ASSESSMENT GUIDE FOR MBChB Phase 1 (incorporating BSc (Hons) MEDICINE STUDENTS
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- What are our specific challenges in assessing medical students?
- What types of assessment does the School use to monitor my progress?
- What's the difference between formative and summative assessment?
- Do all modules use the same format of assessments?
- How does the School decide what types of assessment to use?
- Do I get practise in each type of assessment?
- Do I need to learn any normal adult clinical ranges?
- Can I get past exam papers to practise?
- How is the content of each assessment decided?
- How do you ensure each exam is fair?
- Is there a set pass mark?
- How are the dates of assessment decided?
- What if I have special requirements that may affect the assessment process?
- What happens if I fail to attend an assessment?
- What should I do if circumstances throughout the term could affect my exam performance?
- How do I find out my final module grade?
- What feedback can I expect to get on my exam performance?
- Why are grades reported out of 20?
- What contributes towards my final BSc degree classification?
- Can I progress to a partner Medical School without an Honours degree?
- What happens if I fail the end of semester assessment for a module?
- What happens if I fail the end of year OSCE?
- What happens if I fail my MD2000/MD3000 resit OSCE?
- Is there a limit to what grade I can achieve from a resit assessment?
- If I have to resit a module, will the format of the assessments be the same?
- Can I progress in to second year if I have not passed a MD2000 module?
- Can I progress in to the third year if I have not passed a MD3000 module?
- How many attempts can I take to pass a module?

What are our specific challenges in assessing medical students?

For you to become a qualified medical professional we need to ensure you have both the knowledge and the skills expected and required by the General Medical Council (GMC), which are outlined in "Outcomes for Graduates". During your time at St Andrews we must also ensure that you are adequately prepared for transitioning to our partner clinical schools.

The School has therefore adopted assessment methods that meet the needs of both a vocational degree (to determine acceptable levels of competence expected in a medical professional), and those of an Honours BSc (to assess your ability to understand and apply knowledge). Our assessment strategies are regularly reviewed to ensure compliance with best practice in the field of medical education. Every effort is made to match our assessment methods with those of our partner clinical schools.

See also Outcomes for Graduates

[Return to top]

What types of assessment does the School use to monitor my progress?

The School most frequently uses the following forms of assessment:

Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs)

- Also known as SBAs "single best answer" questions.
- Each MCQ consists of an introductory statement, a question and five answer options. Only one of the answers is correct.
- The School does not negatively mark MCQs.

Short Written Answers (SWAs)

- Structured written questions, usually worth 10 marks (or multiples of) which can be sub-divided into several parts.
- SWAs are often used to test the application and integration of knowledge.

Anatomy Practical Exams (APEs)

- Also known as "Anatomy Spotter Exams".
- APEs consist of timed individual stations at which students are asked to identify structures or answer questions about three-dimensional anatomy specimens or models.

Objective Structured Clinical Exams (OSCEs)

- OSCEs are used to assess your competency in clinical and communication skills.
- OSCEs consist of timed individual stations at which students are asked to perform skills according to the protocols taught.
- Stations are designed to be as close to the clinical situation as possible and often use simulated patients to achieve this.

Oral Presentation

- Students will deliver formative group or individual presentations during their studies.
- You will give a summative oral presentation as part of your Honours dissertation module.

Honours Dissertation

- Each BSc student must complete a dissertation in their final year.
- Dissertations can be based on research within a laboratory, data collection and analysis, or can be a critical appraisal of an important aspect of medical practise.

[Return to top]

What's the difference between formative and summative assessment?
Formative assessments are practise assessments or exercises that do not count towards your final degree grade. They are designed to encourage you to consolidate your learning and provide you with practise in the assessment methods used in the summative examinations. These tasks help you monitor your own progress and ability to apply knowledge, plus they can also provide you with an early warning of any areas of weakness. Typical examples of formative assessments include practise exam questions, self-assessment, staff review and feedback of clinical skills.

Summative assessments count towards your module grades and are designed to be a fair and valid test of your depth, breadth, and application of knowledge, or your clinical and communication skills.
[Return to top]

Do all modules use the same format of assessments?
Semester one modules (i.e. MD2001, MD3001 and MD4001) follow a similar pattern of summative assessment. Rolling out from 2026/2027, semester two modules will follow a different format, incorporating assessment for OSCE and portfolio, alongside knowledge (outlined below):

Mid Semester Assessment (MSA)

- A summative assessment scheduled around week 6 or 7 of each semester.
- Contributes 25% of your final module grade for knowledge and consists of 60 MCQ items.

End of Semester Assessment (ESA)

- A summative assessment scheduled in the University's examination period at the end of each semester.
- The ESA is divided into two knowledge papers: A short written answers (SWAs) paper and a 60-item MCQ paper., which makes up the remainder of your knowledge module mark. From 2026/2027, the year 1 second semester module (MD2002) will be comprised of three domains: knowledge, skills (OSCE) and professionalism (portfolio). The module mark will be calculated by combining assessment marks from each domain, with a weighting of 75:20:5 percent for knowledge, skills and professionalism respectively. From 2027/2028 onwards, second year module MD3002 will also follow this format.
- Some modules may opt to hold an Anatomy Practical Exam (APE), and if so then your mark from the APE is included as part of your total for the SWA paper.

For 2026/2027, second year students (MD3002) will also be required to pass a multi-station OSCE.

Assessment in the final semester (MD4002 and MD4003) follows a different pattern from above. For MD4003, you will sit a high-stake multi-station, multi-part OSCE that contributes towards your final degree grade classification. This OSCE will test your clinical, communication, and clinical reasoning skills. From 2028/2029 onwards, MD4003 will be comprised of two domains: skills and professionalism, weighted 95:5 percent respectively and together will make up the module mark). MD4002 is assessed via your Honours dissertation project and an oral presentation.

See also: MBChB BSc (Hons) Medicine Modules

Professionalism (portfolio)
Where professionalism is integrated into module domain structure, the portfolio will contribute a maximum 5% of the overall module mark (based on its weighting). Satisfactory completion of the portfolio is based on timely submission of items, of appropriate quality.
See also: Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

How does the School decide what types of assessment to use?
To fulfil the requirements of Outcomes for Graduates, we need to assess your clinical knowledge and skills. It is generally recognised that skills are best assessed in a practical exam (i.e. OSCEs) where students have the opportunity to demonstrate their proficiency and understanding of the underlying principles of clinical examination.

Knowledge, understanding and reasoning are assessed in written examinations (e.g. SWAs, MCQs), in the format that are best suited to the subject material.

Our assessment processes are constantly under review to reflect best practise in medical education in the UK and are designed to be compatible with our partner medical schools.
[Return to top]

Do I get practise in each type of assessment?
Wherever possible, the School provides formative opportunities for you to attempt each type of assessment. For example, MD2000 students have a formative OSCE in the first semester ahead of their summative MD2002 OSCE which is held during the second semester exam period. Practise in SWAs and MCQs are provided frequently throughout the course, allowing you to adjust to both the style and level of assessment you will encounter during your studies.

Whilst you will not write a formative dissertation for MD4002, opportunities to practise your scientific writing and research skills are integrated into the curriculum during the subsequent modules. These form the formative basis of feedback for many aspects of your dissertation.
[Return to top]

Do I need to learn any normal adult clinical reference ranges?
Students are expected to recall normal adult ranges and units for vital signs (blood pressure, temperature, pulse, oxygen saturation, heart rate, respiratory rate and blood glucose level). Reference ranges for other biochemistry and blood results will be provided.
[Return to top]

Can I get past exam papers to practise?
In order to maintain the security and integrity of our assessment question bank it is not possible to provide students with past exam papers. Instead, we aim to provide students with formative examples that mirror the style and difficulty typical of exam questions that will be included in formal assessments.
[Return to top]

How is the content of each assessment decided?
Every written paper is blueprinted to the curriculum. Elements within a module are assigned to specific topic strands, and a notional weight applied to each element. These weightings are used to determine the relative proportion of questions from each topic strand in any assessment. In this

way, potentially every element and the associated learning outcomes can be assessed, though in practise the exam is a representative proportional sample of the assessable content of a module.

Since we teach an integrated curriculum, our assessments are also integrated. For example, you will not sit an individual pharmacology paper; instead your knowledge of pharmacology may be tested as part of a question that also contains other elements from the module (e.g. physiology, anatomy, public health etc.).

The stations for each OSCE can be selected from any clinical skill that you have been taught during any module. The rationale for this is that you need to be competent, and consistently so, in all of your clinical skills throughout your training and subsequent career.
[Return to top]

How do you ensure each exam is fair?
Once blueprinted, draft exam papers are reviewed both internally and by a panel of external examiners, whose remit is to ensure that the assessment process is valid and reliable.

After assessment, the performance of all questions are analysed and any that did not perform as expected are reviewed for suitability. Questions may be withdrawn if it is decided post-assessment that they are unfair or unfit for purpose.
[Return to top]

Is there a set pass mark?
No two exams are the same and may vary in difficulty from year to year. It is the view of the School that it is therefore unfair and methodologically unsound to have a set pass mark for every assessment.

In order to set a fair pass mark, the School employs a process of standard setting for every assessment (with the exception of MD4002). As part of the standard setting process, every question is appraised by a group of teaching staff who make a judgement on the relative difficulty of each item. When available, previous data from past exams is used to ensure the best estimate of difficulty is made. The pass mark for each written assessment is set by combining the predictions of the subject experts and the results of the analysis of any previous data. This creates a unique pass mark for every assessment that reflects the inherent variability in difficulty that occurs from creating unique exam papers.

This process is known as the “Modified Angoff Method”, and is routinely used by a large number of medical schools in the UK.
[Return to top]

How are the dates of assessment decided?
The MSA is normally held at the mid-point of each module up to, and including, MD4001. Usually the MSA occurs during week 6 or week 7, depending on the University calendar.

The ESA papers are scheduled by the Medical School in the official University examination diets. As assessments may need to be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances, students are advised to not make plans to leave St Andrews prior to the end of the University’s specified examination period.

Practical assessments (e.g. OSCEs and APEs) are scheduled by the Medical School within the

examination periods to avoid clashes with the written papers.

See also: Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

What if I have special requirements that may affect the assessment process?

The School liaises with Student Services, who advise on any special arrangements that must be provided for students during assessments. Students must register with Student Services in order for any special arrangements to be made. You must do this as early as possible; otherwise it may not be possible to make provision.

See also: Student Services Website

[Return to top]

What happens if I fail to attend an assessment?

If circumstances arise that mean you are unable to attend any summative assessment, you may be able to apply for a deferred assessment. Granting of a deferred assessment is the decision of the School Progress Committee, who considers each case on its merit and after reviewing supplied evidence.

It is vitally important that you submit a Self-Certificate of absence via e-Vision as soon as you are able to do so and contact the Director of Teaching. You should also contact the School's Assessment Team and the Pro-Deans, who will be able to advise you on what further action you need to take. Written evidence may be required to support any application for the award of a deferred assessment. Students who miss an assessment due to a self-limiting illness (e.g. diarrhoea and vomiting), must contact the School on that day.

See also: Student Services Website
Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

What should I do if circumstances throughout the term could affect my exam performance?

If circumstances throughout a semester could affect your ability to study, you would be advised to inform the Medical School at the earliest opportunity. Please contact either your Personal Tutor or the Pro-Deans to discuss any issues you may be experiencing. Student Services are also available to offer support and advice on a wide range of issues as necessary.

Your assessment performance in the Honours level modules is critical to your overall degree classification. You may be eligible to S-Code a module in the Honours years if substantial disruption to your ability to study has occurred. The option to S-Code a module is not available to students in MD2001 or MD2002, as your grades in these modules are not included as part of your final degree classification. Again, it is in your best interest to inform the Medical School of any difficulties at the earliest opportunity.

See also: Student Services Website
Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

How do I find out my final module grade?

Your official module grades are reported by the University registry office via the iSaint student portal using the University's 20-point grade scale.

The Medical School often provides more detailed feedback and breakdown of your results via

Galen. However, the grade reported by the University is your official grade.

See also: Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

What feedback can I expect to get on my exam performance?

In addition to your module grade, most modules will provide you with additional feedback on your exam performance. The type of feedback you will receive depends on the type of assessment that has been utilised.

For MCQ exams, all modules will provide you with a breakdown of your score into key question groups via Galen. For example, in MD2001 and MD2002 you will be able to find out how well you performed on questions relating to “Structure”, “Function” and the other key topic strands. The School now provides students with individual performance scores for all MCQ questions tagged to the learning outcome for each question (along with topic strand). To protect the integrity of our question bank, it is not possible for the School to provide you with the actual question. For SWA exams, all modules will provide you with a breakdown of your score per question along with average mean scores from your cohort. Students can request to view their SWA paper script, under the supervision of their personal tutor (or assessment lead). See ‘viewing SWA exam scripts’ policy

Your performance on each individual station of an OSCE will also be communicated to you. Students who fail to meet the passing criteria for the OSCE are encouraged to meet with the Clinical Skills Lead to review and appraise their performance. Ongoing personal feedback on your clinical skills is provided by staff throughout both semesters.

Most modules will also hold whole class feedback sessions, where general feedback applicable to the year will be presented.

[Return to top]

Can I have my exam remarked?

All assessments go through stringent quality assurance procedures, including internal review and review by our external examiners. Papers are not remarked following release of results and the appeal process cannot be used to challenge matters of academic judgement.

I want to lodge an appeal, how do I do this?

You can find more information on the appeal process here. Please remember the appeals process cannot be used to challenge matters of academic judgement.

Why are grades reported out of 20?

The University utilises a non-linear unitary scale from 1 to 20. Grades 1 to 6 represent failing grades, whilst grades 7 and above are passes. The School is required by University regulations to report all your module grades on this scale. All modules on the Phase 1/BSc programme will be reported to a full round number on the University 20 point scale.

See also: Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

What contributes towards my final BSc degree classification?

Only your module results for MD3001, MD3002, MD4001, MD4002 and MD4003 contribute towards your BSc Honours degree. The University’s algorithm for calculating your degree classification takes into account the credit weighting of each module.

See also: Assessment Information for UG Students

[Return to top]

Can I progress to a partner Medical School without an Honours degree?

No. Our partner medical schools only accept students from St Andrews who have an Honours degree.

[Return to top]

What happens if I fail the end of semester assessment for a module?

All students have an initial attempt to pass a module (either at first sitting or as deferred). Should you fail, you will be entitled to a resit assessment for a module. Resit assessments are normally held in August (or July for MD4000 modules) and be delivered as an in-person, closed book examinations. Resit assessments will incur an administrative charge from the University.

[Return to top]

What happens if I fail the end of year OSCE in MD2002 or MD3000?

Should you fail your end of year OSCE in MD2002 or MD3000, you will be entitled to a resit. For MD2002, the resit OSCE will be in the main August resit period (early /mid August). For MD3000, the resit OSCEs are normally held in the week prior to orientation week of the next semester of study (i.e. end of August / start of September).

[Return to top]

What happens if I fail my MD2002/MD3000 resit OSCE?

Students who fail the MD2002 resit OSCE will not have successfully passed the module to complete the academic year. A re-take of MD2002 may be possible providing MD2001 has been passed successfully. For 2026/2027, students who fail the MD3000 resit OSCE will not have successfully completed that academic year and their progression to the next academic year will be considered by the School Progress committee. If the committee decides to allow the student to progress this will be subject to specific probationary conditions and if students fail to meet those conditions the students' studies will be terminated.

[Return to top]

Is there a limit to what grade I can achieve from a resit assessment?

For all modules, any resits you are required to take will be capped at a maximum achievable grade of 7, irrespective of your exam performance.

See also: University of St Andrews Examination Rules

[Return to top]

If I have to resit a module, will the format of the assessments be the same?

Yes and no, depending on the assessment you need to resit. Resit OSCEs are of the same format as the original assessment and consist of the same number of stations and durations as the original. However, the station content may vary.

Written assessment papers are similar in structure (i.e. one SWA paper and one MCQ paper), but consist of nine SWAs and ninety MCQ items. The resit for a module may or may not contain an APE.

Students who fail MD4002 may be required to submit an entirely new dissertation.

[Return to top]

Can I progress in to the second year if I have not passed a MD2000 module?
The simple answer to this question is no. Students can only progress if they have successfully passed both MD2001 and MD2002 to the required standard.
[Return to top]

Can I progress in to the third year if I have not passed a MD3000 module?
The simple answer to this question is no. Students who do not pass an MD3000 module at either the first attempt, or at resit, will not be allowed to progress to the third year. Students may be able to repeat modules they have failed after resit, but there are limits on the amount of time you can take to complete the course.
[Return to top]

How many attempts can I take to pass a module?
All students have an initial attempt to pass a module (either at first sitting or as deferred). Should you fail, you will be entitled to a resit assessment for a module. Providing you fulfil the University regulations for accumulating credits, then if you fail a module resit assessment it may be possible to retake the entire module again (including all assessments).

However, the University places a time limit on how long you can take to obtain your degree: You must complete your BSc degree within four years or MBChB within seven years of study.
[Return to top]