



Covid-19: medical schools given powers to graduate final year students early to help NHS

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Medical schools have been granted the power to graduate their students early to allow them to work for the NHS during the covid-19 pandemic, the BMA has said.¹ This follows the surprise statement from the health secretary Matt Hancock on 24 March, in which he said that 5500 final year medical students would be on the wards by next week.²

Early graduation does not mean immediate, emergency registration with the General Medical Council, said communication from the BMA Medical Students Committee disseminated via social media to students in the UK. Current guidance on the GMC website states that provisional registration will go ahead in August as previously planned.³ But the BMA indicated that this might change soon.

The BMA's statement acknowledged that plans for students would vary based on which medical school they attended. Some courses are yet to fully assess their final year students against the competencies for new doctors required by the GMC. It also emphasised that, although students might be eligible for provisional registration under a new framework, there was no obligation for them to work in the NHS until their formal foundation training begins in August. "Students must choose to take this up early and cannot be compelled to serve in the NHS as a result of this," the BMA said.

Roles that will be offered to graduated final year students will be called "F1 locum appointment for training." The BMA and GMC require these roles to have the same induction, education, and supervision as a standard F1 role, though it is not yet clear how this will be achieved. Students will be paid as junior

doctors. The exact responsibilities and duties students would be required to undertake in these roles is also unclear. Students are being encouraged where possible to seek these opportunities for employment in the area in which they have studied.

The statement from the BMA came shortly after the release of new guidance from the Medical Schools Council for students volunteering in the NHS.⁴ The guidance is aimed at all students considering taking up roles in the health service during the covid-19 pandemic, not just final year students. It states that students should not take on volunteering posts if it will impact heavily on their studies and their ability to prepare for qualification in the future. It sets out guidance around indemnity and insurance, payment for services, and hours. Medical students who want to volunteer must have the endorsement of their parent medical school. As with previous guidance, students continue to be expected to work only within their competency.⁵

- 1 British Medical Association Students. Covid-19 update for medical students. <https://www.facebook.com/BMAstudents/photos/a.341683459180314/3454069574608338>
- 2 Coronavirus: Only go to your job if you cannot work from home—Hancock. *BBC* 24 Mar 2020. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52022417>
- 3 General Medical Council. Information for medical students. <https://www.gmc-uk.org/news/news-archive/coronavirus-information-and-advice/information-for-medical-students>
- 4 Medical Schools Council. Statement of expectation. Medical student volunteers in the NHS. <https://www.medschools.ac.uk/media/2622/statement-of-expectation-medical-student-volunteers-in-the-nhs.pdf>
- 5 Harvey A. Covid-19: medical students should not work outside their competency, says BMA. *BMJ* 2020;368:m119710.1136/bmj.m1197.

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