

## Characteristics of the Current System for Selection into the Foundation Programme

### UKFPO Foundation Programme Rules Group

The Foundation Programme Rules Group is responsible for defining the rules and processes for recruitment to the Foundation Programme. The Rules Group comprises representatives from all major stakeholders, including COPMeD, Foundation School Directors, the GMC, Medical Schools, BMA Medical Students Committee, NHS Employers, the four UK health departments and the UKFPO. All major changes to the recruitment process proposed by the Rules Group are subject to legal scrutiny and equality impact assessment. Written proposals are then submitted to the four UK health departments and to the Foundation Programme Standing Committee (which acts as the governing body for the UKFPO) for approval.

### Certification of competence

In the UK, the General Medical Council (GMC) certifies competence to practise as a doctor, and specifies the legally required minimum standards. UK Medical Schools base their curricula on the framework set out by the GMC (Tomorrow's Doctors) and determine their procedures for assessing whether students should graduate and become licensed to practise with provisional registration with the GMC. Schools do so in accordance with the standards and outcomes set by the GMC's Undergraduate Board in *Tomorrow's Doctors*,<sup>1</sup> as verified both by external examiners and by the Committee's procedures for Quality Assurance of Basic Medical Education (QABME). The system of continuous external examiner scrutiny and of formal QABME visits twice every ten years provides the GMC with the evidence it requires to confirm that the education delivered by UK Medical Schools prepares Foundation doctors with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to assure patient safety.

In 2005, the GMC undertook an extensive study of the need for a common final examination<sup>2</sup>, and later published a *Strategic Proposal for Assessment*<sup>3</sup> in which it recommended consideration of the implications of either shared questions within UK Medical School final examinations or a single national examination. In this Option Appraisal, the Steering Group has considered the use of a national assessment taking place in addition to, and before, finals as a means of reliably ranking all applicants for Foundation training. It has not considered the merits of replacing current finals with a national assessment as a means of certifying graduating doctors. The use of shared questions within UK Medical Schools has also been considered in depth by the Steering Group.

### History of recruitment to medical training posts

A national recruitment process for the Foundation Programme was introduced in 2005 for programmes beginning in 2006, with seven of the 17 Deaneries recruiting on line through the Multi-Deanery Application Process (MDAP)<sup>4</sup>. The process was developed by a UK Strategy Group, which included the four Chief Medical Officers. MDAP introduced common, nationally agreed person specifications, application forms and scoring guidelines, and facilitated applications into Foundation Schools remote from the home Medical School. Applications included personal statements which were considered difficult to score objectively. The proposal to interview, for example, the lowest scoring 5% of candidates was rejected by consultants and students.

---

<sup>1</sup> A revised edition is due to be published in autumn 2009.

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/strategic\\_outcomes\\_final\\_report\\_jun\\_2006.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/strategic_outcomes_final_report_jun_2006.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/strategic\\_proposal\\_for\\_assessment.pdf](http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/strategic_proposal_for_assessment.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Developed by the West Midlands Deanery in 2000, the MDAP was later used by four deaneries in 2004. The MDAP removed several features of the original system, including interviews, the introduction of anonymised scoring of applications by panels, and appointment based on candidates with the highest scores receiving their first preference.

A fully internet-based recruitment process was introduced for programmes beginning in 2007 and which included all 17 deaneries across the UK. The Medical Training Application System (MTAS) included an online application form and an academic ranking provided by the candidate's Medical School<sup>5</sup> to determine the candidate's overall score. Eligibility criteria were also established. Candidates were allocated to a Foundation School based first on their preference list, then their score. In the last application round, 93% were allocated to their first choice School.

In 2007, the UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO) was established to take responsibility for coordinating the online recruitment process across the UK. Unlike MDAP, there is a single national application round, and completed forms are scored across white space questions, which are mapped against the national person specification.

### **Current UK recruitment process**

The recruitment process comprises three main steps: national selection into Foundation training through a) exclusion of those not qualified to proceed and b) allocation to a Foundation School through a process of matching to ranking/preference, and c) matching to a specific programme within the Foundation School (local process). This Option Appraisal encompasses a review of parts a) and b), but is not charged with reviewing in detail the processes involved with matching to Foundation Posts at local level, the Academic Foundation Programmes, special circumstances, linked applications nor selection into the Defence.

Figures made available to this Option Appraisal by the UKFPO indicate that in the 2008/09 recruitment round, there were 7,004 allocations for 7,075 available places. 60% of UK graduates applied to their local Foundation School. Where the number of local graduates is not matched by the number of available Foundation Programme training posts, some regions such as London and Scotland are net exporters and some students are obliged to move.

### **Eligibility checking**

All applicants to the Foundation Programme must confirm that they meet the Eligibility. For applicants who have graduated from a UK Medical School within the previous 24 months, this is confirmed by the graduating Medical School. All graduates from EU and non-EU Medical Schools are required to complete Eligibility forms. As part of the Eligibility Criteria, applicants are required to demonstrate they meet the requirements for provisional registration with the GMC by the start of the Foundation Programme, including demonstrable English language ability, criminal records clearance and declaration of Fitness to Practise. All candidates are subject to pre-employment checks by their employing Trust. No post is guaranteed until all eligibility checks have been undertaken and approved. An academic transcript and a letter of nomination from the Medical School Dean are also required.

The UKFPO Eligibility Office requires all UK and non-UK candidates who qualified from Medical School more than two years previously, to pass an assessment of their clinical skills. In 2009 there were 577 applications from outside of the EU, down from 1,100 in 2008. Medical Schools are invited to tender to host the clinical skills assessments. In 2008 and 2009, the University of Manchester was awarded the contract.

In 2009 there were 577 applications from overseas, down from 1,100 in 2008. Of these, 186 met the eligibility requirements and UKFPO person specification. Non-EU nationals and UK nationals without EC rights who graduate from outside of the EU are also required to prove their Professional Linguistics Assessment Board (PLAB) status. The PLAB examination, a GMC

---

<sup>5</sup> Medical Schools determined the method of awarding points through the academic quartile system.

requirement, is a written three hour knowledge examination, an English language test, and a clinical assessment through 16 five-minute mini-exams. Non-EU nationals are required to provide evidence of their right to work as a doctor in training in the UK. Candidates without proof of the right to work may apply for the UK Foundation Programme, and provided they meet minimum eligibility criteria and there are sufficient places available, may subsequently apply for a Trust to sponsor their visa application. The costs incurred for additional tests to demonstrate eligibility requirements and for registration with GMC are met by the individual applicant.<sup>6</sup>

The UKFPO makes reasonable allowances for applicants to the Foundation Programme with refugee status, on an individual basis, in recognition that it may be difficult for these candidates to produce the necessary paperwork to prove their eligibility. There have been small numbers of candidates with refugee status in 2007 and 2008. The Steering Group does not recommend changes to the consideration of refugee doctors.

### **Online application form and white space questions**

The UKFPO website provides information on programmes available in all Foundation Schools, the application form and the online guidance two weeks in advance of the application period. During this time, candidates register and their details are checked against eligibility requirements. Candidates have two weeks to complete and submit their application form, to include their rank of all 26 Foundation Schools in order of preference. In 2008, the online application form included eight competency based questions mapped against the person specification. Anonymised application forms are scored by the candidate's first choice Foundation School by NHS clinicians, which has an opportunity cost. Each form is scored horizontally by a panel of two trained people, at least one of whom is a clinician, using nationally agreed scoring criteria. 10% of applications are randomly selected for verification, and 5%-10% of applications are re-scored by different panels for quality assurance.

### **Academic quartile ranking**

Each Medical School Dean issues a statement to the UKFPO providing a verifiable academic quartile ranking for each applicant, based on a local ranking of academic performance in comparison with other students at the same Medical School. In 2008, 34 points were awarded for the fourth quartile, 36 points for the third quartile, 38 points for the second quartile and 40 points for the first quartile. The means of obtaining this rank is defined locally by each Medical School, and is usually based on a combined weighted score of performance in third and fourth year assessments.

### **Allocation to Foundation School (national level)**

Candidates receive a score based on their responses to white-space questions on the application form (60%) and the academic quartile from their Medical School (40%). Candidates are allocated to Foundation Schools through an algorithm firstly on their geographical preference, then their score. Candidates with the same score at the bottom cut-off for allocation to a specific school are then randomly allocated. Once all first choices have been allocated, candidates are allocated according to their score to the next choice school on their list with vacancies.

### **Matching to Foundation Track (local level)**

Candidates rank the programmes available in their allocated Foundation School. The method for matching students and programmes varies locally, and may include an interview. The score of the UKFPO process is used in this matching process by most schools. Candidates are informed of their programme match via the online recruitment system. The employing Trusts run pre-employment checks such as Criminal Records Bureau clearance and references.

---

<sup>6</sup> The current fees are listed on <http://www.gmc-uk.org/doctors/fees/index.asp>

**Special circumstances**

Medical Schools may recommend individual students to be allocated to a particular Foundation School on the grounds of special circumstances (family, caring, health or educational reasons). Candidates apply to their Medical School for pre-allocation, and requests are considered by a local panel. Approval results in candidates being pre-allocated to a Foundation School providing that they meet minimum criteria through the UKFPO application process. In 2008/09 there were 224 applicants for pre-allocation due to Special Circumstances, of which 204 applications were approved.<sup>7</sup>

**Linked applications**

Linked application forms enable two candidates to be allocated to the same Foundation School (with spaces available at the level of the lower score of the two candidates). This was first introduced in 2008. Candidates with special circumstances may not apply for a linked application.

---

<sup>7</sup> UKFPO data.