

LTC13D081

**Title:** *MED Fit To Sit Policy*  
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### **Issue**

The School of Medicine is seeking a concession that would permit the application of a 'Fit to Sit' policy in respect of all event type assessments undertaken by students on the MB BS programme. The School believes that this would better prepare students for professional body examinations sat in parallel with the MB BS assessments (eg the UKFPO Situational Judgement Test) in which a Fit To Policy is applied and would also reflect the requirements of place upon students with regard to their awareness of any applicable health issues by the General Medical Council.

### **Recommendation**

Members are invited to approve the proposed concession as detailed in the document below

### **Resource Implications**

There are no resource implications

### **Risk Implications**

There are no material risks to the University associated with the approval of this request

### **Equality and Diversity**

The proposed regulatory amendments apply equally to all students on the MB BS programme.

### **Timing of decisions**

Approval by LTC at its June meeting would allow the concession to be applied with effect from the 2014-15 academic year

### **Further Information**

Contact Mr Jon Sharp Head LTS (Quality) [jon.sharp@uea.ac.uk] with any enquiries about the content of the paper

## MEMORANDUM

**To:** Dr Adam Longcroft

**From:** Professor Richard Holland (Course Director), Professor David Crossman (Head of School), Dr Mary Jane Platt (Teaching Director), MED

**Re:** Concession request:

- Fit to sit policy

### FIT TO SIT

The School would like to request a concession that students on the MB BS programme are required to declare, by attendance at assessments, that they are 'fit to sit'.

Medical students must demonstrate the judgement and self-awareness in their studies that they will need to have in practice in order to ensure the safety of the public. The GMC makes it clear that doctors are personally accountable for their professional practice, and this includes making appropriate judgements about their own health and its impact on patients. Applying a 'fit to sit' policy will enable us to better assess students' self-awareness and professional values and will help ensure that our student doctors are well-prepared for the professional responsibilities and demands of being a doctor. As soon as they become F1 doctors, our students will be expected to make sound judgements about when they are fit to 'attend' work and manage patients. The proposed 'fit to sit' policy parallels the clear professional expectations that our students will face as they start their careers in medicine.

In addition, the approach we propose will better prepare our students for the crucial 'hurdle' of the Situational Judgement Test (SJT). This is a national exam, run by the UK Foundation Programme Organisation (UKFPO). The SJT is a test of the professional attributes required to work as a Foundation Year 1 doctor in the NHS. The UKFPO rigorously apply a 'fit to sit' policy. This national exam is a key determinant of our students' overall national ranking and thereby their allocation throughout the UK to their first Foundation Year 1 NHS post. Poor performance in that exam has significant consequences in terms of potentially being placed in locations distant from where students may wish to work as a doctor. Extremely poor performance can mean that graduates are not offered an FY1 post, though we would hope that none of our students ever performs at such a low level.

UKFPO organise allocation of all Foundation training posts for medical graduates throughout the UK. These Foundation posts used to be called "house jobs" – and are the first two years of postgraduate work as a doctor that our graduates undertake.

It should also be noted that “Fit to sit” is something that our students are in fact aware of even before they enter our course, as they are required to take the UKCAT (UK Clinical Aptitude Test) as part of their application for medicine to UEA (and likewise to 24 other medical schools). This aptitude assessment can be taken only once in any one application cycle, thus, applicants are strongly discouraged from attending if unfit (note: candidates book to take their test between 1<sup>st</sup> July and 3<sup>rd</sup> October of their application year).

We, therefore, believe that a student should be able to judge if they are fit to take an exam, or not. We accept a student’s fitness to attend/take an exam may be affected by their physical or mental health, circumstances in their personal life, or Specific Learning Disabilities. However, we consider that students should reflect carefully on those circumstances and make their own judgement as to the impact of those circumstances prior to any exam. Thus, they should judge in advance themselves whether they are fit to take a given assessment, or not.

It should be noted that all our summative exam assessments are preceded by a formative assessment in the first year. This is a requirement of the GMC, and means that no assessment type is encountered by a student summatively that has not been encountered previously formatively.

If a student considers themselves to be unfit this self-declaration would be automatically accepted (see below). That student would then be expected to sit the assessment at the next available opportunity subject to them being within the time restrictions placed on students on our course.

This policy is already in place at a number of other UK Medical Schools including Glasgow and, Barts and the London medical schools.

Extract from UKCAT Guidance 2013

*In presenting yourself to sit the UKCAT test, you are declaring yourself fit to take the test. If you are not fit to take the test, due to illness or other personal circumstances prior to sitting the test, then you must reschedule your test for a later date. We will not consider such issues as extenuating circumstances.*

Extract from UKFPO Situational Judgement Test (SJT) Guidance 2013

*Applicants declare themselves fit and well by entering the venue on the date of the SJT. Claims of extenuating circumstances cannot be made retrospectively after taking the SJT.*

Extract from University of Glasgow medical school

*..... this means that should a student fail a summative examination, it is not possible for the student to claim that they were unwell, either before or at the time of the examination, and were unable to complete the programme or study adequately. Should a student be unwell and unable to sit the examination then this should be brought to the attention of the School of Medicine before the examination date, together with appropriate medical certificates, to be submitted within 7 days of the examination date. In*

*undergraduate medicine, should a student sit an examination, that student is saying that he or she is fit and prepared to sit the whole examination.*

**Student perspective on this policy:** the National Union of Students is against introduction of 'fit to sit' policies. Their three key reasons are given below (from: "Fit to Sit policy: NUS Social Policy Briefing 28<sup>th</sup> Sept 2012: SPB/10/12")

- "Students may find it difficult to accurately assess their own fitness to sit an exam. This may be a bigger concern for students with mental health difficulties but could also occur if an incident influencing a student's fitness happens immediately before an exam and they have not had time to fully consider the incident's likely effect on their performance.
- For much of students' previous educational experiences, they have been in a culture which encourages them to sit exams even if they are not feeling completely fit. Therefore, they may be unlikely to even consider not sitting an exam, regardless of their fitness to do so. Students may also feel that sitting their exam or submitting coursework on time shows dedication to the course and may be reluctant not to do so.
- In most cases, if a student does not sit an exam due to not feeling fit for it, and their subsequent mitigating or extenuating circumstances are not accepted, they will receive a mark of zero in their attempt at the exam. This makes deciding whether one is fit to sit a high-risk situation, which is not compatible with an inclusive approach to assessment and can lead to high stress levels for students."

As described above, we expect our medical students to be able to assess their own "fitness" whether this be affected by physical, mental health or social issues. We emphasise that this is in keeping with the "Professionalism" that we are expected to assess and uphold, as insight into ones own health is a requirement for doctors (Good Medical Practice 2013, GMC), and thereby student doctors. As a course, we promote high standards of professional behaviour and, if this policy were to be accepted, we would ensure all students were well aware of it, and aware that declaring themselves "unfit to sit" would not be considered an indication that they lacked dedication, rather it would indicate a professional approach to their situation.

In terms of NUS' final point, this is extremely important. Our view would certainly be that whilst, wherever possible, we would expect evidence to support a claim that a student was "unfit", once a student has declared that they are "unfit" this self-declaration would automatically be accepted. Thus, we would ensure that the "risk" to the student was minimised.

### **Declaring yourself "unfit to sit" - reasons not to sit (extenuating circumstances)**

Extenuating circumstances encompass a range of physical, mental health and social circumstances which when occurring in the immediate lead up to the assessment are sufficiently severe as to mean that they would seriously affect the ability of the student to perform at the required level.

Students would be expected to notify the Learning & Teaching Service Hub that they are not "fit to sit" the assessment. Students would be expected to notify the Hub no later than 2 days before any assessment with relevant proof, for circumstances that affected them over the period leading up to the assessment, and within 3 days after the assessment for acute events that occurred at the time of the assessment and prevented the student attending on the day of the assessment. As stated above, a student's own declaration would be automatically accepted. Thus, a student who was yet to visit a doctor, but considered themselves not fit, would be considered as an appropriately professional judgement. We would always expect a student to seek appropriate help/support promptly relevant to the circumstances that they have declared.

Students who have submitted circumstances and have not sat the exam would retain the same number of attempts. The student's notification of being "not fit to sit" would be forwarded to the senior adviser so appropriate support can be considered.

### **Extenuating circumstances declared after assessment**

Students who sit an assessment and fail but subsequently report extenuating circumstances to the School or University would not have these considered by the School EC Panel, the Faculty Appeals and Complaints panel or the University, as they have declared themselves 'fit to sit' through their attendance at the assessment.

## **Illness during an examination**

A student who is taken unwell during an examination cannot have their marks adjusted for that, but will be given the choice to:

- Stay and complete the examination with no additional time; or
- For their mark up to their point of illness to count as their mark; or
- If, and only if, significantly acutely unwell (e.g. an epileptic fit) and with supporting evidence, the student would be permitted to sit at the next sit with that sit discounted, assuming that such a decision would not take the student over the maximum course length (5 years + 2).