

14 December 2023

Dear Lord Wharton

Thank you for the work recently undertaken by the Office for Students (OfS) following our guidance of 1 October 2023 to allocate an additional 205 medical training places for AY2024/25, supporting the objectives of the NHS Long Term Workforce Plan (LTWP) to deliver an NHS workforce fit for the future. This historic plan is the first time any Government has taken such an approach to workforce planning for the NHS.

This guidance relates to the further expansion of medical places in AY2025/26. To continue to deliver the commitments set out in the LTWP, we are providing sufficient additional funding to enable the OfS to increase the maximum fundable limits for home students by a further 350 places in AY2025/26, in advance of the larger scale expansion from AY2026/27 onwards.

We ask that the OfS develops a competitive bidding process to allocate this funding, to help ensure that further expansion in places is focused in areas of greatest need, as well as supporting the reform objectives in the LTWP. In particular, we ask that the criteria to allocate these additional places takes into account the following:

1. The need to align expansion to local NHS workforce need, with an emphasis on priority geographical areas, as per NHS workforce requirements set out by NHS England (NHSE).
2. That medical schools should only be allocated additional places if there is confidence that placement and educator capacity is in place, informed by advice from the General Medical Council (GMC) and NHSE of provider readiness and clinical placement capacity respectively. Medical schools accepting new places would need to understand that no new capital funding will be available in 2025/26.

In addition, providers will be aware of the medical education reforms set out in the LTWP. With this in mind, we ask that you encourage providers to consider now how they can best deliver the following priority reform objectives, to new, as well as existing, medical places from the 2026 academic year (though we do not expect these to form part of the specific criteria for allocations in AY2025/26):

- a. Applying innovation in course delivery (e.g. blended learning, simulation).
- b. Focussing on equality, diversity and inclusion – widening participation in and improving access to medical education so that the medical workforce is more representative of the population it serves and attracts doctors from a wider pool of people in local communities, including through the delivery of the new medical degree apprenticeship.

- c. Supporting general practice and other shortage specialties so that the NHS can deliver services required to meet patient need, as per NHSE workforce requirements set out separately.
- d. Increasing provision of graduate entry programmes.
- e. Developing four-year undergraduate medical degree programmes that meet the same established standards set by the GMC, so that doctors are able to enter service more quickly.
- f. Delivering accreditation of prior experiential learning programmes which shorten the degree programmes for graduates with appropriate prior learning and experience to less than the current four years for graduate entry medicine programmes.
- g. Subject to the outcome of a pilot that NHSE intend to deliver in 2024/25, delivering an internship model for newly qualified doctors to shorten the length of training, with a view to improving preparedness for practice.
- h. Delivering medical education programmes that deliver training in generalist skills to help ensure that future doctors have broader generalist and core skills to manage multi-morbidities, alongside single conditions.

The additional funding needed to cover the full costs to the OfS for funding these additional medical students will be reflected within the Strategic Priorities Grant (SPG) allocations for AY2025/26 and future years. The process for allocating places for AY2026/27 onwards and the funding allocations to support them will be confirmed in due course- we would expect the allocation of the additional 205 places for AY2024/25 and the 350 places for AY2025/26 to be carried over into the intakes of the schools in question for subsequent years, but this will be subject to review.

We also continue to welcome the strong commitment to apprenticeships within the LTWP- including the ground-breaking medical degree apprenticeship. We will continue to work closely with you, the HE sector and NHSE to progress these plans over the longer term.

We will work with the sector as we expand medical school places to ensure that providers can deliver the places where they are needed. While no new capital funding will be available in AY2025/26, we would anticipate that in their responses to the OfS, providers do set out whether capital will be required in future years as a result of a 2025 expansion and also indicate the purpose of the capital. We would expect schools to be innovative and use wider capacity in the education sector in partnership to grow physical and teaching capacity.

We ask the OfS to engage with the DfE and DHSC, as well as NHSE and the GMC as appropriate, as it makes decisions about how to use this funding.

The operation of maximum fundable limits for medical courses should continue to be managed closely by the OfS in future years, so that medical school places remain within their fundable limits.

This letter provides further guidance to the Office for Students under section 2(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and this guidance does not supersede steers in any previous guidance.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robert Halfon". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'R'.

The Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP  
Minister for Skills, Apprenticeships and Higher Education

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Andrew Stephenson". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'A'.

The Rt Hon Andrew Stephenson MP  
Minister of State for Health and Secondary Care