for any question where a significant proportion of students struggled, the examination board will reassess such questions to see if they were appropriate in light of what students were taught and would have reasonably experienced in the past year. **If a question is then deemed unreasonable due to its content (or presentation) it will be removed from the exam.**

- 2.2.1. MBBS Y1-4 (including GEP Y1-3): If a topic was not covered this year because of the pandemic, it will not be included in the exam. However, all core content has

been covered in lecture or case/problem-based teaching.

2.2.2. For MBBS Y5, all core topics required by the GMC for competency as a foundation doctor will be examinable. This has always been the case and will not be changed this year. The School is however aware that students' experiences have altered on account of the pandemic, therefore academics and clinical tutors will take the actual experiences of students during the pandemic into account and those altered experiences will be reflected in the balance of the exam.

### 2.3. OSCE:

As is usually the case, all stations will be counted in the OSCE in order to calculate your score for passing; to pass you must achieve a final adjusted score above 50% **and** pass more than 60% of stations.

2.3.1. If a topic was not covered this year because of the pandemic, it will not be included in the exam. This will not compromise our ability to confirm to the GMC that our students have achieved the required competencies because MBBS Y5 will assess competences from across the programme.

2.3.2. In addition to the list of previously used station titles released every year, there will be a **list of topics that can be assessed sent to students in MBBS Years 2, 4 and 5 in advance**, so they know where to focus. This list will be sent no later than 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021. We are doing this because of the change of balance of the exam this year. We intend that this practice will be for this academic year only.

2.3.3. **For students joining MBBS Y5 next year:** to account for the variability in experience on clinical placement this year, **when calculating EPM scores**, the School will **discount an individual student's worst 2 stations in their MBBS Year 4 OSCE (where applicable)**. This will raise the average score in the Y4 OSCE of every finalist next year when calculating EPM, therefore mitigating against any potential asymmetrical effect of the pandemic on different students.

2.3.4. **For students currently in MBBS Y4 but not entering MBBS Y5 next year:** to account for the variability in experience on clinical placement this year, **when calculating EPM scores, the School will discount an individual student's worst 2 stations for their MBBS Year 4 OSCE**. This will raise the average score in the Y4 OSCE when calculating EPM, therefore mitigating against any potential asymmetrical effect of the pandemic on different students. Not all students in the cohort will have sat their Year 4 OSCE in the 2020/21 academic year and so not all will have this mitigation applied.

### 3. Extenuating Circumstances (E.C.):

This section comes from the [QMUL Covid Mitigations policy](#) and has been included for reference. The **fit to sit policy will apply in the usual way** (if a student submits an assessment that assessment will count, except in rare cases where a student can show that they were unable to determine their fitness to sit). However, the E.C. policy has now been adapted (see below).

Please note, however, as always and as with all institutions, **E.C.s** cannot be used to give additional marks or recognise a student's potential. They are primarily a deferral mechanism, until a point where a student is in a position to undertake the assessment.

3.1. **Self-certification will be expanded.** There will now be **no limit** on the number of occasions on which a student can submit an **E.C. claim** for consideration **without evidence** since we recognise that it will be very difficult to provide any such evidence and, in any case, the School is all too aware of the problems under which students have been working (N.B. this is not the same as automatic approval).

3.1.1. Students will still **need to submit a claim** to be considered. This will **help to identify and address concerns.**

3.2. The **definition of an extenuating circumstance has been temporarily expanded** to recognise the effects of the pandemic on students' ability to engage in assessment. Typically, an E.C. relates to a circumstance which is both 'unforeseen and beyond a student's control'. This year, **students will also be able to submit an E.C. claim for circumstances outside their control arising from the effects of the pandemic.**

3.3. We have updated the categories of E.C.'s to **ensure that sufficient account is taken of caring responsibilities, suitable study environments, and access** to the necessary **hardware/software** so that these will now be accepted as E.C. issues in addition to those that have always been accepted as valid reasons for extenuating circumstances, such as domestic violence (which, sadly, is more likely to occur at this time).

**4. Standards and Examination Boards (applicable to all exams unless specifically stated):**

As usual, **the pass mark for written exams is not set by the performance of students in the exam but is an objective process, independent of student performance, undertaken by professional Standard Setters.** The pass mark for a written exam is therefore set in advance of the exam by those standard setters. This means that **one individual's performance will not affect the pass mark or anyone else's performance.**

4.1. **Standard setting:** The standard of the written exam will be set by lecturers who have taught students and/or clinicians who have worked with students on placement. These lecturers/clinicians **will set the standard of the written exam to reflect the teaching that has been delivered and/or the experience students will realistically have had** on wards or in teaching this year. Therefore, questions on topics which may have been harder to cover or experience this year will have a lower pass mark than usual. That said, we are confident that all areas of required competence have been covered and current events have only affected the *balance* of experience and thus of the exam.

4.2. As always, **exam boards will look more compassionately on all students whilst maintaining standards.** (The Year 5 Board will have to adhere more closely to normal practice). We want to minimise the risk that students need to repeat the whole academic year as a result of the more than usually heterogeneous experiences they have encountered. We will provide remediation in subsequent years for students to make up for gaps in their experience. This opportunity for remediation, not previously available

and not likely to be available in the future if we are to restore some of the currently lost optional components of the course, means that it will be possible for a student to progress in cases where students are on the border of passing and might otherwise have had to repeat the year. We can do this without compromising standards since the whole course is examinable in Year 5 and so no-one is at risk of not being examined in important competencies. Someone who fails on their first sit will need to re-sit the failed exam. However, if they are on the borderline of passing at their second sit, the **exam board will use all available data** (including performance in previous years, performance during the year and other exams a student has sat including their first sit) **to determine if, with the remediation outlined above, the student has the potential to pass Year 5 exams. If this is deemed likely, the student could still progress.** This applies to all years except year 5 as we cannot remediate beyond final year. (The term 'borderline' will be defined statistically in advance of the exam board following consultation internally and with the external examiners).

- 4.3. Merits and distinctions: the **calculation of Merits and Distinctions will not change**, will be based on all papers, and will use all OSCE stations.