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Scottish Funding Council
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Dear Karen

MEDICAL UNDERGRADUATE NUMBERS 2019

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.

Scottish Ministers are committed to achieving a sustainable medical workforce for the future. Consideration of the intake for 2019/20 takes place against the background of the successful launch of ScotGEM, a key element in the delivery of the medical education package announced by the First Minister in 2015. While this is a significant achievement it is clear that work remains to be done in relation to the supply pipeline and we are therefore continuing 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 medicine to all sectors of Scottish society is key to this and remains a priority, providing a fresh supply pipeline into the profession.

Sixty of the places to which Ministers committed under Part 1 of the National Health and Social Care Workforce Plan are to be included in 2019 intake numbers. In terms of further action to improve retention of graduates, evidence shows that Scots domiciled graduates of Scottish medical schools are retained in NHS Scotland at a significantly higher rate than graduates from elsewhere. Ministers therefore wish to see further action taken to increase the number of Scots domiciled students in medical intakes. We have been working closely with the SFC on this matter.

Following the meeting of the MUG on 08 November, and taking account of the recommendations of that Group, Ministers recommended that the medical student intake for 2019 should be as follows:

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Scot/EU/RUK: | 949 |
| International: | 64 |

Total intake: 1013

This represents an increase of 60 Scots/EU/RUK places in comparison to last year. Following the process held last year Ministers consider that 30 additional places should be allocated to the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow respectively.

In terms of increasing Scots domiciled/EU numbers, Ministers consider that replacing 100 RUK medical students with 100 Scots dom/EU students on a phased basis over the next three years would help to retain more Scottish medical school graduates in Scotland. In practice this means that from the total intake for 2019/20, 34 more places should be allocated Scots dom/EU students and RUK places should be decreased by the same number.

The total student intake for 2019 again includes the 50 undergraduate places to widen access to medicine distributed equally across the 5 medical schools first introduced in 2016. The overall message from last year's widening access data is one of a mixed picture with some medical schools performing significantly better than others in terms of SIMD 20 admissions. I have noted the work being taken forward by Education Directorate colleagues through the Access Data Group to determine whether the measure of deprivation used should be extended beyond SIMD 20. As was discussed at the Board for Academic Medicine in December an invitation has been extended to the medical schools collectively through the Board to participate in that process. While that process is ongoing Ministers expect medical schools and in particular those who are furthest away from current targets to continue to make progress around widening access. It should be noted that the allocation of the 50 places for 2020/21 may be different. In the meantime Ministers are pleased to note that medical schools have agreed contextualised entry requirements and would expect that information to be effectively communicated by medical schools to the target audience.


The outcome from the first year of the two pre-medical entry programmes at Glasgow and Aberdeen Universities has been extremely positive and Ministers therefore wish to increase places on the pre-medical entry courses by 10 (split equally between the Universities of Aberdeen and Glasgow.)

Finally while Ministers remain cognisant of the intake and important contribution of international fee paying medical students in Scotland, their expectation is that international numbers should not increase beyond existing levels. Ministers will consider this issue further over the coming months in order to form a view as to whether additional action is required to control international intake numbers.

I would be grateful if the SFC would now make the necessary arrangements for the 2019 intake. Scottish Ministers continue to welcome efforts towards achieving a more sustainable medical workforce and we will look to the SFC to continue the monitoring and evaluation arrangements set out in the Memorandum of Understanding for the Medical Education Package.

I would be happy to discuss the contents of this letter with you or, alternatively, you can contact Stella Smith in my Division on 0131 244 3346 or by e-mail at Stella.Smith@gov.scot.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stella Smith', written in a cursive style.