

Improving Selection to the Foundation Programme

Appendix B

Characteristics of the current system for selection to the Foundation Programme

Characteristics of the current system for selection to 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 schools, the GMC, medical schools, BMA Medical Students Committee, NHS Employers, the four UK Health Departments and the UKFPO. All major changes to the application 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 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*, 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 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 graduates for the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours to assure patient safety as a practising Foundation doctor.

In 2005, the GMC undertook an extensive study of the need for a common final examination¹, and later published a *Strategic Proposal for Assessment*² in which it recommended consideration of the implications of either shared questions within UK medical school finals or a single national examination. This was considered as part of the initial Options Appraisal (MSC, 2009), and the ISFP Project Group have recommended that work should continue outside of the scope of the ISFP project to develop common final examination questions between UK medical schools, and to develop an assessment of clinical communication for applicants without English as a first language and who have not interacted with patients in English during the course of their undergraduate medical degree.

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)³. 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 geographically remote from the graduating medical school. Applications included personal statements which were considered difficult to score objectively. The proposal to interview, for example, the lowest scoring 5% of applicants was rejected by consultants and students.

A fully internet-based application process was introduced for FP2007 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 applicant's graduating medical school to determine the overall score. Eligibility criteria were also established. Applicants were allocated to a foundation school based first on their preference list, then their score. In

¹ http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/strategic_outcomes_final_report_jun_2006.pdf

² http://www.gmc-uk.org/education/documents/strategic_proposal_for_assessment.pdf

³ 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 applicants with the highest scores receiving their first preference.

2007, the UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO) was established to take responsibility for coordinating the online recruitment process across the UK.

Current UK recruitment process

Selection into the Foundation Programme comprises three main stages: a) selecting the most suitable eligible applicants to the Foundation Programme, b) allocation to a specific foundation schools (national process) and c) matching to a specific programme within the foundation school (local process). This project to review the methods for national selection into the Foundation Programme relates to (a) and (b) only, but the processes involved with matching to individual programmes remains the responsibility of the relevant foundation schools, and is outside of the scope of the ISFP project.

There were 7,253 eligible applications to FP2011 for 7,073 available places. Around 57% of UK applicants applied to the foundation school associated with their graduating medical school. Where the number of local graduates is not matched by the number of available Foundation Programme places, 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 criteria. For applicants who have graduated from a UK medical school within the previous 24 months, this is confirmed by the graduating medical school. All applicants who have graduated from non-UK medical schools are required to complete Eligibility applications. 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 applicants are subject to pre-employment checks by their employing Trust. No post is guaranteed until all eligibility and pre-employment 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 applicants who qualified from medical school more than two years previously, to pass an assessment of their clinical skills. Medical schools are invited to tender to host the clinical skills assessments. The University of Manchester was awarded the contract for FP2009 and a Service Level Agreement has been extended each year since. For FP2011, 112 applicants of the 225 who were required to undertake clinical skills assessments completed them.

Non-EU nationals and UK nationals without EC rights who graduate from outside of the EU are also required to prove their Professional and Linguistic Assessment Board (PLAB) status. The PLAB examination, a GMC requirement, is an English language test, a written knowledge examination, and a clinical assessment. Non-EU nationals are required to provide evidence of their right to work as a doctor in training in the UK. For FP2011, the UKFPO's Eligibility Office processed 1,605 applications from non-UK applicants. Of those, 1,037 were eligible to apply, but only 880 completed application forms. Of those, 267 were eligible for a Foundation Programme.

The UKFPO makes reasonable allowances for the small number of applicants to the Foundation Programme with refugee status, on an individual basis, in recognition that it may be difficult for these applicants to produce the necessary paperwork to prove their eligibility.

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, applicants register and their details are checked against eligibility requirements. Applicants have two weeks to complete and submit their application form, to include their rank of all 26 foundation schools in order of preference. For FP2011, the online

application form included five competency based questions mapped against the person specification. Anonymised application forms are scored by the applicant's first choice foundation school. 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. A number of applications are verified where the scoring panel doubt the truthfulness of an answer or have serious concerns about the reported behavior of the applicant.

Academic quartile ranking

The 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. For FP2011, 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.

Allocation to foundation school (national level)

Applicants are allocated to Foundation Schools through a matching algorithm which takes account of their foundation school choices, then their application score. In the event of oversubscription to a particular foundation school, applicants with the same score at the cut-off for allocation are then randomly allocated. Once all first choices have been allocated, applicants are allocated according to their score to the next choice foundation school on their list with vacancies.

Matching to Foundation Programme (local level)

Applicants 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. Applicants are informed of their programme match via the online application system, FPAS. The employing Trusts run pre-employment checks such as Criminal Records Bureau clearance and reference checks.

Special circumstances

Medical schools may recommend individual students to be allocated to a particular foundation school on the grounds of special circumstances (caring responsibilities, health or educational reasons). Applicants apply to their medical school for pre-allocation, and requests are considered by a local panel. Approval results in applicants being pre-allocated to a foundation school providing that the applicant also meets the minimum criteria of the UKFPO application process. There were 241 approved Special Circumstances applications to FP2011.

Linked applications

Linked application forms enable two applicants to be allocated to the same foundation school (with spaces available at the level of the lower score of the two applicants). This was first introduced for FP2009. Applicants with special circumstances may not apply for a linked application.

