

9 December 2011

MEMORANDUM ON THE MAKING OF OFFERS INTO THE 2011 UNDERGRADUATE-ENTRY MBBS PROGRAM

A total of 309 applicants were offered places to commence study in the undergraduate-entry MBBS Programs in 2011. The offers were made in two rounds — in January and February. This memorandum discusses the number and circumstances of those offers.

Four undergraduate programs provide entry pathways for school leavers into the Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS):

- MBBS (Provisional Entry for School Leavers);
- Bachelors of Medicine, Surgery and Science (MBBS/BSc);
- Bachelors of Arts, Medicine and Surgery (BA/MBBS); and
- Bachelors of Health Sciences, Medicine and Surgery (BHlthSc/MBBS).

The admissions processes for these four programs are handled in aggregate with identical entry standards set across all four programs. They are referred to collectively as the MBBS Program in this memorandum.

Offers for admission into the MBBS and other programs at the University can be generated through the State-wide QTAC system in one of two ways:

- by cut-off – where minimum cut-off scores (Course Rank Sets) are entered into the QTAC system on advice from the University, calculated to fill the available quota (see details below). The QTAC system then generates offers automatically to all applicants who meet or exceed the nominated scores; or
- by manual selection (referred to by QTAC as a “forced offer”) – where the University identifies applicants that should be made an offer and then manually enters the request for an offer to be generated by the QTAC system for the relevant applicant(s).

Manual offers are used in a number of circumstances. For example, they are used to allow admissions in support of particular programs such as the Alternative Entry Scheme for People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Descent, to affect some top-up offers (discussed below), to overcome administrative and clerical errors and to give effect to successful student applicant appeals.

Manual offers can also be used to allow admissions in the “exceptional circumstances” provision of the University’s Admission Rules.

Offers made into the 2011 MBBS Program

Offers made into the 2011 MBBS Program can be considered in three groups:

- Offers selected by cut-off on 11 January 2011
- Offers selected manually on 11 January 2011
- Offers selected manually on 8 February 2011

Offers selected by cut-off on 11 January 2011

275 of the 309 offers made for the MBBS program were selected by cut-off in the January round.

The cut-off score was set by reference to an OP1 or equivalent score and specified scores achieved by applicants on the Undergraduate Medicine and health sciences Admission Test (UMAT). The UMAT is an independently run test used by the majority of medical programs in Australia and New Zealand.

The UMAT comprises three sub-categories which assess logical reasoning, communication skills and abstract problem solving. Students receive a score in each sub-category and an aggregate score.

The cut-off score for the January 2011 admissions round required applicants to attain an aggregate UMAT score greater than 177, or an aggregate score of 177 and a score of 66 in the first UMAT sub-category. Scores below that did not automatically receive a QTAC-generated offer.

The aggregate score of 177:66 (i.e. overall: first sub-category score) was established by the University's Planning Office as the cut-off that was likely to deliver a number of enrolments that was close to, but did not exceed, the University's targeted enrolment level. It was set with regard to demand analysis and the target figure for enrolments across all undergraduate pathways into the MBBS program.

Consistent with the program admission requirements, applicants required a score of at least 50 in each sub-category of UMAT to qualify for consideration.

In 2011 the cut-off score set by the University meant that QTAC would automatically generate offers for applicants that met the OP1 or equivalent requirement and scored a minimum aggregate UMAT score of 177, a score of at least 66 in the first sub-category of UMAT, and a score of at least 50 in each UMAT sub-category.

Offers selected manually on 11 January 2011

11 of the 309 offers made for the MBBS program were manually selected in the January round.

At the end of December 2010 it was noted by the Scholarships Office that a number of Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship recipients who had nominated the UQ MBBS Program as

their first preference for tertiary study lacked the requisite UMAT scores for an automatic offer of entry into that program. They all held OP1 or equivalent rankings.

Vice-Chancellor's scholarships are awarded to applicants who achieve an Australian Tertiary Admissions Rank of 99.95, which places them at the very top of the OP1 band.

As the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship is the most prestigious of the scholarships awarded at UQ and specifically designed to attract the "best and brightest" students to the University, it was considered anomalous that these students would not receive an offer into their preferred program of study. Given their first preference was the MBBS Program, it was also considered likely that these students would choose to study at another University where they could gain entry into medicine without needing the UMAT scores set by UQ as a pre-requisite. Again, it was considered anomalous if the recipients of the highest UQ Scholarship award were to be lost to the University.

The practice of guaranteeing places to students who win elite academic scholarships is common in tertiary institutions across Australia, and indeed the world. The decision to make those offers into the MBBS Program was made in good faith and for a legitimate purpose and, whilst not publicised in advance as a guaranteed method of entry into the MBBS Program, this does not affect the validity of the decision or its rationale.

After discussion between the Scholarships Office, the Head of School (Dean) of Medicine and the Acting Vice-Chancellor it was decided to make each of these Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship recipients a manual offer into the 2011 MBBS Program. This resulted in seven manual offers being made at the same time as the automatic cut-off offers on 11 January 2011.

At the same time, a further three manual offers were made as part of the University's Alternative Entry Scheme for People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Descent.

A manual offer was also made to a close relative of the Vice-Chancellor. The applicant had an OP1 ranking but did not have the requisite UMAT aggregate score or a score of at least 50 in each sub-category and was not the recipient of a scholarship. The circumstances and consequences of this offer were the subject of an independent investigation and resulted in the Vice-Chancellor and Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor resigning from their positions at the University.

Offers selected manually on 8 February 2011

23 of the 309 offers made for the MBBS program were manually selected in the February round.

As part of the normal process of managing student intake every year, the number and trend of offers and acceptances are closely monitored by the University's Planning Office. This is done across all programs and is the subject of regular discussions between the Director of Planning and a range of senior managers including the Vice-Chancellor, the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, and Heads of School.

Depending on the level of acceptances into a program and the assessment made of likely future acceptances before final offers close, a decision is often taken to make top-up offers. These offers are designed to fine-tune offer numbers so that the University achieves the desired number of students for programs across the University. The decision to make top-up offers and if so, the number to make, is not an exact science. It relies on skill and judgment, based on experience and an analysis of all of the relevant data.

Top-up offers are commonly made from February each year as the trend of acceptances from the first round of QTAC offers becomes more clear.

By early February 2011 the acceptance rates were running significantly lower than projected for the MBBS Program. The reasons for this included the larger-than-normal number of interstate applicants – interstate applicants traditionally display lower acceptance rates – and the impact of the Brisbane floods which delayed the QTAC first-round offers. The flood meant that applicants, and especially interstate applicants, would have received offers from other institutions before their response to QTAC was due.

Based on lower-than-projected acceptance rates and the likelihood of this trend continuing, a decision was made on 4 February 2011 at a meeting of the Vice-Chancellor and the Director of Planning to make 10 top-up offers.

It was also decided at that meeting that, given the increased number of interstate applicants and the need for greater certainty in converting offers to acceptances, as well as the sense of responsibility to attract students that were more likely to practice medicine in Queensland, the 10 top-up offers would be made to Queensland-resident applicants in order of merit, based on their UMAT aggregate and sub-category scores. That decision was implemented on 8 February 2011.

In early February a review by the Scholarships Office showed that:

- three Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship recipients not identified in the first round of manual offers had also missed out on an offer into the MBBS Program based on their UMAT scores; and
- eight UQ Excellence Scholarship recipients had similarly missed out on their first preference of entry into the MBBS Program based on their UMAT scores.

These scholarship recipients and the making of offers to them were discussed at meetings with senior managers including the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), the Director of Planning and senior staff in the Scholarships Office in the first week of February 2011. These meetings concluded that it would be equitable and appropriate to make these scholarship recipients manual offers of entry into their first preference – the MBBS Program – on the same grounds as were applied to the first round of manual offers to the Vice-Chancellor's Scholarship recipients.

The formal decision to approve those offers was made by the Senior Deputy Vice-Chancellor and those offers were also made on 8 February.

In addition to the offers referred to above, a further two manual offers were made by way of administrative corrections relating to errors in process.

The total number of offers

The total number of offers into the MBBS Program in 2011 was 309. One of those was made to the close relative of the Vice-Chancellor. 275 were selected by cut-off on January 11.

Of the remaining 33:

- 18 were scholarship recipients;
- 10 were top-up offers made to meet targeted intake levels after consideration of acceptance levels and trends, and made to Queensland-based applicants in order of merit based on their UMAT scores;
- 3 were offers made as part of the University's Alternative Entry Scheme for People of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Descent; and
- 2 were to effect administrative corrections as per normal practice.

2012 and beyond

The independent investigation into the making of the offer to the Vice-Chancellor's close relative made a number of recommendations for review of the current entry rules into the MBBS Program and the process for making manual offers, including the preference, if any, to be given to scholarship recipients.

Those recommendations are currently under consideration. However, due to the fact that application for entry into the 2012 MBBS Program is currently underway it is not considered appropriate or fair to change the rules for the 2012 intake.

Consequently, for 2012:

- cut-off offers automatically generated by QTAC will be based on:
 - the prerequisite requirement that applicants complete grade 12 or equivalent in the year in which they make an application; and gain an OP1 or equivalent; and meet the threshold score of 50 in each section of the UMAT; and
 - selection will be in merit order based on UMAT aggregate and then first sub-category UMAT scores should that further level of differentiation be required.
- Scholarship winners will not be given preference over other applicants.

- Top-up offers will continue to be made to meet program intake targets.
- Manually selected offers will continue to be made to effect the University's special entry schemes, to make administrative corrections and to deal with successful appeals.
- During 2012 the University will review its procedures for the making of offers and admission rules in time for implementation of any changes before the 2013 round of offers.

The majority of students who commenced the MBBS Program in 2011 will be joined in 2013 by a separate group of graduate-entry students to make up the full Bachelor of Medicine/Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS) cohort. The graduate-entry students will be selected on merit in the second half of 2012.

The decision to make offers to the 33 manually selected applicants referred to in the list above were made with full knowledge and proper consideration of the University's current and future capacity constraints, and will have no unintended impact on the number of places available in the future. The flexibility within the systems employed to manage intake levels into all programs at the University, including the MBBS Program, mean that none of the manual offers made in 2011 will have any material impact on the number of places available for graduate entry or school leaver entry into the MBBS Program in future years.

Ken Richardson
Director, Planning