

# Subject Descriptor for Medicine Pilot: **Evaluation Report**

September 2021



## Preface

This evaluation report provides an overview of the outcomes of the subject descriptor for Medicine pilot that was delivered during the 2020-21 academic year. This report is aimed at course providers, Access Validating Agencies, higher education providers and other key stakeholders who deliver, award or receive students that have successfully completed a QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma (Medicine). This report will include feedback from the pilot course providers and recommendations and suggestions to support future course providers in the delivery and assessment of the Access to HE Diploma (Medicine).

## Section 1: Introduction

### Subject descriptor for Medicine

The Access to Higher Education Diploma changes lives. While over 50% of all current Access to HE students in higher education are studying a healthcare subject, less than 1% are currently studying Medicine at university. The subject descriptor for Medicine aims to change that and make the Access to HE Diploma a recognised route into Medicine for adults. The subject descriptor can be found on the QAA website.<sup>1</sup>

The aim of the subject descriptor is to bring greater standardisation to Diplomas titled Access to HE Diploma (Medicine). This will allow the medical schools currently accepting Access to HE students for direct entry to have greater confidence that an unfamiliar Diploma will be very similar in selection, content and assessment to those that they currently accept. It may also encourage those medical schools not currently accepting Access to HE students to review their admissions policies based on a clear definition of an Access to HE Diploma (Medicine) student.

The subject descriptor defines the minimum requirement of content for a Diploma titled Access to HE (Medicine). The subject descriptor provides information regarding the expected and recommended areas of study for progression into Medicine but also allows AVAs and course providers a degree of flexibility.

In addition, the subject descriptor includes recommendations for:

- the delivery and assessment of this Diploma
- the potential selection requirements (beyond qualifications) and the desired attributes of applicants.

The subject descriptor was reviewed by QAA in collaboration with a range of stakeholders including the Medical Schools Council, General Medical Council, AVAs, course providers and Dr Gordon Dent, Senior Lecturer at the School of Medicine at Keele University.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/access-to-he-diploma-subject-descriptor-medicine.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/access-to-he-diploma-subject-descriptor-medicine.pdf)

## Section 2: Pilot

The subject descriptor for Medicine pilot was implemented during the 2020-21 academic year. Five course providers and three AVAs participated in the pilot (see Table 1).

**Table 1: Pilot course providers and AVAs**

Course provider	AVA
DistanceLearningCentre.com	Ascentis
Dudley College of Technology	Open College Network West Midlands
Harlow College	The Cambridge Access Validating Agency (CAVA)
The College of West Anglia	The Cambridge Access Validating Agency (CAVA)
Truro and Penwith College	The Cambridge Access Validating Agency (CAVA)

Throughout the implementation of the pilot, QAA maintained overall oversight of the pilot and undertook the following in-year monitoring activities:

Activity	Period
Spot-check: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verification of Diploma content to be delivered</li> <li>• Marketing of the Diploma (by AVA and course provider)</li> </ul>	August - December 2020
Stakeholder feedback: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course provider</li> <li>• AVA</li> <li>• Student</li> </ul>	October 2020 March 2021 22 July 2021
Data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diploma</li> <li>• Course provider</li> <li>• Unit - Professional Behaviours</li> </ul>	September 2021

## Section 3: Pilot outcomes

### Spot-check

- All pilot course providers ensured that the content of their Diploma aligned to the subject descriptor for Medicine. This was verified by QAA prior to delivery.
- Each course provider and AVA released timely communications on the introduction of the pilot, including:
  - Facebook live sessions to support the introduction of the pilot Diploma
  - taster sessions
  - three-day Access to HE (Medicine) induction
  - case studies via Facebook and Twitter
  - college website
  - leaflets
  - open days.

QAA officers made available a generic statement (see Annex 1) that course providers could release to support the introduction of the pilot. The statement has been revised to support course providers delivering the Access to HE Diploma (Medicine) from September 2021 (see Annex 2).

### Stakeholder feedback

The COVID-19 outbreak is the most significant challenge we have all faced in at least a generation and we are very grateful to the course providers and AVAs for agreeing to deliver the pilot diploma during a time of such uncertainty. Feedback was very positive and we would like to share the following feedback and key takeaways from this pilot.



#### Any proposed changes to the Diploma content from Sept 2021?

- No changes to content.
- It's gone well and has been better than anticipated in the current situation (the pandemic).
- Statistics to be included in the numeracy unit.
- Order of delivery of some units: Mathematics for Medics unit to be studied after the study skills and the Chemistry units to give learners time to get to grips with the expectations of how assessments needed to be completed.



#### Is there anything you would do differently this academic year?

- Commence the delivery of the professional behaviours unit as early in the course as possible, even during induction.
- Support students, where possible, in gaining work placements.

- Most of the course is assessed through exam; preparing for mocks has been time consuming and there is a need to have an extensive pool of practice exam questions.
- Need to make sure students have the appropriate skills and knowledge in place for tackling those early units.
- Use of a VIVA as an assessment method.
- Increase number of units in Chemistry.



**What would they say to a course provider delivering the subject descriptor for Medicine for the first time?**

- Important to give detailed initial advice and guidance to manage expectations from the start about progression, content, demands, Medical School Council requirements and attainment.
- Induction programmes are really useful to get to know students before the course starts and helps to gauge a student's natural aptitude and ability.
- Students require UKAT to be completed before they start their Access to HE Diploma (Medicine).
- Useful to consult with other course providers and medical schools.
- Be sure to tackle the Chemistry units alongside any development units, including Professional Behaviours. Universities want to see evidence that an applicant has a Level 3 grounding in this subject specifically.
- By the time students have completed their Medicine UCAS application and need an academic reference, they should have studied at least the fundamentals of Chemistry and so their performance in a related assessment can be commented upon in the tutor reference.
- The Diploma can be a heavy course (content and assessment), certainly the chemistry and biology units. Carefully consider how you will deliver the Diploma effectively and efficiently.



**Any feedback on the professional behaviours unit?**

- The professional behaviours unit is good in terms of encouraging self-reflection and to look at knowledge and skills and what a student would need to successfully complete the course and progress to an undergraduate programme.
- As adults, some have come from health settings and this experience can feed very well into such a unit as well as sharing such experiences with their peers.

- Interviewing skills would be useful to incorporate in the activities that a student participates in for this unit.
- It was a really good unit. Get the student to lead on the unit.
- One challenge is that not all students have work experience. In such cases it is important that the student focuses on the learning outcomes rather than depth of experience. Make sure students know that it's about them being reflective of their experience regardless of what it might be and make sure that students don't feel less valued because their experiences aren't so broad.
- Assessment criteria 2.3: Team working skills can be challenging to assess when the mode of delivery of the programme may be fully online. This is a challenge to be considered early in the facilitation of this unit.<sup>2</sup>
- Assessment criteria 4.1: Research, work experience and speaking to a doctor will help support students in meeting this criterion. Understanding what it is to be a doctor will help a student understand what behaviours they need to focus on to support their transition into becoming a doctor.<sup>3</sup>
- Although not explicit, it could be inferred that the unit is made up of two halves: GMC versus health and safety/risk assessment.
- Good addition to the course. Give plenty of time to deliver the unit as there can be a lot of reading and research to do.

### **Student feedback**

The COVID pandemic in 2020-21 posed challenges for many students and Access to HE students often balance significant additional responsibilities alongside their studies. Students' feedback on the pilot Diploma was overall positive, despite the circumstances.

Students noted their satisfaction with their course and felt that they had been extremely well supported by their course provider. Feedback included some concerns around the impact of the pandemic - for example, lab time and face-to-face tutorial/pastoral support.

The overwhelming feedback from providers regarding their students was how keen the students were to complete the Diploma and just how resilient the students were. It was noted that the students did adapt quickly to the demands of this Diploma, achieved high grades and enjoyed their learning experience.

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<sup>2</sup> This has been incorporated into the guidance from September 2021  
[www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/access-to-he-diploma-subject-descriptor-medicine.pdf](http://www.qaa.ac.uk/docs/qaa/about-us/access-to-he-diploma-subject-descriptor-medicine.pdf)

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## Student feedback (continued)

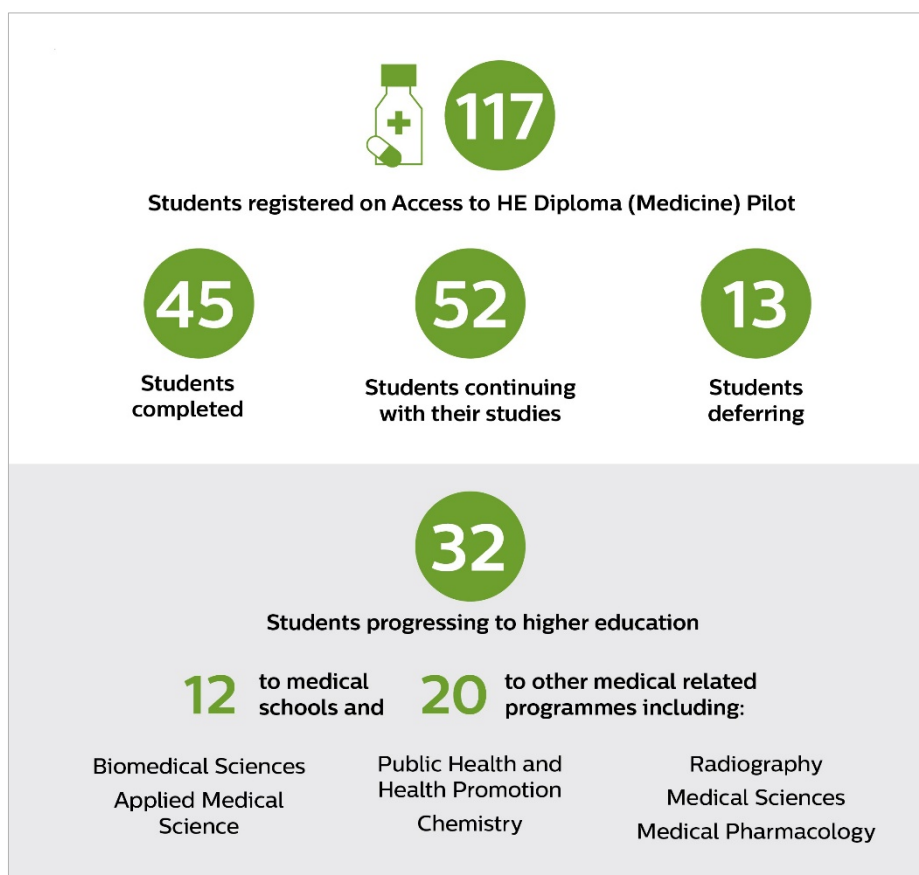
Healthcare has always been a passion of mine and it's something I really wanted to explore at degree level. Unfortunately I didn't have the qualifications needed for Medicine to apply through the traditional route. I found the Access to Higher Education Medicine course at Dudley college and was delighted when my application was accepted.

I was a little apprehensive considering I had been out of education for 8 years but my tutors and classmates were so welcoming and helpful, they instantly put my mind at rest. One thing I found difficult was the pace of the course, so much content is included in one year but luckily I had the support of my tutors and classmates which made it much easier. I was also given support with my UCAS application by the admissions team at Dudley College, because of their support I was offered two interviews, one at the University of Manchester and one at the University of Liverpool. I was lucky enough to be offered a place to study medicine at both universities!

I wanted to express my gratitude for the work you have done with the QAA Access to Medicine, Subject Descriptor for Medicine scheme. It is work like this that has enabled me to secure a place on an Access to Medicine course, while still working. This allows me to support my husband who was recently made redundant and also it puts me in a stronger position for my university application as I am able to save money and gain volunteering experience. On behalf of all mature students, and people in non-typical circumstances who have a desire to follow Medicine as a career, thank you.



## Data



## Next steps

In September 2021, QAA will formally launch the national framework for the Access to Higher Education Diploma in Medicine - a move we hope will lead to a greater number of adults beginning medical careers and play a part in delivering GPs to meet the Government target of delivering 6,000 more doctors in general practice in England by 2024-25.

## Acknowledgements

Thank you to the Medical Schools Council, General Medical Council and Dr Gordon Dent from the School of Medicine at Keele University, for their valued contributions to the development of this guidance. We are grateful to all participating course providers for their contribution to the success of the pilot which has allowed us to identify a number of practices that can be carried forward. We are particularly keen to continue to collaborate with Access Validating Agencies, course providers and the Medical Schools Council to ensure that the framework supports students entering Medicine.



## **Annex 1: Course provider statement (pilot)**

*(name) College* is pleased to be piloting a new QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma (Medicine) from September 2020. It has specially been designed with input from the Medical Skills Council to help students from non-traditional backgrounds take their first step into the world of Medicine.

The aim is to improve the standardisation of Diplomas entitled Access to HE Diploma (Medicine), allowing medical schools to have greater confidence in your knowledge and preparation for an undergraduate degree in Medicine. It may also encourage those medical schools not currently accepting Access to HE students to review their admissions policies.

## Annex 2: Course provider statement (delivery from September 2021)

*(name) College* is pleased to be delivering the QAA-recognised Access to HE Diploma (Medicine) from September 2021. It has specially been designed with input from the Medical Skills Council to help students from non-traditional backgrounds take their first step into the world of Medicine.

The aim is to improve the standardisation of Diplomas entitled Access to HE Diploma (Medicine), allowing medical schools to have greater confidence in your knowledge and preparation for an undergraduate degree in Medicine. It may also encourage those medical schools not currently accepting Access to HE students to review their admissions policies.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education 2021  
Registered charity numbers 1062746 and SC037786  
[www.accesstohe.ac.uk](http://www.accesstohe.ac.uk)

QAA manages the national framework for the recognition and regulation of Access to HE Diplomas. [www.qaa.ac.uk](http://www.qaa.ac.uk)