**Notes in italics are responses to the questions.**

Dear University of Auckland,

I am writing to clarify expectations placed on students by the Faculty of Medical and Health Sciences [FMHS] for Progress Test 27 [PT27] for the University of Auckland Bachelor of Medicine and Surgery programme [MBChB], scheduled to take place on Tuesday October 26, 2021.

According to a statement issued by FMHS staff on 30 September 2021 at 13:00, the announcement stated that “[FMHS staff] have been informed that permission to run PT27 on site, in person at Covid-19 alert level 2 has been withdrawn, due to the highly transmissible nature of the Delta variant. Progress Tests are very important for [medical student] learning and progression so we do not wish to cancel the test. Therefore, this change has necessitated a sudden switch from paper to online delivery”.

Students have expressed significant concern over the sudden change in operations of this test. Despite this, students feel as though there has been insufficient clarity provided to address these concerns.

*This was not framed as a question, but I have provided a response. The change from paper to online, if unable to deliver in person, has been signalled from the start of this year based on the Medical Programme’s experience in 2020. Announcement was posted on Canvas on 13 April 2021.*

*The reactive and rapid requirement to shift was in response to government and university policies and was out of the Medical Programme’s control.*

*All students are being given the opportunity to sit a test that is part of the advertised assessment schedule in a format that is feasible.*

Firstly, the initial update informed students that the Inspera invigilation software will work on “macOS: OS X 10.12 or later”. However, according to an updated webpage on the University of Auckland website entitled “Invigilated (supervised) examinations”, the Inspera invigilation software will only work on “macOS: OS X 10.14 or later”. While this might seem negligible, it has become apparent to many of us that this software capacity correlates to macOS products that were released around the time our undergraduate Year 4 MBChB students started our University education. Considering most of us purchased new laptops around this time, there are plenty of students who are experiencing the problem of not being able to update to the macOS 10.14 software. From reading the initial announcement, we thought we would have been fine with macOS 10.12 software.

With this new understanding that the Inspera invigilation software only works for macOS 10.14, one of our Year 4 MBChB students contacted an FMHS staff member asking for support for this matter. In response to their email, an FMHS staff member replied saying “Students were notified 4weeks [sic] ago to check their devices and organise for alternative arrangements”.

Question 1: Can you please provide the statement in question that was issued by the FMHS four weeks ago, which details the steps that students needed to take if they do not own a device that operates macOS 10.14 or later?

*The first notification that the PT may have to run as an online assessment using Inspera was posted on 6 Sept, “TO ALL MEDICAL STUDENTS – PROGRESS TEST OCTOBER 2021”. A link to the Inspera guide online was provided. We noted that the student’s device needed to be compatible with Inspera, and to read the UoA information online.*

*The canvas announcement on 30 Sept provided the specifications required for a PC or a Mac for standard Inspera. You are correct that the spec originally indicated for Mac was OS 10.12. This was the advice provided by the University to MPD at the time.*

*At this stage we were negotiating permission to use Inspera Smart Proctoring (ISP) with central university. The spec for ISP was later upgraded by the university to OS 10.14.*

*The announcement on canvas on 7 Oct 2021 directs students to the Inspera UoA page, where it specifies the MacOS requirements to be different from that previously given (as you correctly point out).*

*At each time, we have provided the most up to date information that the university had.*

*All students have received this information and we have asked students to identify equity issues that relate to the test – device, connection, WiFi. Special conditions have been maintained.*

With continued instability and uncertainty of living conditions due to the ongoing lockdown, students are finding this period incredibly stressful. Receiving a response like “Students were notified 4weeks [sic] ago to check their devices and organise for alternative arrangements” is not only unhelpful, but also harmful for perpetuating and strengthening the embarrassment and guilt faced by students who cannot afford new devices.

Considering many students have already lost four weeks of summer work time due to compulsory clinical placement compensation time, the inability of our students to complete summer work to save money is already causing an immense, unforeseen stress. For students who cannot work over summer, it is particularly frustrating for our inability to afford brand new devices to be reflected back on us as ‘professional integrity’ accountability.

Moreover, many students have ongoing uncertainty around their examination conditions for PT27. For example, one of the students in our Tauranga Cohort does not have a suitable set-up to sit their PT27 examination in their living place in Tauranga. This student has made plans to drive home to Taranaki for labour weekend so that they have a stable setting to sit their PT27 exam with a proper desk and a quiet environment. However, this student will not know for certain whether these test conditions will remain available to them until 1:00pm on Monday 25 October when Jacinda Ardern makes her 1:00pm announcement.

Question 2: For students who do not have an appropriate location to sit PT27, could you please provide the most updated statement from the FMHS around what steps should be taken by these students?

*See announcement sent 7 Oct 2021, ‘PROGRESS TEST OCTOBER 2021- Update 2 ‘*

*In the attached FAQ, see section ‘Have Test Location concerns’.*

*These issues were raised at the 6 October Student Staff meeting. Student reps were asked to contact each year group via social media and networks to identify the extent of the problem. On 8 October, the AUMSA president relayed details about this issue via email.* *We replied to AUMSA president detailing instructions for what students should do on 11 Oct (providing details of who to contact at MPD). We have been working with the university to provide campus spaces for students who did not have an appropriate device and/or space. We have been collecting and collating that data since 11 October. A canvas announcement on 12 Oct, “Reminder - Inspera Practice Tests in preparation for PT27” included details on how to make contact if students had a device/space problem. Space will be available for those who need it at their site/region.*

*All students have received this information and we have asked students to identify equity issues that relate to the test – device, connection, WiFi. Special conditions have been maintained.*

Considering our PT27 grades are determined by our standing in the class relative to our peers, many students are stressed at the prospect that their differential time on clinical placement compared to other members of their cohort could affect their grades.

Question 3: What policies does the FMHS have in place to ensure students who have lost significant placement time, particularly in Auckland cohorts, have a clinically-equivalent experience to students in Tauranga, Rotorua or Waikato cohorts before sitting PT27?

*Under business as usual, students rotate through a cycle of attachments. The order of attachments varies for each group of students. The exact nature of the attachments varies between sites, but the mix of activities and attachments is standardised. Thus, taking the year as a whole, the experience is clinically equivalent.*

*Under business as usual conditions, students complete different attachments at different time points as they move across the year and sit three PTs scheduled across each year. The lost clinical time due to COVID disruption is similar to that normal variation. Students were provided replacement offsite and online learning opportunities that departments considered to offer equivalent and aligned learning to what students would have experienced in a clinical setting.*

*The PT is a progressive test of applied knowledge that is undertaken by all MBChB students in Years 2 to 6 of the programme. All students, regardless of whether they are in the non-clinical (Years 2 and 3) or clinical years (Years 4 – 6) should be acquiring, refreshing, and reinforcing their knowledge, regardless of the format in which teaching and learning is delivered. Those who were in offsite and online mode, due to unforeseen DHB based COVID–19 student stand-down policies, were still able to do this via self-directed learning.*

Considering our PT27 grades are determined by our standing in the class relative to our peers, students are concerned there will be great incentive for people to cheat as all of our students know that the PT27 scoring is currently planned to be competitive against our classmates, as per protocol for previous progress tests. Students are nervous about the prospect of being graded as borderline or fail for approaching the test honestly, knowing that a dedicated percentage of students will be offered fail or borderline grades.

*Inspera Smarter Proctoring is being used for the assessment in order to manage concerns about academic dishonesty.*

*The grading approach is the same as it has always been. The proportion of fails, borderline and excellent outcomes are pre-determined (see guidebooks). A different approach is applied to Year 6, such that all students could pass if they meet the standard for that test.*

Question 4: What policies does the FMHS have in place to ensure bathroom breaks will be standardised and invigilated consistently across our entire medical student body?

*We are not and should not be standardising bathroom breaks; students take these as and when required. See the ISP FAQ here:* [Procedure template (auckland.ac.nz)](https://cdn.auckland.ac.nz/assets/auckland/students/academic-information/exams-and-final-results/online-exams/inspera-exam-portal-3-additional-info-tips-tricks.pdf)

*Cited: “What if I need to have a bathroom break?*

*We encourage you to go to the bathroom before your exam, however if you need to use the bathroom during your exam you can. If you are away from your computer or laptop for more than a couple of minutes, this will be flagged for review by University staff, who may contact you if they need to confirm why you left your exam”.*

*If students anticipate prolonged breaks due to health conditions, they have been asked to contact MPD.*

Considering this a brand new assessment method that is new for all of our students, many students have approached our class representatives asking if assessment can be formative. Many of us do indeed want to complete the test so we can track our own progress, but we feel it is unfair for our students to be graded against each other when there are glaringly obvious equity issues with the sudden change in test set-up.

Question 5: Could the FMHS please provide its most updated statement detailing the reasons why formative assessment, or some other form of grade relief, has been deemed inappropriate for this assessment?

*The PT is a summative assessment, it is part of our longitudinal assessment approach, and part of our accredited programme. As such we have committed to delivering it summatively. As in 2020, under COVID conditions, we have committed to maintaining this approach. Our contingency in the event of Alert level 3 or 4, as signalled via communications to students, was to switch to online delivery. This obviously depended upon our ability to stand up an online assessment in time. For the first PT of 2020, this was not possible, and the test was cancelled.*

*The PT provides firstly, an important longitudinal view of student progress and knowledge acquisition but in addition also provides feedback for learning (so there is always a formative component). It is based on a student’s accumulated applied knowledge and relates to consistent learning and consolidation practices. See the PT section in the year guidebooks.*

*Students, as is always the case, can apply for an aegrotat/compassionate consideration. The rubric for applying these is also in the guidebooks.*

*Each time the PT runs, the individual question performance and test performance is assessed through a moderation process.*

*We believe the process to be fair and impartial.*

*The University’s 2021 assessment policy does not include a grade bump.*

We look forward to hearing your equity-minded response to these concerns.

Thank you for taking the time to read.

Yours faithfully,

Josh McCormack