**Latest update from the Royal College of Physicians of London regarding the ST3 recruitment error**

We are writing to update you following our email yesterday on the dreadful situation with ST3 offers. We are deeply sorry that it has been necessary to rerun the ST3 offer process due to a mistake in this round of processing. We have taken this approach to be fair to all candidates which can only be achieved with the real scores used. We appreciate what a worrying time this is for you and will provide as much information as we can, when we can, so you know what is happening, and when to expect more information. We are talking with the training bodies for each of the four nations, other Royal Colleges, specialty societies and the BMA and we are grateful to them and everyone who has contacted us for the information and advice they are providing. We are being transparent and will fix this in the fastest and fairest way possible.

We are working through the weekend to restart the process at the earliest opportunity and will answer questions to let people know what is happening. We completely appreciate that this cannot happen too soon and that the frustration, anger and anxiety people are feeling can only be helped by answers and solutions. Below are some answers to questions we have received and more detail will be provided on Tuesday. Whilst we want to respond as fast as possible to everyone’s questions, we will ensure our answers are accurate rather than rushed. When we don’t know the answer we will let you know how and when we will.

**What are we doing now?**

Over the weekend we are compiling and checking the revised scores and ranks so that we are ready to upload these as soon as possible when the system is ready.  We are also monitoring the st3recruitment inbox and responding to candidates with what we can at this stage. However, we are unable to give much specific advice now but your emails are proving valuable in compiling FAQs, which is another major piece of work we are undertaking at the moment.

**Who is and is not affected?**

This has affected all candidates who were found appointable and are competing for an ST3 medical specialty programme in one of the 24 medical specialties coordinated by the RCP. Due to the high degree of crossover in applicants to clinical oncology and intensive care medicine, these specialties are also being included even though there is no suggestion of any error with their ranking process.

Anyone who only applied to ST3 to be clinically benchmarked to have their academic clinical fellowship programme confirmed is unaffected as decisions on whether or not a candidate was appointable have been confirmed as correct as advised.

The CMT/ACCS acute medicine is also unaffected.

We are aware that some candidates will have applied to specialties and posts which are not included above and we are working on this and will include more detail in the FAQs on Tuesday.

**Why did the communication come out late on a Friday?**

We appreciate that the timing of the communication was very bad timing for most people. But we decided that it would be even worse to keep the information to ourselves for three days just as we know many people will be making important choices about their careers and lives. We felt it was better to communicate at the first opportunity and be as transparent as early as possible.

We found out about the issue on Thursday, and worked as fast as possible to identify the extent and nature of the problem and how to fix it. We decided it was important to resolve how this could be addressed in the fairest way possible and put the technical arrangements in place. This process was done quickly in liaison with the four nations and the Oriel system provider and but it took until Friday afternoon to be complete which was when we communicated.

**What was the problem?**

A spreadsheet error was made in transferring data from one system to another. The electronic marking system used at interview produces a spreadsheet, which was then copied into Excel. At this point appointability criteria are checked and those not appointable excluded. This spreadsheet is then copied into a new sheet with a different format to be uploaded to Oriel. It was at this point that the error occurred. A formula required to match the formatting of Oriel was entered but was not copied correctly all the way through the relevant columns in the spreadsheet. This resulted in marks from interview stations being mixed up and, as a result, incorrect rankings given for a significant number of candidates. Checks were made throughout process, but the checks between the electronic marking system were incorrectly made against the first Excel spreadsheet rather than the second.

**Why will it take over a week for offers to start?**

Rolling back candidate statuses is a complex process, which will take time to implement and test so that it will not have any unintended consequence. The whole system has to be taken off line, restarted and risk checked. We then need to reload the scores and ranks for all candidates and conduct stringent checking to avoid a similar situation. In addition to this we believe that candidates should get the opportunity to review their programme preferences to ensure these are as they would wish. This is because there are opportunities throughout the offers period where candidates can make changes and also their situation may have changed. For example, if someone was originally offered their third preference and is now happy with this, they may wish to make it their first preference to guard against being offered an originally higher choice.

These factors mean a start date for offers of Monday 14 May is the earliest we feel it is safe to start. We will be seeking to create a timetable that enables us to progress through offers as quickly as possible whilst providing safeguards for candidates asked to make decisions in an unplanned period.

**When will we find out more?**

A more extensive FAQ document will be published on Tuesday, which will cover the latest information we have and seek to answer questions we have received. All candidates potentially affected will be emailed to notify when this is ready. Beyond this we will communicate regularly throughout the process to notify when things will happen and when key stages are ready; eg when revised scores and ranks are confirmed, programme preferences available, offers starting etc.

After offers start all candidates will be emailed with either details of the offer or to notify that they are on the reserve list as happened in the original offers period.

**What will be in the FAQs?**

This will cover a wide-range of topics and we are writing them now. This will include topics such as: ‘How did this happen?’; ‘What is the timeline for making and finalising offers?’; ‘Who is/is not affected?’ etc. We cannot give a full list now but please be assured we are seeking to make it as comprehensive as possible and monitoring questions we are receiving and being asked on social media and via representative organisations.

**What if I have not got the offer I originally accepted and have made unretractable commitments to others?**

We understand that this has happened and hope this will only apply to a very small number of candidates but will handle each case as needed. If it becomes clear this applies to you once your offers are made, you will be able to contact us and discuss your circumstances with a member of the RCP staff such that we can then do our utmost to resolve your case.

**If I was deemed unappointable will this change?**

No. While non-appointable candidates may have their score altered, the error did not affect the appointability criteria. The error happened later in the process and after non-appointable candidates were removed.

We set the highest standards for our work and expect to be held to them. We have not met them here and are truly sorry. We will learn from our mistake and make any changes necessary to fix it.

Yours sincerely

RCP president, Professor Jane Dacre

RCP registrar, Dr Andrew Goddard