

Health Workforce and Performance Directorate
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10 March 2020

Dear Karen

MEDICAL UNDERGRADUATE NUMBERS 2020-21

The Scottish Government writes to the SFC annually regarding intake numbers for medical schools in Scotland. This follows consideration of the relevant factors by Scottish Ministers taking into account the advice of the Medical Undergraduate Group (MUG) regarding supply and demand.

Consideration of undergraduate numbers for 2020/21 has taken place against a complex background including continued delivery of the widening access, ScotGEM and ScotDOM commitments as well as recognition of the Programme for Government commitment to develop proposals for a new medical school (published in September 2019).

Scottish Ministers are committed to ensuring that there is an adequate supply of medical students coming through the system to meet projected medical workforce numbers and ensure a sustainable medical workforce for the future. Whilst there have been significant achievements in the last three years, it is clear that work remains to be done in relation to supply factors and we need to continue to work together to identify measures to retain more of our Scottish medical school graduates in NHS Scotland and to increase supply into GP and other shortage specialties. Widening access to, and participation in, medical education and training to everyone in Scotland is key to this and remains a priority.



A new course was developed at the University of Edinburgh from 2020/21 to allow experienced healthcare professionals to enter medicine and combine part-time study with their existing job. It is designed to target high calibre candidates who are more likely to be retained and in work in NHS Scotland once they have completed their studies and 25 places have been allocated to Edinburgh for this new course. Accordingly, it was recommended at the MUG meeting, on 15 January 2020, that the medical undergraduate intake for 2020/21 should be 1,038 (which is comprised of the numbers agreed for the 2019/20 intake = 1,013 plus these 25 additional places).

Scot/EU/RUK: 974
International: 64

Total intake: 1038

The total student intake for 2020-21 again includes the 50 undergraduate places to widen access to medicine distributed equally (10 per medical school) first introduced in 2016. Ministers are pleased to note the work that Scottish medical schools have undertaken within this area, including: work to improve the communication of information on contextualised admissions on their web sites; and to establish more consistent criteria to identify access students.

You will be aware of the work on data measures that has already been undertaken by the Access Data Working Group, and that the independent Commissioner for Fair Access, Professor Sir Peter Scott, is also looking at access to medicine as part of his programme of work this year.

I appreciate that the data on widening access continues to indicate that there is a mixed picture with some medical schools performing significantly better than others in terms of priorities set out in our previous letters of guidance. Accordingly, Ministers agreed the recommended overall intake figure for 2020/21 from MUG on 11 February; but have asked that a widening access review take place in 2020/21 in order to inform the developing proposals for the new medical school and any other future work.

I would expect SFC to continue to work closely with SG Health officials and those within SG Higher Education policy to ensure developments within medical schools are well aligned to the wider access work taking place in Scotland and to participate in a working group to carry out this review.

The total student intake for 2020-21 again includes the 55 undergraduate places for ScotGEM first introduced in 2018 and the (complementary to, but not included, in intake numbers) 50 undergraduate places for pre-medical entry first introduced in 2017. These programmes continue to have positive outcomes for students and we will continue to provide the necessary funding for these places.

We will continue with the ScotsDOM policy to replace 100 RUK medical students with 100 ScotsDOM/EU students on a phased basis for a further 2 years (34 extra were added in 2019/20) to help to retain more Scottish medical school graduates in Scotland. In practice this means that from the total intake for 2020/21, 33 more places should be allocated to ScotsDOM/EU students and RUK places should be decreased by the same number.

We are aware that the increasing numbers of medical undergraduate students continues to impact on the capacity of the NHS Boards to provide clinical placements. Since our guidance in 2016 (that the number of international students should not increase beyond existing levels) we note that there has been a 6.6% increase of international students since 2016. We will consider this developing position, and any solutions to be put in place, as we continue to work on proposals to develop a new medical school.

I understand that the SFC will be writing separately to us to provide the necessary data to ensure the effective monitoring of all the recent additional places and continue to work with the medical schools on collecting better data and implementing an indexing system to better track the students as they undertake their medical education and training journey. We would expect the system to be in place prior to the 2020-21 medical undergraduate intake.

I should be grateful if the SFC would now make the necessary arrangements for the 2020-21 intake. Ministers continue to welcome efforts towards achieving a more sustainable medical workforce and expect that the SFC will continue the monitoring and evaluation arrangements set out in the Memorandum of Understanding between us for the Medical Education Package.

The Acting Head of Medical Education and Training Unit, Michelle Campbell, would be happy to discuss the contents of this letter with you on 0131-244-0259 or by e-mail at michelle.campbell@gov.scot

Yours sincerely

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