



# FACULTY OF PAIN MEDICINE

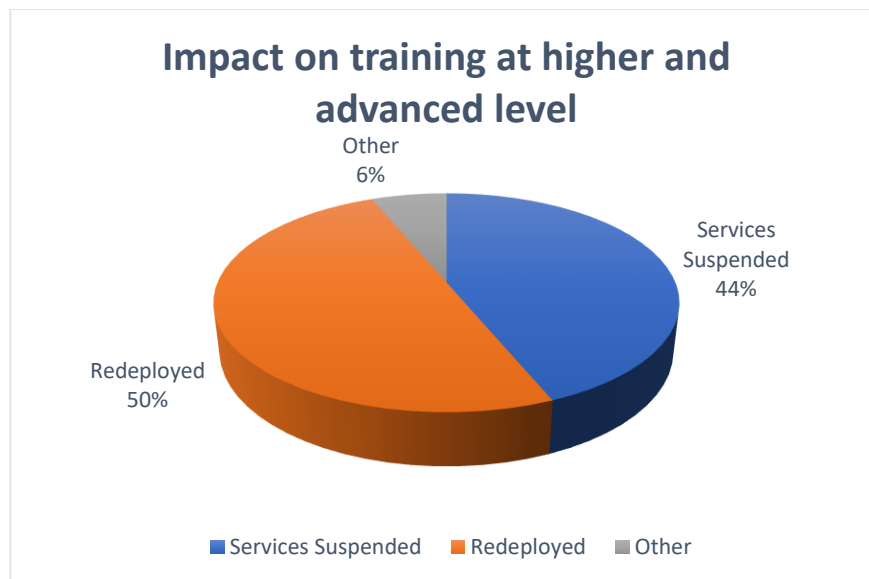
of the Royal College of Anaesthetists

## FPM guidelines on provision of higher and advanced training in pain medicine in light of the COVID-19 pandemic

15 May 2020

Since the statement from the Faculty on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the training and wellbeing of our trainees<sup>1</sup> in March 2020, it has become increasingly clear that the impact of COVID-19 on the provision of pain services, and therefore on training in pain medicine, remains an evolving situation and is likely continue to have a significant impact for many months to come.

A recent FPM survey of higher and advanced pain trainees has revealed that all trainees have had their training disrupted either because they have been redeployed or because pain services where they are based have been suspended. Trainees on Out of Training Programmes for research purposes have also been impacted upon because of the effect on research opportunities due to the current pandemic.



Following the redeployment of many FPM Consultant Trainers and Trainees, and the reduction or suspension of many Pain Management activities due to COVID-19, the NHS is now faced with the challenges of moving to the next phase<sup>2</sup> and, in whole or part, re-establishing pain activities. In line with guidance from the NHS Executive,<sup>2</sup> the Faculty of Pain Medicine will be issuing guidance imminently on resumption of wholly or partly suspended pain services.<sup>3</sup>

The FPM acknowledges that navigating the next few months will be complex, with probable variation in local delivery of services as the NHS continues to adapt practices to deal with the current pandemic. It is recognised that there is likely to continue to be a regional variation and fluctuation in the number of cases with elective NHS work, including pain services having to maintain flexibility in terms of what can be safely delivered.

As such, trainers and trainees alike will need to adapt to this changing world in order to continue to train and be trained to deliver high quality pain services based on the [Core Standards for Pain Management Services in the UK](#).<sup>4</sup>

### **Generic Guidelines**

The Royal College of Anaesthetists issued generic guidance for all anaesthetic trainees on 16 April 2020.<sup>5</sup> Together with our parent College, it remains the FPM's firmly held view that nobody should be penalised by the changes to their working patterns. In line with GMC guidance, the RCoA will allow schools to defer essential Units of Training and postgraduate examinations by a period of up to 12 months. Of particular note for trainees undergoing higher and advanced pain training:

*"If mandatory elements of training have not been completed due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic an ARCP outcome 10 (COVID) should be used with an action plan outlining the areas that need to be completed in the next year of training ... ST7 are given priority in accessing the areas of training that they will need to complete the Core and Higher programmes over the next 3 months"*<sup>5</sup>

The RCoA has also recommended that *"completion of 8 months of Advanced Training rather than the usual 12 for the next 12 months is acceptable"*.

However, the FPM has flagged up with the Anaesthetic Training Committee that pain medicine differs from other advanced modules in the anaesthetic curriculum. Both the Faculty and the College recognise that it is difficult to envisage that only eight months of advanced pain training would suffice to complete what is already a very specialised, time onerous part of the curriculum. We recognise that the last four of the twelve months of advanced pain training are likely to be the months when trainees generally embed into independent practice within the pain team. This is a critical period of training which allows consolidation of experience crucial towards progression into soon to be Consultant status. It is also a time when most trainees will be preparing to sit for the examination leading to Fellowship of the Faculty of Pain Medicine (FFPMRCA).

We recognise that training will need to be adjusted as pain services are adopting alternative modalities of service delivery and learning from challenges faced in real time. These include remote consultations, reduced face to face consultations, alternative ways of delivering multidisciplinary pain management and dilemmas and risks in delivering pain intervention procedures, amongst others. All of these will have an impact on each individual trainee's experience. We recognise that many decisions will need to be made on an individual basis taking specific circumstances into account and recommend that as much as possible, grace periods and readjustments to the length of other Units of Training are made with agreement between Regional Advisors in Anaesthesia, Regional Advisors in Pain Medicine and Training Programme Directors to allow higher and advanced training in pain medicine **not to** be curtailed. The Faculty of Pain Medicine will provide advice to support local decision-making processes when requested.

### **FFPMRCA Examination and Tutorial**

It is encouraging to note that despite the ongoing disruption, redeployment and substantial challenges faced by all trainees, the recent survey has shown that 50% of trainees intend to sit the FFPMRCA exam MCQ or SOE part later this year. The FPM Court of Examiners is currently working on contingency plans in conjunction with the RCoA Examinations Board to consider methods to continuing running the FFPMRCA exam. Moreover, the survey has also indicated that the overwhelming majority of trainees (94%) would be agreeable to attending an FFPMRCA tutorial day in preparation for the exam via an interactive Webinar. The FPM Training and Assessment Committee is actively working towards making this possible if we cannot hold the FFPMRCA tutorial in the usual manner in the Autumn.

## **The way ahead**

The Faculty Training and Assessment Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank all trainees who have responded to the recent survey on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their training. This is the first out of a series of trainee surveys to be sent out by the FPM over the next few weeks. This is in anticipation that practice in pain management delivery and hence impact on training will be changing as we gradually move out from lockdown. Your feedback has indicated that there is significant concern shared amongst the great majority of trainees on how they will resume training, how training will be measured and the long-term consequences of this disruption.

We would like to reassure trainees that the FPM is actively monitoring delivery of pain services across the UK through a series of surveys being sent out to Fellows and Members of the Faculty. This will allow us to indirectly also monitor changing access to training and act accordingly to ensure the best possible training experience for all of you.

We anticipate that another trainee survey will be sent out by the middle of June 2020 and would strongly encourage you to complete it. Although we will remain proactive in quality assessment and assurance of training, we require input from you at the coalface to guide us.

## **Morale and wellbeing**

We thank you for taking the time to fill and return FPM surveys, during this challenging time when we know several of you are working well beyond your normal hours and in very challenging environments.

We would like to take this opportunity to once again acknowledge the significant challenges experienced by all anaesthetists, trainers and trainees alike. We recognise the incredible effort made and the toll that this can have on morale, wellbeing and ongoing training.

We encourage all to access resources that may be of use on the Faculty of Pain Medicine website,<sup>6</sup> the Royal College of Anaesthetists website<sup>7</sup> and the joint ICM Anaesthesia hub.<sup>8</sup> Please do seek help if you are experiencing difficulties, either through your local department or through the Faculty or College if you require our support. We are always ready to listen.

Please watch out for further updates as the situation continues to evolve.

1. FPM. FPM statement on the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on training and wellbeing of our trainees. 25 March 2020. <https://fpm.ac.uk/media/2256>
2. NHS England. Second phase of NHS response to COVID-19: Letter from Sir Simon Stevens and Amanda Pritchard. 29 April 2020. <https://www.england.nhs.uk/coronavirus/publication/second-phase-of-nhs-response-to-covid-19-letter-from-simon-stevens-and-amanda-pritchard/>
3. FPM Guidance on resumption of pain services [to be published at <https://fpm.ac.uk>]
4. Core Standards for Pain Management Services in the UK. 2015 (currently under review). <https://fpm.ac.uk/standards-publications-workforce/core-standards>
5. RCoA. Anaesthetic Training Update – 16th April 2020. <https://rcoa.ac.uk/media/13271>
6. FPM, FICM, RCoA. Practical steps to team wellbeing during COVID-19. 14 April 2020. <https://fpm.ac.uk/media/2271>
7. RCoA. Training & Careers. <https://rcoa.ac.uk/training-careers>
8. FICM, AA, RCoA, ICS. Joint ICM Anaesthesia COVID-19 Hub. COVID-19 impact on training, morale and wellbeing. 30 March 2020. <https://icmanaesthesiacovid-19.org/news/covid19-impact-on-training-morale-and-wellbeing>