

Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Medical Schools Council was commissioned by the Department of Health (DH) to lead a Steering Group to carry out an option appraisal for the best approach for selection of applicants into the UK Foundation Programme and allocation to Foundation Schools. The Option Appraisal was a collaborative venture between the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (AoMRC), the British Medical Association (BMA) Medical Students Committee, the Conference of Postgraduate Medical Deans (COPMeD), the General Medical Council (GMC), the Medical Schools Council, The National Association of Clinical Tutors (NACT), the Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency (NIMDTA), NHS Employers, the Scottish Board for Academic Medicine, the Scottish Foundation Board, the UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO) and the four UK Health Departments.
- 1.2 The Next Stage Review: A High Quality Workforce stated that 'new work needs to be undertaken to develop more reliable and valid selection tools for recruitment' to Foundation Programme training. This was based, to some extent, on shared concerns about the reliability, validity, comparability, NHS consultant time required, possible plagiarism and the longevity of the current online application system. This ranks applicants using a combined score derived from answers to a set of white space questions (weighted 60%) and an academic quartile ranking (40%) provided by the applicant's medical school.
- 1.3 In 2008-9, there were 7,004 applicants allocated to 7,075 vacancies, plus approximately 350 allocated to academic programmes and 60 Defence Deanery posts outside of this process. In this option appraisal, the Steering Group aimed to determine the best process to use in selection, thereby minimising the risk of legal challenge particularly if the ratio of applicants to places were to change.
- 1.4 The guiding principles behind this Option Appraisal have been that:
 - In order to protect patients and to reassure employers it is necessary to ensure that all applicants for the Foundation Programme are fit for purpose and, in scenarios of over-subscription, the most appropriate applicants are selected
 - Performance in Medical School should inform allocation of Foundation posts. However allocation must occur before Final examinations have been taken and so it is not possible to use performance in Finals as a selection tool.
- 1.5 The recommendations of the Steering Group have been informed by evidence that change is necessary, and evidence that the recommended changes would improve the selection process. Evidence was gathered as follows:
 - 1.5.1 The Steering Group commissioned three reviews of published academic literature by research teams in Durham, Newcastle and Warwick to examine the international evidence for alternative selection tools.
 - 1.5.2 An International Expert Panel was appointed, with representation from medical educationalists in the UK, Australia, Canada and continental Europe to use their expertise and the evidence from the three literature reviews in proposing a short-list of selection options for further consideration by the Steering Group.
 - 1.5.3 The Steering Group commissioned an independent Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) to assess both the quantifiable economic costs and important, but non-financial, benefits. The costs were summarised as a Net Present Value (NPV), and non-quantifiable benefits scored and weighted against agreed assessment criteria. A sensitivity analysis was undertaken to identify any likely variations in the findings of the CBA.
 - 1.5.4 The Steering Group consulted with twelve stakeholder groups, and received written feedback from eight further stakeholder groups, on the proposed selection options. The BMA Medical Students Committee independently consulted with 341 students. Stakeholder feedback was mapped against the CBA assessment criteria.
 - 1.5.5 An online questionnaire, with 1810 respondents, sought views on the principles of selection.
- 1.6 Selection tools not short-listed for further consideration were personality questionnaires, unstructured interviews, assessment centres and portfolios/ Structured Records of Achievement.
- 1.7 Selection tools short-listed for further consideration by the Steering Group were the current system (do nothing), Educational Performance Measurement (alone), a National Examination, Structured Interviews (plus measures of Educational Performance), Multiple Mini Interviews (plus measures of Educational Performance) and Situational Judgement Tests (plus measures of Educational Performance).

- 1.8 The Foundation Programme currently matches applicants with Foundation Schools using a hybrid of the First Preference First and Serial Dictator algorithms. The Steering Group commissioned a technical analysis of UKFPO data and considered this in its discussions.
- 1.9 The recommendations of the Steering Group are based on concerns around the current system, and overwhelming evidence in favour of evolution.
- 1.9.1 **Concern:** The Next Stage Review (2008) raised concerns about the robustness, reliability and validity of current arrangements for recruitment,
Recommendation: The current mechanism for allocation/selection is not sustainable in the long term, and the Option Appraisal has demonstrated a need for change. Work must begin immediately to pilot and evaluate alternative evidence-based mechanisms of allocation/selection.
- 1.9.2 **Concern:** The use of white-space questions as a selection tool is unsustainable, the marking is labour intensive, and use of non-invigilated conditions raises concerns around the risk of plagiarism and coaching.
Recommendation: Work should begin to develop and pilot Situational Judgement Tests (SJT) which would assess, under invigilated conditions, the professional behaviour, judgement and fitness for purpose of applicants based on a detailed job analysis,.
- 1.9.3 **Recommendation:** Job analyses should be undertaken for the Foundation Programme in order that selection tools might be based on a more detailed person specification which will include a requirement around clinical communication.
- 1.9.4 **Concern:** The academic quartile system makes it difficult to compare fairly between applicants from different universities and is too blunt an instrument to differentiate between students.
Recommendation: UK Medical Schools should work together to develop a common framework which will be used by all schools to provide a fine grained (differentiated) ranking of educational performance of applicants in Medical School. The impact of using this measure of educational performance should be piloted against current procedures.
- 1.9.5 **Recommendation:** Successful evaluated pilots of each of the selection tools, independently and in combination, are a pre-requisite for any change to be implemented. The relative weighting of two components will be informed by modelling the data gathered during piloting and will aim to produce the most valid and reliable composite score.
- 1.9.6 **Recommendation:** There should be consultation with students, employers and other stakeholders as to the preferred matching algorithm
- 1.9.7 **Recommendation:** A tracking mechanism should be introduced so that progress of all doctors through the Foundation Programme and beyond can be linked to initial selection. This will enable thorough evaluation of the effectiveness of the proposed selection option.
- 1.9.8 **Recommendation:** The new selection tools should not be implemented before the 2012 Foundation Programme so as to allow sufficient time for in-depth piloting and further consultation and communication with key stakeholders.
- 1.9.9 **Recommendation:** A feasibility study, which would scope out the work involved in taking the above recommendations forward and develop a detailed project plan, should be commissioned as a matter of urgency.