

Statement on the practical year application

Accepted by the members of swimsa via referendum on the xxth of March, 2023.
 The original version of this document was written in english.

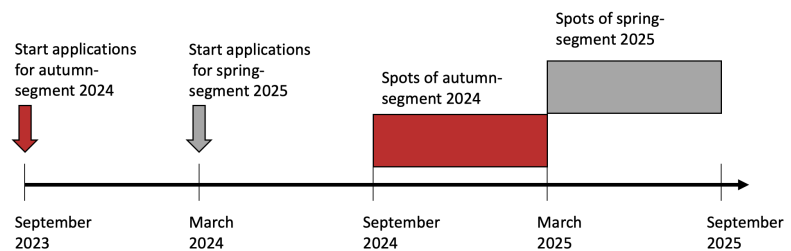
1. Executive Summary

A nation-wide survey (conducted October 2022, n = 923) regarding the application for practical year spots during Swiss medical studies indicated the following unfavourable trends:

- Students feel increasingly peer-pressured to apply for spots early in their studies, due to an undefined starting point of the application process
- Students apply “blindly” for disciplines not yet covered in their studies and in which they have lost interest by the time of their practical year
- Students start “hoarding” spots, causing administrative burden and planning insecurity for healthcare institutions and blocking spots from other students

Introducing some kind of time-limitation could help improve this situation. The results show that the clear majority of Swiss medical students (n = 829, 90%) support the introduction of a time-limitation, with most students wanting an application limitation of one year in advance. To take into account interfaculty differences and avoid monthly application waves and other undesirable side effects, swimsa wants to propose the following changes:

Two practical year spot segments a year should be introduced: An “autumn-segment” (from the beginning of September until the end of February) and a “spring-segment” (from the beginning of March until the end of August). Applications for spots taking place in one of the segments will be accepted no sooner than one year in advance of the first month of the respective segment. For spots that last longer than one month, the starting month of the spot decides the starting point for the application.



As such a solution can only be implemented fair and effective if done so nation-wide, we ask the involved Swiss healthcare institutions for their support in introducing these changes in their institution.

2. Problematic trends regarding the practical year application

The practical year is not just an essential part of a medical student’s education, but also serves the students to compare different workplaces and helps to clarify which speciality they might

want to pursue after graduation. Generally, there are few regulations regarding the application for the practical year spots (e.g. concerning which specialties and which geographical regions to choose), which give the students some freedom to plan the year according to their interests. Students from different faculties however reported various struggles regarding the application process, mostly regarding the time of the application process (e.g. pressure to apply very early, no spots left in interesting disciplines/institutions).

In order to objectify these issues, the *commission on medical education (AK/CoFo)* of swimsa conducted a survey, including students from all Swiss medical faculties and all study years (n = 923). The results revealed the following issues:

1) Students feel increasingly peer-pressured to apply for spots early in their studies, due to an undefined starting point of the application process: As there are no regulations regarding the time point of applications, students face the dilemma of not yet knowing what they might be interested in versus being too late to apply for interesting spots. To avoid this, some students start to apply very early in their studies (sometimes already in their 1st and 2nd study year). This causes pressure amongst their fellow-students to do so as well. The survey shows that meanwhile many 1st year (34%) and the majority of 2nd year students (66%) experience this pressure¹.

2) Students apply “blindly” for disciplines not yet covered in their studies and in which they have lost interest by the time of their practical year: Students that apply early are likely to not have had an insight in the respective discipline during their studies yet. 409 of the surveyed students (44%) reported to have applied for disciplines neither covered in their lectures nor in their courses by the point of their application. As interests can change due to insights gained while studying, it is no surprise that a third of the participants (n = 288) regret certain applications even before starting their practical year spot. The main reasons being not enough time left to see other disciplines of interest (n = 94) and not being interested any longer in the booked disciplines (n = 87).

3) Students start “hoarding” spots, causing administrative burden and planning insecurity for the healthcare institutions and blocking spots from other students: To avoid the dilemma described above, some students started to apply for multiple spots during the same time-period (“double-bookings”) or to cancel spots. Although the survey-results indicate that only a minority of students does so, there are still 105 participants (14%) with one or more “double-bookings” and 151 (20%) with cancellations. While cancellations are in some cases inevitable, double-bookings do clearly cause unnecessary administrative burden and planning insecurity to the hospitals due to potential rather short-notice cancellations. Some hospitals have started implementing measures against this themselves. Further it blocks those spots for other interested students to apply, which is particularly unfortunate since 305 of the surveyed students (33%) stated having problems finding desired spots.

¹ Please notice that the survey was conducted at the beginning of the academic year and numbers are likely to increase during the ongoing year.

3. Student's proposal to improve the situation

The survey-results show that the current situation regarding the practical year application is unfavourable for both students and healthcare institutions and is likely to deteriorate further if no measures are taken against. Since those trends seem to be caused (to some extent) by peer-pressure due to a missing starting date for applications, a possible improvement for the situation could be the introduction of a nation-wide defined time-point for the beginning of the application process.

Swiss medical students clearly support the introduction of a time-limitation (n = 829; 90%), with the most preferred time-limitations being able to apply one year in advance (n = 319) or after reaching the bachelor's degree (n = 208).

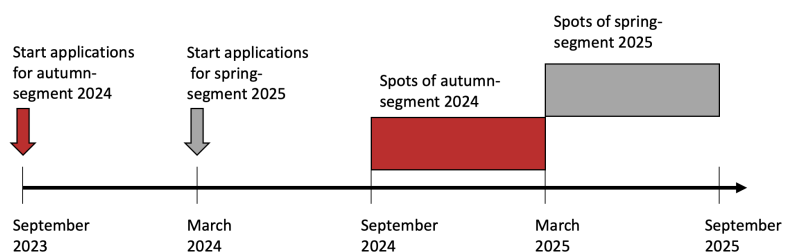
Setting the starting point for applying after reaching the bachelor would have the advantage of having an identical starting-point defined by the academic year for all faculties. However, as not all faculties start their practical year at the same time this could lead to differences in application opportunities. Furthermore, hospitals would have to check if an applicant has already successfully obtained their bachelor degree. As the bachelor diploma is not issued at the same time at all universities, this can lead to inequalities among the students in the application process.

Setting the starting point to apply one year in advance to the beginning of the spot, could avoid these differences between faculties, as the application time point is solely defined by the time the practical year spot takes place. However, a monthly application window could add additional stress to the medical studies. Further, the organisation of the practical year for the individual student might have to be reconsidered after each month, depending on the student being able to get the desired spot or not. As some students want to visit certain disciplines/institutions during a specific time-period (e.g. orthopaedics in skiing regions during winter months), this could even increase double-bookings as "backup-spots", in case students would not be able to get the spot in the respective discipline/institution at the desired time point.

To avoid those interfaculty differences, differences in the distribution of documents, monthly application waves, increased double-bookings and cancellations and still be able to encounter the unfavourable trends explained above, we want to propose the following solution:

Two practical year spot segments a year should be introduced: An "autumn-segment" (from the beginning of September until the end of February) and a "spring-segment" (from the beginning of March until the end of August). Applications for spots taking place in one of the segments will be accepted no sooner than one year in advance of the first month of the respective segment. For spots that last longer than one month, the starting month of the spot decides the starting point for the application.

General application example: A student wanting to apply for spots that take place in the



“autumn-segment” of 2024 (so any spot from the beginning of September 2024 until the end of February 2025), could start to apply no sooner than September 2023.

Example of an application for a multiple-month spot overlapping the segments: A student wanting to apply for a two month spot from February 1st, 2025 until March 31st, 2025 would be able to apply no sooner than September 2023 (the autumn-segment 2024, as the beginning month of the spot is part of this segment).

As this regulation would be implemented by the healthcare institutions, there is no expected disadvantage for Swiss medical students compared to students applying for practical year spots from abroad, since they also have to comply with the same time-regulations.

The organisation of practical year spots abroad would not be influenced by this proposal, as those changes are only proposed to Swiss healthcare institutions. For spots abroad, the current regulations would continue to be the only regulations.

The time point and duration of the segments were chosen similar to the academic semesters in order to keep the structure of the academic year without being dependent on it.

This proposed solution can only be implemented fair and effective if done so nation-wide.

Therefore, swimsa asks the Swiss healthcare institutions involved in the practical year of Swiss medical studies for their support in introducing the proposed time-limitation within their institution.