## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preparation</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Choosing your project</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role of the Home Supervisor</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequently asked questions</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Useful websites</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home supervisor guidelines</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sample Dean’s letter</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Preparation

All Students:

- Need to organise a 5 week elective during the 7 week elective period (4th April to 21st May 2011)
- Should have a home supervisor by October 2010 (exact dates to be confirmed)
- Should have a project title by October 2010
- Should have a confirmed elective placement and location supervisor (if outside Birmingham) by December 2010
- Should have written a protocol and considered and discussed the health and safety aspects of their proposed placement with their home supervisor by December 2010

Good planning and taking the initiative at this early stage will stand you in good stead for the rest of the project.

Things to consider:

- Each home supervisor in the University of Birmingham can only take one or two students, and popular supervisors are likely to be booked up early. If you act quickly you are more likely to find a supervisor and a project in an area that interests you.
- Some placements require applications well in advance
- Getting ethical approval (where necessary), finding patients, planning experiments and learning techniques, all take time
- The MBChB office is better able to help quickly with queries/Dean’s letters/application forms during the summer
- Only students that meet all the set deadlines will be considered for Medical School funding to help with elective costs
- The earlier you write your protocol the sooner you can apply for external funding
Learning Outcomes

By the end of the Elective you will be able to:

- Demonstrate the ability to plan and design a scheme for investigating questions and/or exploring areas of interest through formal research, audit, service evaluation or reflection on your experience.

- Demonstrate an awareness of the technical problems which may be encountered in unfamiliar learning environments, and show the flexibility needed to work around them.

- Demonstrate competence in matching the project approach to (1) the question being asked/area being explored and (2) the learning context

- Demonstrate the ability to work in an academically rigorous manner, both generally and in accordance with the particular rules pertaining to the project type.

- Demonstrate competence in finding, evaluating and using information appropriately to provide a context for and to support your assertions and conclusions.

- Demonstrate the ability to write a clear report, in a style which is appropriate to the nature of the project and the approach taken.

Demonstrate an appreciation of the benefits of medical research or reflection on practice with regard to (1) personal and/or professional development, and (2) patients and populations.
Choosing your project

Topics for your project may be chosen from the whole field of medicine. This is one of the most exciting aspects of the Elective. Many excellent ideas for reflection on experience projects and data-based projects can grow out of something that has particularly sparked your interest during your clinical work on junior medical and surgical firms, or in the community medicine modules or teaching on any topic from ethics to infection. Alternatively, you may find a specific research paradigm of particular interest and choose a topic which can be effectively explored using those methods; you may wish to select a project which will enable you to work with a particular supervisor; or you may already have contacts in another country and wish to select your topic on the basis of appropriateness to a particular clinical location. Please be clear about your reasons for project selection. As an example a project in an Australian city is likely to give you, eg, ‘clinical experience transferrable to year 5’, it is less likely to give you, eg, experience of a ‘radically different healthcare environment’.

Whichever way you choose your project, it must satisfy the following criteria:

a) It will be concerned with a clinical experience or a data collection exercise demonstrably relevant to the study and/or practice of medicine
b) It will identify some questions that (in principle) can be answered and/or areas that can be illuminated.
c) It will involve a rigorous application of data collection methods or reflective approaches that are appropriate to the project.
d) It will be possible to complete the project in the time available.
e) A suitable home supervisor for the project can be identified, and if outside of the West Midlands an additional location supervisor* can be identified.

Your home supervisor in Birmingham will have responsibility for providing written feedback on your project protocol and Elective report. Your location supervisor will oversee your time on the Elective at your placement.

In exceptional circumstances a student may be given permission to undertake a project that does not fulfil all of these criteria. (Please contact the academic lead for the Elective Dr Connie Wiskin if you believe this is the case – c.m.wiskin@bham.ac.uk)

If you already have an idea for a project, you may find it helpful to discuss it with your GP tutor or with other teachers or clinicians, so that you can refine your idea before identifying a supervisor and writing the protocol. If you do not have an idea for a project, you may find that teachers, clinicians or even students from the previous year can offer valuable advice
The Elective is about choice

You may undertake your Elective study in the UK, or overseas. It can be in a clinical (primary or secondary care) setting, or a laboratory setting. It is worth remembering that good projects cannot be organised quickly! Getting ethical approval (where necessary), finding patients, planning experiments and learning techniques, all take time. The earlier you start to plan your project the better an experience it is likely to be.

In summary:

- You will design a project which (1) demonstrates an academically rigorous approach, (2) is feasible and makes good use of the opportunities of the Elective period and (3) which does not carry undue risk to you or to others.
- You will identify a home supervisor who is able to support you in the design of your project, assess its feasibility and safety, and review your completed report.
- You will submit a project protocol describing your project and the rationale for undertaking it; making reference to the literature to provide context and support your approach/arguments.
- You will identify a location supervisor able to support you during the Elective period.
- You will make effective use of the Elective period, demonstrating a minimum of 5 weeks of learning activity.
- You will submit an Elective supervisor form, signed by your location supervisor, or agreed deputy, with an institutional stamp, in which s/he states the degree to which you have made effective use of the Elective period and have demonstrated appropriate professional behaviour.
- You will submit an Elective report. This will be assessed by your home supervisor, providing you with feedback on the execution of your project, and the quality of your report.
Role of the Home Supervisor

Your home supervisor’s function is to:

- Facilitate your project work by offering advice and guidance to help you to refine your ideas, rather than to come up with ideas for you

- Help according to their involvement in the project. If your project is local, your home supervisor may help you to make the necessary contacts and get access to the experience/observations, patients and/or laboratory facilities that you may need. Further away, or outside of the UK this will typically be facilitated by the location supervisor.

- Play a part in providing verbal and written feedback on the protocol and final written report

Who can be a home supervisor?
The home supervisor does not have to be a subject specialist. Any individual with a medical education background can potentially fulfill this role, providing s/he can guide a project at this level and provide critical feedback on a dissertation.

Examples are clinicians from placements, academic staff from the Medical School, PM Tutors, Firm 1 staff etc...

We do ask please that students don’t select a relative or friends for this role, as it does involve summative grading of work.

STUDENTS

It is your responsibility to keep in touch with your home supervisor and to arrange to meet them when necessary, and to manage your own learning. Supervisors are not expected to chase up students who do not bother to keep in contact.

The roles and responsibilities of the supervisor are covered in greater detail in the Home Supervisor Guidelines (page 10), which you must give to them before they agree to be named as your supervisor.
Funding

i. **There is (some) money available if you know how to apply for it.** Keep an eye on the advertisement section of the BMJ. You may have to submit a great many grant applications, but the more you submit, the greater your chances of success. When applying for external grants, you should make every effort to submit a clear and concise application form (preferably typewritten). Include evidence that some preparation has been done for the application in the Library, i.e., with reference to the medical literature. Also a draft protocol, where relevant, should be enclosed.

ii. A list of bursary opportunities that we know of will be made available in August.

iii. The Medical School administers bequests on behalf of certain trustees, but there are only around 30 of these available.

iv. Apply for as many bursaries as possible as you will stand more chance of getting funding (BUT if you do get some money then do tell the other sources to which you have applied so that others stand a chance too).

v. Make sure that you fulfil all the bursary criteria – some require a reference or CV to be submitted along with the application form. Remember that any awards which you obtain can be listed on your CV, and are sure to impress any prospective employer (especially MRC bursaries). It is always worth getting your application forms and project proforma typed: at the very least they must be well presented.

vi. All students may apply for a Travel Expenses Grant of up to £100 from the University on their return from the Elective, as long as they can produce original receipts that come to at least that amount. The claim form is attached at the back of this booklet. Please note: this is not applicable to students awarded an Arthur Thomson Travel Scholarship, or students who have failed to meet the basic project criteria (e.g., missed deadlines).

*Students should note that despite the number of Elective bursaries and awards available, there is a lack of substantial funding available for students undertaking Electives. You should therefore think carefully about your financial circumstances, and beware of taking high cost Electives and incurring large debts which will likely run on for some considerable time.*
Frequently asked questions

Q. The placement I am applying to are asking for a Dean’s letter of recommendation, who can I request this from?
A. Please email sscgeneraladmin@contacts.bham.ac.uk with Dean’s letter in the subject line, and specifying any extra details they ask for.

Q. Does the Medical School cover us for indemnity/malpractice insurance while on placement?
A. Yes, proof of this can be requested from sscgeneraladmin@contacts.bham.ac.uk (please specify the name of the placement provider).

Q. Does the Medical School cover us for health insurance while on elective placement?
A. No, but there is standard travel insurance available free from the University: http://www.travel.bham.ac.uk/

Q. Where do I bring application forms that require the signature and stamp of a school official?
A. Please bring these into the MBChB office and allow 2 working days for completion.

Q. What is the difference between a home supervisor and a location supervisor?
A. Your home supervisor should be based in the West Midlands, your location supervisor is based at your placement.

Useful websites

http://www.electives.net/en/4/for.mxs
A student run database of project ideas

Foreign and Commonwealth Office travel advice

http://www.bma.org.uk/_top/contact_us/index.jsp
British Medical Association – provide tailored Elective insurance

http://www.nomadtravel.co.uk/
Nomad travel – sell travel safety equipment
GUIDELINES FOR HOME SUPERVISORS
ELECTIVE PROJECT 2010-11

1. Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the Elective, students will

Demonstrate the ability to plan and design a scheme for investigating questions by collecting data in a laboratory or clinical based research topic.

OR

Demonstrate the ability to plan and design a reflective project based on a clinical/experiential placement or project

Demonstrate competence in finding and using appropriate information from the literature.

Data collection projects:
- Demonstrate the ability to make clinical observations or measurements or to carry out experimental work in the laboratory to provide basic data.
- Demonstrate an awareness of the technical problems which may be encountered in data collection.
- Demonstrate the ability to select and apply research methods / tools appropriately.
- Demonstrate the ability to write a clear research report, utilising quantitative and/or qualitative data appropriately.
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the benefits of medical research to individuals and / or populations.
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the benefits of research activity to personal and professional development.

Reflective projects:
- Demonstrate the ability to set personal aims and objectives
- Demonstrate the ability to anticipate, and set personal learning and developmental goals
- Be responsive to, and maximise the learning potential of events occurring on sight
- Demonstrate awareness of what reflective learning is
- Relate that awareness to critical analysis of experiences during the project
- Draw conclusions from what has been experienced/observed, relating them to the literature and learning from the MBChB
- Make recommendations, as applicable
2. Role of the Supervisor

The supervisor's function is to facilitate students in the Elective by offering advice and guidance: to help students to refine their ideas, rather than to come up with ideas for them. Home supervisors may be able to help to make the necessary contacts and get access to placements, experiences, patients and or laboratory facilities that students may need (depending on Elective choice and project type). On-location supervisors should support students working outside of the UK. The supervisor also plays a major part in providing written feedback for the student on the protocol and final written report. Please also ensure that Safety and Feasibility issues are discussed and the forms signed and returned by 17th December 2010.

It is the student's responsibility to keep in touch with their supervisor and to arrange to meet when necessary: to manage their own learning. You are not expected to chase up students who do not bother to keep in contact.

2. Writing the report

The main assessment of the project is based on the written report. Following the students' first rotation in year 5, a week has been set aside for them to complete the writing up of the project. The report should be 5,000-6000 words long. If students are submitting a joint report, the maximum length of the study is increased to 8000 words (with a minimum of 7,000). The report should be typed in clear and concise language, using scientific terminology as and when necessary, but avoiding jargon. A copy of the report should be given to you (by 6th September 2011) and the student will make an appointment to meet with you within 5 weeks for feedback.

The report should be suitable to be read by someone who is generally acquainted with medicine but is not an expert in the particular topic. Terms which may be unfamiliar to general medical readers (relating to the subject matter or to the research methodology) should be explained.

A data collection report should normally contain the following elements:
- Structured abstract: A summary of what you did and what the main findings were. See papers in British Medical Journal for examples.
- Introduction: What is the problem / topic for the study? Why is it important and worth studying? Why is it of interest to you?
- Comprehensive literature review: What work has already been done on the topic by others?
- Aims and objectives / Research Question(s): What was your research aiming to determine / explore? Did you answer the specific questions or test the hypotheses identified in your protocol?
Data Collection: What research methods / tools did you use? How did the aims / objectives and the context of the research project shape their selection?

**A reflective report** should link the experience back to the learner’s preset aims and objectives. It should contain a literature review, either as a section or with citations embedded throughout the report. It should contain a substantial critical analysis of what has taken place, linked to the learner’s own understanding and growth. Students have been provided with guidance on how to write a reflective report, also available to supervisors less familiar with the format ([c.m.wiskin@bham.ac.uk](mailto:c.m.wiskin@bham.ac.uk), on request). The project should contain conclusions, and where appropriate recommendations.

In both cases references should be given in the Vancouver style as found in articles in the British Medical Journal. Students should report and discuss (rather than hide) difficulties encountered.

Note: Pay attention also to the need to be able to identify individual student contributions where projects have involved partnerships.

3. **Written Feedback**

Your feedback for the project should take account of:

Achievement: How well the student(s) met the general learning outcomes for the Elective Project; how well the student(s) achieved their specified objectives for the project and/or how they coped with / overcame on-site difficulties.

Originality of the idea: Is it something that the student(s) thought of themselves or have had a major part developing the ideas. The student(s) should mention why the study is unique, or different, in the literature review of the report.

Effort: has the project been undertaken with care and rigour. Does the protocol demonstrate sufficient effort in determining an appropriate project and research approach: does the report show evidence of sufficient application? (a questionnaire to friends wouldn't fit the basic criteria we've already specified)

Difficulty - related to effort: Sometimes the political climate makes collection of data more difficult than it seems at first glance. A project that tries to work in a difficult area and ends up making undesirable compromises will not be penalised, providing the student is aware that these have been made and point them out in the write up. Projects that are part of a changing service can be more difficult than pure research, and this will be recognised. We expect the student(s) to plan and carry out the research themselves, with guidance.
Independence: How much help was the student(s) given by you in terms of developing the protocol, undertaking and writing up the research?

The student will submit a copy of the report to you by 6th September 2011 and make an appointment to meet with you within 5 weeks for feedback.

A copy of the Supervisor’s Review Schedule must be returned to the Medical School Office no later than 12th October 2011. This should be sent as an email attachment to ssaSubmissions@contacts.bham.ac.uk from your university or hospital email account (this will be accepted without your signature).
29 March 2010

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Mr John SMITH (818181)

This is to confirm that the above-named fourth year medical student is a registered full time student of the University of Birmingham and has full approval of the Dean to undertake an elective study abroad for up to seven weeks, beginning 4th April 2011.

Mr SMITH is in good standing in the Medical School and of good character and conduct.

The Research Elective is a required part of the medical curriculum and at the end of the study the student will return to the UK and is expected to remain in attendance until completion of the course and final MBChB examinations in June 2012. The Dean recommends this student to you.

Emma Chambers
Executive Officer for the Student Selected Component
Tel: +44 (0)121 414 6978
Fax: +44 (0)121 414 6933
Email: ssccgeneraladmin@contacts.bham.ac.uk