

Perspectives on training during the COVID-19 pandemic: responses from a pan-European survey

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Background The Corona Virus Disease-19 (COVID-19) pandemic has profoundly affected the healthcare system, especially the personal and professional wellbeing of healthcare staff. As an organisation that aims to improve and harmonise training in Europe, we sought to evaluate how the European obstetrics and gynaecology residency program and trainees were affected by the pandemic.

Aim To understand the perspectives of trainees in O&G, with regards to the effect of COVID-19 pandemic on postgraduate training in Europe.

Methods: This study was a cross-sectional explorative survey using an online questionnaire and was conducted from 20th of April 2020 to 1st July 2020. It was advertised on social media platforms and emailed to representatives of the 35 member countries of the European Network of Trainees in Obstetrics and Gynaecology (ENTOG), who were requested to disseminate further to trainees in their respective countries. The questionnaire comprised of 40 questions that were subdivided into four subjects; workload, specialist training aspects in obstetrics and gynaecology, health and safety of the trainee and women's health and maternal health issues. The survey also consisted of a free-text option to explore the perspectives of trainees further. These questions covered five main domains; effect of the pandemic on training, worries about training, acquisition of skills during the pandemic, training period and extensions and responsibilities outside training during the pandemic. The responses to these questions in the survey were analysed using pragmatic thematic analysis. The process of thematic analysis was instructed by Braun and Clarke.

Results: Responses from 110 trainees from 25 different European countries were analysed. Thematic analysis of trainee responses resulted in multiple themes across the five domains. The domain that explored **the effect of the pandemic on training** showed that trainees felt there was a lack of training as well as a lack of training opportunities. On **worries about training**, some trainees had concerns whilst others took this as a learning opportunity to gain new skills. When trainees were enquired about the **acquisition of skills during the pandemic**, five main themes rose: gaining further clinical experience, educational benefits, research opportunities, personal benefits, and no benefits at all. The survey also explored the **views of trainees on training period and extensions**, and two themes were noted: time in training and uncertainty about extensions. In terms of **responsibilities outside training during the pandemic**, three themes were generated: patient care, involvement in the departmental organisation and the inability to contribute.

Figure. 1 Map depicting countries from whom trainee response was provided.

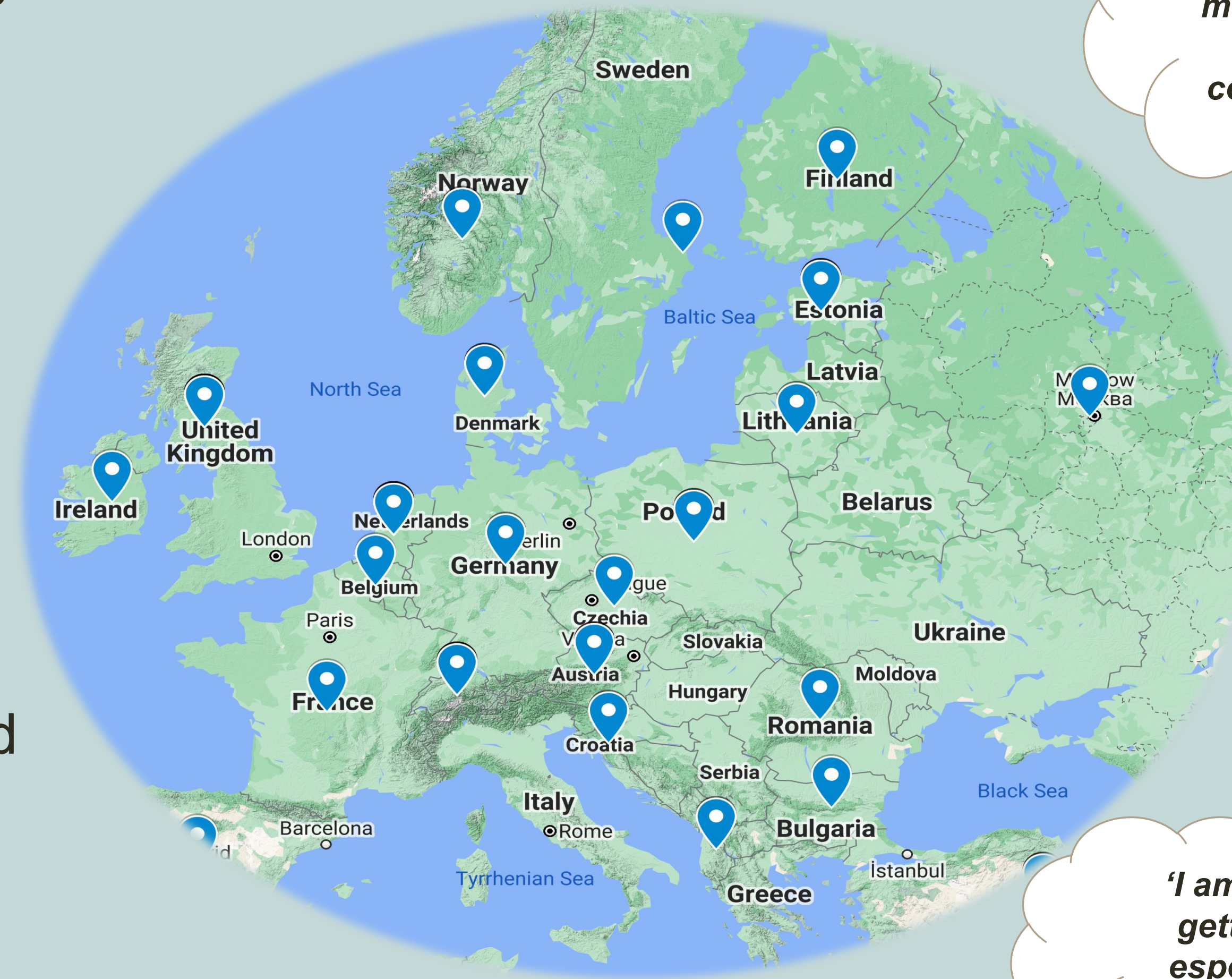
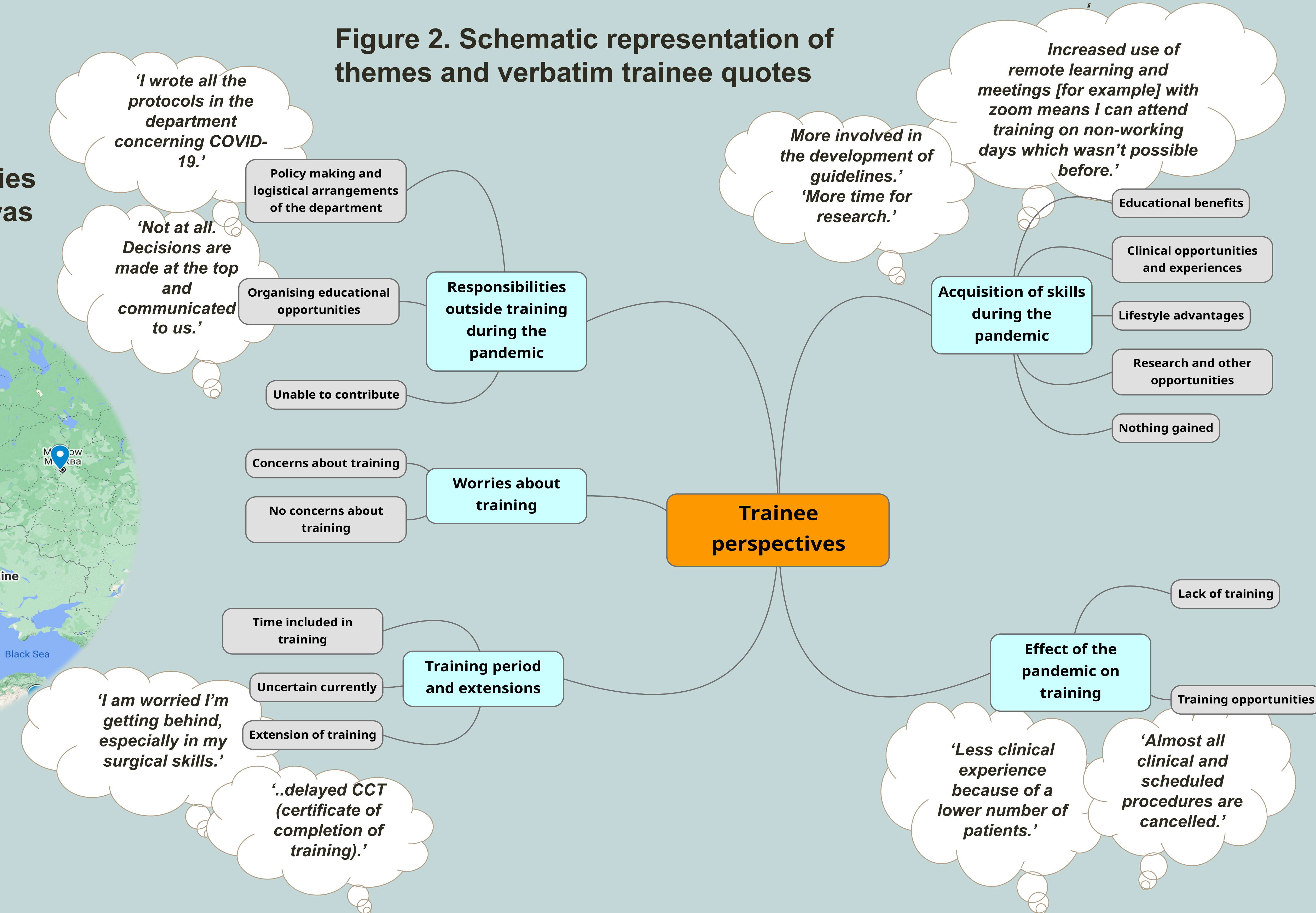


Figure 2. Schematic representation of themes and verbatim trainee quotes



Conclusion. The impact on the training varies per trainee, but issues like workload, exposure to learning opportunities, theoretical education and trainee-related psychosocial factors were all noted to be affected. When planning for reshaping the training programmes to accommodate for the discrepancies caused, trainers need to consider the perspectives of trainees and actively involve them in the decision making, designing and execution of future plans.