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Mr Lewis MacDonald  
Committee Chair  
Health and Sport Committee

Email: [HealthandSport@parliament.scot](mailto:HealthandSport@parliament.scot)

Dear Mr MacDonald,

When I gave evidence to your Committee on 1 December 2020 Emma Harper asked me about ScotGEM students' travel time in Dumfries and Galloway and you asked me to provide some more information.

As part of their studies we send ScotGEM students across Scotland, currently to 72 GP practices, including a large number to rural areas, where restrictions on travel time can provide a particular challenge.

While during all four years ScotGEM students combine their studies with placements, it is from Year 2 that students start spending time in local practices around Scotland beyond Fife.

In Year 2, students rotate around three of our four partner Boards – Fife, Highlands and Dumfries and Galloway. Students are less flexible during these placements, since they attend weekly clinical skills session at their base site as well as GP placements, and must be able to reach all these and their accommodation in a way that is practicable and safe. As a result, students are required to stay within reasonable travel distance from their accommodation, which is 45 minutes.

In Year 3, clinical placements are Longitudinal Integrated Clerkships (LICs), therefore students are residentially accommodated near their LIC practice. Year 3 students can therefore choose to have their accommodation closer to the practices they are involved with and so Year 3 placements are not restricted by travel time or proximity.

Year 4 placements are in development. They will additionally require proximity to secondary care placement options across our four partner Boards, and it is likely that we will have to take travel times into account.

In terms of Dumfries and Galloway there will now be Year 3 ScotGEM students coming every year with full flexibility in relation to practice placements, as well as Year 2 students who have somewhat less flexibility. This should enable the numbers to be distributed usefully across the practices. It also means that all practices are eligible to host a student in Year 3 should they wish to apply and be selected.

As a University based in a rural area, we are aware of the challenges faced by practices outside main population centres. However, we are determined to work hard for the NHS in every part of Scotland including rural areas. I hope that the information attached outlining our plans for placements from Years 1 to 4 is helpful.

We know that the 45-minute travel rule provides a challenge in Years 2 and 4 but have worked to overcome that in Year 3. It is important for us to balance the needs of the students with those of the NHS. We are committed to continuing our work with the NHS to ensure that we help provide for both educational and health needs in these areas and contribute to a sustainable future for the NHS in the whole of Scotland.

Please let me know if you or other Committee members would like any further information.

Yours sincerely,

  
Professor Sally Mapstone  
Principal and Vice-Chancellor



University  
of  
St Andrews

## **Appendix 1: ScotGem Placements from Years 1 - 4**

**ScotGEM Year 1** clinical placements take place in Fife – All placements are within 45 minutes travel of St Andrews, to limit student travel time.

**ScotGEM Year 2** clinical placements take place in Fife, Highlands, and Dumfries & Galloway. All placements are within 45 minutes of clinical skills suite and/or the provided accommodation, again for the sake of students – St Andrews, Inverness or Dumfries. This is to facilitate attendance of the weekly clinical skills sessions at the three base sites, as well as GP placements.

**ScotGEM Year 3** clinical placements are Longitudinal Integrated Clerkships (LICs), therefore students are residentially accommodated near their LIC practice and the perceived barrier of 45 minutes from these bases is not relevant, since it is not possible to exceed this. For example, the BMA representative ScotGEM student who gave evidence is in Year 3, in Thurso, on his LIC placement and accommodated nearby, with an occasional base in Inverness for 'Secondary Care bursts'.

**ScotGEM Year 4** clinical placements – these are currently being planned and could be in all four of the partner Boards. The first cohort of Year 4 ScotGEM students will commence their final year in the summer of 2021. Given the requirement for secondary care experience, it is likely that travel time will again have to be considered.