



YEAR 5 MBChB

Elective Guidelines

2025 - 2026

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AIMS

Concept

The aim of the Year 5 Medical Elective is to provide an opportunity for the student to develop personally and professionally by arranging and performing a project of his/her own choice in any field of medicine including medicine within the wider context of societies, at an approved host institution.

Project

A project is defined as a discrete piece of work conceived with guidance by and for the student. Student choice is the fundamental principle. The project may take several forms, for example and not exclusively:

- A short clinical or laboratory research study, addressing clearly defined questions or testing a hypothesis; (maybe quantitative or qualitative)
- An evaluation of a service or specific intervention;
- A detailed and extensive review of the literature on a topic with illustrative case-based examples; The best reviews now follow “systematic review” methods.
- Clinical audit of a service or component of a service comparing with accepted standards;
- A standard setting observational study from which audits might follow;
- A survey to establish levels of knowledge, or skills, behaviours, values, beliefs about a specific topic;
- An educational project that produces material to facilitate, teach or train the students, staff, patients or the wider public.

The University of Aberdeen does not consider it appropriate for students to carry out clinical clerkships as electives. A simple description of how a student spent his or her time on ward rounds, in clinics or the community will not satisfy programme requirements. This regulation does not undermine or attempt to diminish the potential value of such experiences. Rather, it reflects the intention of the MBChB programme to broaden the undergraduate experience to include planning, executing and writing up a critical body of independent work, which will challenge you and provide useful skills in whatever sphere of medicine is entered.

Elective proposal (ME4020)

During Year 4, all students will be required to complete full details of their elective plans on the elective website <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/medical/electives>. Deadlines for submission will be made known in advance. This information is used to establish that the student has developed the elective in terms of its intellectual content, organisation and assessment of risk. Timely submission of a satisfactory elective outline is a pre-requisite to progression to final year.

Setting

The project can be carried out in the North of Scotland (including Aberdeen and Inverness), other parts of the UK, or abroad. The choice of location is the student's, although the University may advise, sometimes strongly, against electives in unsettled parts of the world or where student safety is an issue.

Duration

The Elective block is eight weeks in duration and the project length is a minimum of six weeks. No travel time is allowed in the previous or next block (depending on your rotation), i.e. travel to Australia etc must take place during the eight week block. Students will have the full eight weeks to submit the elective report. Any clinical training required will be discussed with and arranged by the Year 5 Team. Students are not expected to arrange their own clinical training.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In planning, executing and writing up the project, students might consider the following broad objectives that may be achieved in the course of planning, carrying out and presenting the project.

To develop generic attributes relevant to a career in medicine. These include the following qualities of professionalism:

- Interpersonal, communication, organisation, time management, and presentation skills
- Flexibility and adaptability
- Independence and team working
- Intellectual capacity, credibility, judgement, intuition
- Punctuality, setting and meeting deadlines
- Responsibilities to oneself and others

To gain experience that will be of potential value in future:

- Health care in an unfamiliar environment
- Dealing with issues of ethics as they pertain to clinical and research practice in teaching and learning
- Planning, analysing and writing up an original project of medical importance
- Evidence of acquisition of specialty focus and relevant experience
- Opportunities to develop career aspirations

To acquire knowledge that will benefit personal development and patient centered care:

- Broadly about medicine and medical practice and specifically based on the topic of the project
- With reference to the choice of subject and nature of the project about relevant methods, handling and presenting quantitative and/or qualitative data, setting these in the context of world literature
- Of health care systems with which the student has no prior understanding
- Of personal strengths and challenges that may be revealed in the course of the planning and execution of the elective

Specific, task-centred objectives might include:

- Develop individual initiative, communication and organisation skills in identifying suitable project supervisors and making arrangements with host institutions
- Gain experience in formulating a simple question or hypothesis which can be addressed in the time available for the project
- Hone skills on how to become familiar with the existing state of knowledge in an area of medicine or medical practice or related topic
- Learn the importance of planning and time management in carrying out the project and meeting required deadlines for proposal and report submission
- Learn to work in an independent manner within the constraints of circumstances at the host institution
- Gain experience in analysing data in the context of existing knowledge and drawing appropriate conclusions
- Gain experience in writing a report in the format of a scientific or medical paper describing the study which has been carried out

STRUCTURE OF YEAR 5

Blocks

There are four rotational eight week blocks and two one week fixed Preparation for Professional Practice (PrePP) blocks in the final year of the MBChB Programme. The Medical Elective block is one of the four rotational blocks. The essential requirement of the Elective block is that a project must be carried out, written up and submitted for consideration and assessment by the electives' advisers as an essential component of the Year 5 assessment. Like all other parts of Year 5, successful completion of the Elective is a pre-requisite for graduation.

A copy of the section list which indicates which block students have been allocated to, for their elective is available on MyMBChB. Section swaps will be considered until the end of February of Year 4 but these must be agreed with Diane Gerrie – diane.gerrie@abdn.ac.uk. No swaps will be allowed after this time, unless for specific reasons. Section numbers must remain relatively equal so it will not normally be possible to move into another section, without a swap.

Carrying out the Elective and completing the Elective Report

The Elective extends over the full eight weeks of the block which must include travel time. Each block is closely followed by the next and so it is a requirement that Elective reports are handed in on time to ensure that students are able to focus on the part of the programme that follows. It is not acceptable to hand in reports late for two reasons. First, it confers an advantage on the late student who has had more time to complete the report than his or her colleagues. Second, doing Elective block work in, for example, the surgical block, might well jeopardise the student's attendance, leading to loss of learning opportunities in surgery and difficulties arising from absence.

The assessed component of the elective is the report (5,000 words +/- 10%).

Further guidance on writing the report is available on the Electives website.

Elective Web Resources

A web resource for students is available from <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/medical/electives/electives> which has been designed in consultation with existing and past final year students, elective advisers and supervisors, and provides invaluable advice on how to plan and execute the elective. It also provides guidance on how to apply for funding and links to useful contacts for external bursaries and bursaries for electives in particular disciplines, alongside comments from students on their experiences. To ensure students have the most up to date information, only the key information is included in the handbook and students are directed to the website to assist with the planning of the elective.

The electives website and/or MyMBChB should be your first port of call for any elective information.

The web resource is being continuously developed and will contain further guidance on when ethical approval is likely to be required in the UK.

Planning the Elective

Spending time planning the elective is the key to a successful and enjoyable elective.

Plan what you intend to do and where

Make a list of interesting subjects, thinking as widely as possible about your previous experiences and influential people and events. Consider whether you have any contacts that may be willing to act as your supervisor.

The university requires that the project should be carried out to good governance standards. Guidance will be specific to the particular project carried out. You should discuss this with your supervisor.

Projects which are being conducted as part of a larger research study may already have secured ethical permission. Do check this with your supervisor. You should cite the approval number in the final project report.

Ethical Considerations

Projects in the UK

- Research in the UK involving NHS patients requires ethical approval from the appropriate NHS Research Ethics Committee. Applications are made through the NHS Integrated Research Application System (<https://www.myresearchproject.org.uk>). The NRES document “Defining Research” is recommended as a decision aid for the need to gain ethical approval (see <http://www.nres.nhs.uk>). The application process may take six months (rarely appropriate for an 8-week project).
- Low risk projects with no material ethical issues, with a minimal burden or intrusion (applying to many electives) may now be suitable for a much simpler “Proportionate Review”. For more information, visit <http://www.hra.nhs.uk/resources/applying-to-recs/nhs-rec-proportionate-review-service/>
- Comprehensive information on planning a research project is available on the University of Aberdeen & NHS Grampian Clinical Research Governance & Quality Assurance website (<http://www.abdn.ac.uk/clinicalresearchgovernance/index.php>)
- Research in the UK, not involving NHS patients (e.g. normal volunteers, healthy individuals, sports participants) can be approved by the University’s School Ethical Review Board (SERB) (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/ethical-review-10645.php#panel10600>). An ethics checklist is available from this webpage (<https://www.abdn.ac.uk/staffnet/research/ethical-review-10645.php#panel10594>) to assist you in determining whether your project requires ethical approval. Applications must be submitted to Worktribe (<https://uoa.worktribe.com>) by your supervisor and it is strongly advised that you allow a minimum of three months for the application to be assessed. SERB review meetings are held once a month and the meeting dates and submission deadlines can be found on the SERB webpages.
- Projects involving service evaluation, clinical audit or surveillance (most electives) may not require ethical approval, depending on the nature of the project, and you should discuss this with your supervisor.

Allow plenty of time to make arrangements

- Planning always take a lot longer that you anticipate. It can take weeks or months to get a response from host supervisors.

Changing Elective Plans

It is sometimes inevitable that plans for Electives need to change. This may be because of problems with contact from supervisors, issues of cost or access, or changes in personal circumstances, for instance. If a student makes changes for whatever reason the following course of action is required:-

- Please email the MBChB Office with the changes and the reasons for them. Verbal notification will not suffice. This is particularly important where there has been a change in location.
- You must update your elective outline using https://www.abdn.ac.uk/medical/electives/my_elective/form_menu
The local supervisor who will have been involved in the setting up of the project in its original form must be contacted
- If relevant, the original host supervisor must be informed, otherwise they may not know that the student is no longer planning to undertake a project in their institution.
- The host institution which may have reserved a place or accommodation for a student, must be informed.

The GMC’s Medical Students: Professional Values and Fitness to Practise guidelines are clear. Concerns could be raised about a student’s Fitness to Practise if they display inappropriate and unprofessional attitudes or

behaviour. This includes all aspects of dealing with the University and the host institution. Being responsible for these arrangements and communicating information in a timely and polite manner is an attribute relevant to professional development and is thus an expectation of students

LOCAL SUPERVISOR

Summary of the role of the local supervisor (see website for details)

- Advise students about electives and ethical approval
- May be able to provide contacts
- Talk through the subject
- Help modify ideas
- Requires to see and “sign off” the elective proposal

Students should start approaching potential supervisors early on in the planning of their elective. It is not satisfactory for students to start approaching supervisors 2 days before the outline is due in! Students need to consider if their local supervisor will be available prior to the deadline for submission of the outline. The website will provide supervisors with an electronic “sign off”.

Students should not expect their local supervisor to arrange their elective for them or to write their elective outline. They are there in an advisory capacity but the onus is on the student to do the preparation.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH ELECTIVES

General

The MBChB Programme has a range of supportive structures in place to help students arrange and carry out Electives.

Advice and Problems

The MBChB Office can deal with administrative matters at any time. Significant changes of project or serious problems with write-up should be discussed with Dr David Nesvadba, Electives Convenor. He can be contacted via email – year5@abdn.ac.uk

Advisers on Electives

There is a group of interested staff – Advisers on Electives – drawn from clinical and teaching staff in the University and the North of Scotland Hospital and Community NHS who have particular knowledge and experience of Electives and who are committed to offering advice and guidance to students. This Group is led by a Convenor who also has an executive role and makes decisions about individual students, for example, on behalf of the Group – in addition to the adviser role.

Advisers assess submitted Elective Reports on behalf of the Programme.

A list of Advisers can be found on the electives web resource. Students should be aware that these names may change over time although most will remain on the list.

NOTES ON COMPLETION OF THE ELECTIVES OUTLINE FORM

Purpose of Elective Outline form

- To provide evidence that each student has thought about and organised an elective project.
- To demonstrate that students have assessed the potential risks and arrangements relating to the Elective.
- To ensure the University of Aberdeen has details of the whereabouts and contact details relevant to the Elective period.

COMPLETING THE FORM

An online database is available at <https://www.abdn.ac.uk/medical/electives> for you to record your potential elective plans, progress etc. The deadline for submitting your elective outline is **Friday 21 February 2025**. If you are planning to intercalate in 2024/2025, you are not required to submit a project outline. Please however be advised that should you choose to enter Year 5 and not intercalate, you will be required to arrange a project within 2-3 weeks prior to the start of Year 5 and you will forfeit any preferences on Year 5 placements.

Once the plans have been finalised you will be able to complete the online form which must include details of

- The venue for the Elective. This must include the full address of the host supervisor/elective location
- Who is to supervise the project. In all instances you should include the title of the supervisors eg Dr / Professor
- Contact details of these people must include email address, phone number
- Dates you are undertaking the elective (should automatically populate)
- The title of the project: The title should be concise and informative.
- A summary of the project to be carried out ensuring that all prompts are answered
These include a paragraph about the background to the project, briefly noting the main issue to be addressed and one or two key references if appropriate. The aim of the project should be stated.
The second paragraph should focus on methods used. Methods will vary depending on the nature of the project (e.g. observational, survey, audit, evaluation, educational, experimental). Statements like “the [host hospital] data base will be examined and data collected” are not reassuring – you need to say “the [host hospital] data base will be examined and details of patient demographics, serum magnesium haemoglobin level and SEWS score will be gathered to a SPSS spreadsheet”; or similar level of detail to indicate you know what you are going to do and how you are going to do it.
The third paragraph should be a brief statement to include expected outcomes of the project and the elective as a whole.
- References should be limited to one or two key pieces of work, peer reviewed articles if possible, cited appropriately.
- Confirmation that you have considered all “tasks” e.g. ethics and confirmation that you have read the regulations

Once these points have been completed you will be able to forward this electronically to your local supervisor who must confirm they have discussed the plans with you and is happy with the arrangements. This in turn will submit the form to the MBChB office. If the form is missing any of the required parts you will be unable to submit it to your local supervisor and/or the office.

The proposal should have been discussed with and agreed by the supervisor.

It is your responsibility to ensure everything is in place by the deadline. In particular, you should ensure the local supervisor is around to confirm the outline.

It is suggested the text include the following:

- An introductory sentence (or two but no more) giving a background to the subject and citing one or two key references.
- A statement of what the project aims to do. e.g. ‘This project will review diagnostic criteria for AIDS used in Hospital X’.
- Methods to be used in the project. e.g. ‘Hospital X receives around 40 cases of AIDS per month. I will gather data on age, gender, presenting symptoms and signs over a 5-week period for all attending patients diagnosed as having AIDS. Any laboratory tests or other investigations and (where available) the results of these will be included. This data will be analysed to determine the means by which the diagnosis was reached. The results will be compared with those in published studies, conclusions drawn and recommendations made.’
- You should also ensure you have answered all the prompts.

In order to do this, it is evident that details will need to have been discussed with the supervisor in the location of the Elective to take into consideration local circumstances. The reason for this is to encourage realistic expectations – in the example above, it would be realistic to see 25 – 40 patients who fit the study criteria; do not expect 250! It is

necessary to think out exactly what can be done and how to do it. This approach is recommended because it allows effective planning to ensure that the project takes up a reasonable component of time wherever it is carried out and leaves enough time to be involved in the other activities of the hospital or environment in which the Elective is carried out.

A project involving patient based research or involving healthy subjects, whatever its nature will, in many cases, require ethical scrutiny and approval. This is usually a time consuming process (often 3-6 months) and the student should discuss this with supervisors early in the planning to ensure time to gain approval, if it is required (See above). Students will need to demonstrate that they have investigated whether ethical approval is required.

Please note the word limit of 450 words

ELECTIVE INTERVIEWS

Elective interviews will only be arranged for those students who are having difficulties organising a project. Elective outlines will be reviewed and any concerns highlighted.

ELECTIVE REPORT

ELECTIVE REPORT

Assignment details

It is a requirement for the Year 5 Elective Block that you submit a written elective report of 5000 words in length (+/- 10% i.e. 450-550 words). Your report must be submitted to ensure your Class Certificate is not refused.

Outcomes

- Final CGS scores of 20 – 22 will be considered for prizes. Possible awards are listed on the website.
- Final CGS scores of 9 – 19 are a pass.
- Final CGS scores of 8 or below are regarded as a fail. Students in this category will be contacted as soon as possible and given the opportunity to rewrite and resubmit the report. The Convenor or deputy will interview such students and will help formulate a plan to assist the student in the resubmission process.
- The worst case scenario is that the Advisers may require that a new project be performed. This will inevitably result in failure to graduate as a satisfactory report is a pre-requisite for graduation - the elective project is the same in this regard as a final year degree exam.
- The elective results will not be available until after the main exam board in June therefore we are unable to confirm any marks before then. However, we will contact students as early as we can if there are any concerns.

To help ensure you can submit your report by the deadlines stated below, we would advise the following timeline in undertaking your project. It is expected that the report will be written during the 8 weeks of the block. Sections can be written as the work progresses.

Reflective Piece (for exceptional circumstances only)

Assignment Details

The reflective piece is **typically not required** for the Year 5 Elective Block. However, in exceptional circumstances such as a natural disaster or the unplanned unavailability of a host supervisor, where a planned elective cannot be carried out, a written reflective piece will be required to ensure that students are not disadvantaged. The specifics around the length and content of this reflective submission will be discussed with the lead for electives on a case-by-case basis. This reflective piece should be submitted along with any available documentation of your initial elective plans.

Requirements

The reflective piece should address the unexpected changes to your elective plans, how these were managed, and any lessons learned from this experience. In particular, you may want to discuss the impact of the change on your learning objectives, the challenges faced, and how this experience has helped you prepare for future unforeseen circumstances in your medical training and practice.

The written reflective piece:

- Length and content will be determined in consultation with the lead for electives on a case-by-case basis.
- Include your name (or matriculation number), date, title of the piece, references, and the word count at the end. These details are excluded from the word count.
- Word processed.
- Text Arial, font size 12, and 1.5 or double line spaced.
- Contain no figures, tables, or footnotes.
- Submitted on or before 12.00 noon on the last Friday of the block.

References

- Gibbs, G. (1988) Learning by doing: a guide to teaching and learning methods. [London]: FEU.
- Kolb, D. A. (1984) Experiential learning: experience as the source of learning and development. Englewood Cliffs; London: Prentice-Hall.
- Moon, J. (2004) Reflection and Employability, LTSN
- Schön, D. A. (1983) The reflective practitioner: how professionals think in action. New York: Basic Books.

REPORT DEADLINES

The deadlines for submission of reports and reflective pieces to the MBChB Office for Electives to be undertaken during session 2025-2026 are detailed below:

Section 1 Electives	5 pm on the 17 October 2025
Section 2 Electives	5 pm on the 19 December 2025
Section 3 Electives	5pm on the 27 February 2026
Section 4 Electives	5 pm on the 1 May 2026

Elective submission will be done via the Moodle site. No paper copies of the report are required.

Students must also submit an electronic copy of their report through the Plagiarism Detection Software TurnitinUK at http://www.turnitinuk.com/en_gb/login. Students should read the plagiarism guidelines available on the electives website prior to writing their report. Although the report does not have to be submitted by the dates above you will be required to submit through TurnitinUK within 3 weeks of the above deadlines. More details of submission to Turnitin will be sent during the block.

ASSESSMENT

The common grading scale descriptors used in marking elective project reports is shown overleaf. Elective submissions awarded a CGS of 20 or above are second marked. Second marking may bring down your initial CGS marks if both markers are not of the same opinion on the quality of your submission. An overall mark reflecting both sets of CGS marks will be awarded for your submission.

Project reports which are not deemed satisfactory may be returned to students for re-writing. A satisfactory report is a pre-requisite for graduation - the elective project is equivalent to a final year degree exam. You should therefore ensure that your report is handed in by the required date for marking. (see above).

If you think that you are going to miss your submission deadline, you must contact either the MBChB Office or the Electives Convenor. Extensions will only be granted in exceptional circumstances so you must ensure that you have allowed sufficient time to complete your report by the deadline. All extensions will be confirmed by email.

Elective reports submitted after the appointed or agreed revised submission date could be subject to penalty. This means the final CGS grade could be reduced. Dates for submission are set and are published in this handbook and on the Electives website - you should ensure you know the date relevant to your own elective block. Students should be aware that it is unacceptable to take time off scheduled teaching and placements on return from the elective period for the purpose of completing the elective report.

PENALTY FOR UNAUTHORISED LATE SUBMISSION OF COURSEWORK

A consistent, institution-wide penalty to be applied to unauthorised late submission of coursework by students. This policy has been applied for all undergraduate and postgraduate taught students since Academic Year 2021-2022. The link to the policy can be found [here](#)

Late submission refers to submission of work after the published deadline without an agreed extension, and in the absence of exceptional circumstances. Where a student has agreed extensions, either due to their disability provision or because of accepted mitigating circumstances, their work is deemed to be submitted late when it is submitted beyond that agreed extension.

Any assessed coursework that is submitted beyond the deadline, without an agreed extension, will be recorded as late and a penalty will be applied. For work submitted late, markers will grade the work as normal and award the CGS that is appropriate for the piece of work. The course coordinator will then exact a penalty according to the number of days the assignment is late (includes weekends and University and local/national holidays).

The penalty exacted for unauthorised late submission of work will be as follows:

- Up to 24 hours late, the grade will be deducted by 2 CGS points;
- For each subsequent day, up to a maximum of seven days total, the grade will be deducted by a further CGS point for each day, or part of a day, up to a maximum of seven days late;
- Over seven days late, a grade of G3 will be awarded.

It is therefore essential that you inform Diane Gerrie, in good time, of any difficulties so that arrangements can be made.

Late submissions will not be considered for elective prizes or distinctions.

COMMON GRADING SCALE FOR ELECTIVE REPORTS

Mark	Description	
22 21 20 19 18	Exceptionally good project in all aspects of design, execution and write up. Shows evidence of extensive reading/ literature review. Good understanding of topic and critical analysis of own findings. Aware of strengths and weaknesses of project and how results fit with wider literature.	Outstanding
17 16 15	Above average design and execution of a sound project, with appropriate presentation of results. Some evidence of understanding and critical analysis of results.	Very Good
14 13 12	An acceptable project has been carried out and is competently written up. Should demonstrate some awareness of wider literature and implication of own results.	Good
11 10 9	A project has been carried out and the write up is acceptable but: a) Is poorly presented or contains inaccuracies, or b) The project has been poorly design or executed	Pass
8 7 6	Little evidence that a project has been carried out/ unsatisfactory presentation/ extensive plagiarism.	Fail
5 4 3 2 1 0-1	No evidence that a project has been carried out.	Clear Fail