



## Senate

<b>Paper Title</b>	<b>MBBS and BDS regulations: third attempts</b>
<b>Outcome requested.</b>	The Senate is asked to <b>approve</b> this request.
<b>Points for Senate members to note and further information.</b>	<p>This is a request for an amendment to the Academic Regulations for the MBBS and the BDS, the qualifying medical and dental degrees in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry, to introduce a third attempt as standard for all students. The regulatory change would take effect from 2023-24 entry, though the relevant examination boards would use existing discretionary provisions in their regulations to make the third attempt available to all students in the interim period until the new regulations take effect.</p> <p>The request was discussed in detail by EQSB and proposed for further consideration at the cross-Faculty EQSB Assessment Sub-Board. Following this, it was approved at EQSB by Chair's Action in June 2023. This was discussed at the July 2023 Senate meeting and felt it needed further discussion at a subsequent Senate meeting. Hence, it is being tabled at the October 2023 Senate meeting.</p> <p>The MBBS and BDS programmes currently offer students two attempts to pass – a first attempt (with teaching) and a resit (assessment only). The Examination Board has the discretion to allow a third attempt which, if granted, is taken in attendance with full teaching in the subsequent academic year.</p> <p>“4.92. ii. in a very limited number of cases, where a student has failed to pass any or all Sections of a Part at the second attempt and does not meet the requirements of (i), above, but is deemed to have sufficient potential to succeed, the Board may permit the student to re-take the year for a third and final attempt with strict conditions imposed by the Subject Examination Board (such conditions will be to retake all elements [including those passed] in full attendance and take and pass all assessments in Sections A, B, C, D and E as required by the mark scheme). Such a student will be closely monitored and unsatisfactory performance may lead to deregistration at any point in the year. On passing the Part, such a student will not have their marks capped to the pass mark.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Academic Regulations 2022-23 (MBBS)</p> <p>FMD requests to make this discretionary provision available to all students on the MBBS and BDS programmes. However, the marks for the third attempt would be capped to the minimum pass mark at module level, as is the case for re-</p>

assessment elsewhere across the institution. The following are among the key reasons behind the proposal:

1. The General Dental Council allows up to four attempts for students to achieve professional accreditation. The General Medical Council provides three sittings for international medical graduates to complete their licensing examination. Though this does not directly link to the number of attempts universities may offer for their degree programmes, discussion with other providers has shown a general trend toward increasing the number of attempts for these programmes.
  - This recognises the vocational nature of the programmes and their methods of delivery and the high level of investment of student, university, and public resource and time into a student's studies, while not compromising academic standards, at the time of a national drive to increase the numbers of doctors and dentists being trained.
  - FMD has confirmed that it does not seek to introduce four attempts for the degrees.
2. Discretionary provisions can, by their nature, be difficult to apply fairly, consistently, and without challenge. The current regulations have been subject to query and appeal previously. Moving to a clearer set of regulations that does not allow for exceptions or special arguments will permit better management of our provision and clearer messaging to students.
3. The MBBS and BDS are self-contained awards. The Assessment Sub-Board of EQSB discussed at length the potential implications and issues of fairness for other Queen Mary programmes and concluded that this did not present an obstacle. Unlike a BSc or BA (for example), each of the MBBS and BDS is taught as a single programme, supervised by a single Institute. Hence, this change would not mean that another programme using the same award but taught in a different School had different standards applied. Though this had not been requested, the EQSB Assessment Sub-Board did note that it would not support the extension of this amendment to other programmes in the Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry (e.g. BSc programmes) for that very reason.
4. MBBS and BDS students are required to maintain regular clinical contact for significant parts of their studies. This means that the third attempt needs to be taken in attendance, requiring an additional year of study (and of fees and living costs, from the student) which is a model not readily transferable to other programmes. The student would take all summative assessments within the academic year and will have the ability to have the better mark recorded for the transcript. The module mark will be capped to reflect the retake.
5. Historically, Queen Mary allowed three attempts for most awards (though not the MBBS or BDS). Detailed review showed that only a tiny minority of students who failed at the second attempt went on to pass at the third attempt, which – for those programmes – was a resit of the assessment without a repeat of the teaching, taken out of attendance and without the

support and engagement that the MBBS/BDS model would provide. The Sub-Board did not support a return to that previous position for other Queen Mary provisions and noted that two attempts (a first attempt and one resit) was by some distance the most common approach in the sector for non-clinical programmes. This is not true for the MBBS and BDS degrees, where it has been our experience that those students who return on appeal and successfully repeat the previously unsuccessful year continue to be successful in subsequent years.

6. The MBBS and BDS have maximum durations of study of seven years. The MBBS and BDS are five-year programmes, meaning that, in practice, no student could be granted the third attempt more than twice during their studies. If it became apparent at any stage that a student would not be able to complete within seven years, the student would be deregistered (after individual consideration) under this regulation:

“2.46 The maximum duration of study is the normal duration plus one year (excepting the MBBS and BDS programmes, where it is the normal duration plus two years). A student who exceeds this limit will have their registration and enrolment terminated and will cease to be a student. Queen Mary may also deregister a student where it is no longer possible for a student to complete a programme within the remaining period of permitted maximum duration.”

Academic Regulations 2022-23

7. The MBBS and BDS have noted an increase in students requiring additional support in recent years (even before the pandemic) and have made increased use of the discretionary third attempt. This prompted a review of the regulations, but the proposal is not a direct attempt to accommodate the needs of a particular cohort, but rather a reflection on the general approach to pedagogy and student support, particularly considering the accrediting bodies' more flexible approaches.
8. As a regulatory change this amendment, if approved, can only take effect from the 2023-24 regulations (for students starting on the programmes from that year), but the same provisions would be available for all currently registered students using the widespread application of the existing discretionary procedures in recognition of the current external environment.
9. If approved, the Academic Regulations 2023-24 will be amended accordingly. This will require small but meaningful changes to the final sentence of regulation 2.85 (below) and to relevant sections of the MBBS and the BDS progression and award regulations in section 4.

“2.85 A student has a maximum of two attempts to pass a module – the first attempt, and one resit. In rare circumstances the resit may be replaced by a retake. MBBS and BDS students also have two attempts

	<p>but may, under prescribed circumstances and at the discretion of the examination boards, be granted an exceptional third attempt.”</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Academic Regulations 2023-24</p>
<b>Questions for Senate to consider.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Are members supportive of the proposal in the context of the MBBS and BDS degrees?</li> <li>2. Are members satisfied that implementing this change for the MBBS and the BDS would not unfairly disadvantage students registered on other Queen Mary programmes and awards?</li> </ol>
<b>Regulatory/statutory reference points</b>	<p>OfS Conditions of Registration B4 (assessment – particularly “academic regulations are designed to ensure that relevant awards are credible” and B5 (alignment with sector-recognised standards).</p> <p>Queen Mary University of London Academic Regulations General Medical Council (GMC) and General Dental Council (GDC) policies and procedures</p>
<b>Strategy and risk</b>	No specific points.
<b>Reporting/consideration route for the paper</b>	<p>Considered and endorsed by the EQSB Assessment Sub-Board</p> <p>Considered and endorsed by the Education Quality and Standards Board.</p> <p>Senate to consider for approval.</p>
<b>Authors</b>	<p>Paper and Coversheet:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dr Nimesh Patel, Institute of Health Sciences Education Head of Assessment</li> <li>• Professor Rakesh Patel, Head of MBBS</li> <li>• Dr Swati Nehete, Institute of Dentistry Lead for Assessment</li> <li>• Dr JAG Buchanan, Institute of Dentistry Director of Taught Programmes</li> </ul> <p>In Consultation with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Simon Hayter, Head of Academic Quality and Standards</li> </ul>
<b>Sponsor</b>	

## Appendix

### Proposed changes to Section 4 of the MBBS and BDS Academic Regulations

The Medical and Dental schools' sector is slowly moving to providing students with additional sits within a repeat year. The processes by which these are offered to students varies between institution. For instance, Aston University permits all students up to three attempts at an examination, with two of those attempts being within a single academic year. Cardiff University is currently going through the process of changing regulations for MBBS to permit an automatic third attempt with a fourth being granted under exceptional circumstances. The Southampton MBBS programme provides an automatic third attempt as part of its current university regulations. The GMC allows up to four attempts at the Medical Licencing Assessment, depending on local university rules.

In a recent survey carried out by the Dental Schools Council, it was identified that the ability to award third sits is supported by academics in all schools and two schools already have automatic third sits.

An additional sit in a repeat year would allow students to consolidate their learning from the previous year and succeed. It has been our experience that those students who return on appeal and successfully repeat the previously unsuccessful year continue to be successful in subsequent years. The opportunity of an automatic third sit as defined by the proposed change of regulations outlined below would allow students to remain on the programme without the additional anxiety of an appeal process. Students who are then repeating the year would be offered the necessary support, both academically and pastorally, to provide the maximum opportunity for success.

The proposal allows the subject examination board to automatically give students a third attempt without consideration of circumstances or potential to succeed, which

is currently the case as described in the academic regulations. Any student who then fails at the third attempt would then be automatically deregistered without consideration of circumstances or potential to succeed. Students would still have the right to appeal after deregistration as is currently the case.

Consultation with student representatives has been positive and it is felt that this would be clearer, supportive, and better understood.

It is recommended that these revised regulations are implemented and supported at Subject Examination Boards in the 2023/24 academic as they would be viewed in the best interests of students.

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## Academic Regulations amendments:

### **Number of attempts (MBBS)**

4.87 On successful completion of Section A, a student will normally be allowed two attempts at examinations in Sections B, C and D during an academic year: one first attempt or first sit, and one resit attempt.

### **Number of attempts (BDS)**

On successful completion of clinical requirements, LiftUpp requirements and in-course assessments whilst meeting expectations of the GDC, a student will normally be allowed two attempts at end of year examinations during an academic year: one first attempt or first sit, and one resit attempt.

### **Resits (MBBS and BDS)**

4.88 Resit marks will normally be capped at the pass mark.

### **Retakes (MBBS)**

4.92 The Subject Examination Board may consider as follows:

- i. Where a student has failed to pass any or all Sections of a Part at the second attempt in the Late Summer examination period, the Board will permit the student to re-take the Part for a third and final attempt. Strict conditions will be imposed by the Subject Examination Board which may include to retake and pass all elements [including those passed] in Sections A, B, C, D and E as required by the mark scheme. Such a student will be closely monitored, and unsatisfactory performance may lead to deregistration at any point in the year. On passing the Part, such a student will have their marks capped to the pass mark for the module.
- ii. Where a student fails to pass an examination at the second attempt in the Summer examination period, the Subject Examination Board shall permit a capped third sit in the Late Summer examination period.
- iii. If a candidate fails more than one of Sections B, C or D at the first attempt in the Summer sitting and the Late Summer sitting is less than four weeks from when the candidate is notified of the failure, the Subject Examination Board may, taking into account previous academic performance, normally require the candidate to repeat the year before taking their second attempt at the failed examinations.

### **Retakes (BDS)**

The Subject Examination Board may consider the following:

- i. Where a student has failed to pass any or all sections of a Part at the second attempt in the requisite examination period, the Board may permit the student to re-take the year for a third and final attempt with strict conditions imposed by the Subject Examination Board. These conditions will include retaking and passing all elements [including those passed] in full attendance. The student will need to meet requirements for clinical practice elements,

LiftUpp requirements and in-course assessments whilst meeting expectations of the GDC. A student in this position will be closely monitored, and unsatisfactory performance may lead to deregistration at any point in the year. Upon passing the Part, the student will have their marks capped to the pass mark for the module.

- ii. Where a student fails to pass an examination at the second attempt in the summer examination period, the Subject Examination Board may permit a capped third sit in the Late Summer examination period if deemed appropriate.
- iii. If a student fails more than one element at the first attempt in the summer sitting and the resit examinations are less than four weeks from when the candidate is notified of the failure, the Subject Examination Board may, taking into account previous academic performance, require the candidate to repeat the year before taking their second attempt at the failed examinations.

**Deregistration (MBBS and BDS)**

4.93 Failure of any element at the third attempt will lead to deregistration from the programme.

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