

5 February 2025

By email: fyi-request-29324-c2ded650@requests.fyi.org.nz

Tēnā koe J

I refer to your information request dated 26 November 2024 made under the Official Information Act 1982 (the Act), concerning plans by the Otago Medical School to remove the grade of distinction from the medical curriculum and to cease the award of the MB ChB with distinction.

Our decision of 24 January indicated we would be providing a response, as follows.

1. I would like to know if any final decisions have been made. If not, when a final decision will be made.

A decision was made by the MB ChB Curriculum Committee (MCC) (the main committee with governance over the MB ChB programme) at their meeting on 6 December 2024 to recommend ceasing the awards of years with distinction, distinguished performance in disciplines in ALM, and the MBChB with distinction.

The final decision is not made by MCC. The recommendation must now go to various academic committees at the University of Otago, including the Otago Medical School Academic Board, the Health Sciences Academic Board and the Board of Undergraduate Studies. The final decision is then made by University Senate. The timing for when the recommendation will be presented to these boards and Senate has not yet been determined.

Before it goes to these boards, work must be done to plan how the decision might be implemented. Information about possible implementation will need to be included for the boards to consider. MCC has agreed that the implementation will be staggered to enable current year 4-6 medical students to graduate with distinction if they meet the criteria. This would mean that the earliest the decision could apply to all students would be from 2028.

2. I would like the meeting minutes regarding this matter.

As at today's date the draft minutes from the 6 December 2024 MCC meeting have yet to be confirmed, and as such are not held under section 18(g) of the Act.

3. I would like to see communications with OUMSA (Otago University Medical Students' Association) regarding this matter.

Consultation occurred with staff and students (including members of Otago University Medical Students' Association) in two cycles. The first cycle was August to October 2024 and then a further cycle was completed in November 2024. Please find **attached** the two documents that were used in those consultations, titled:

- *Consultation on proposal to cease the award of years with distinction Aug 2024.pdf*
- *Consultation on distinction proposal memo 1 Nov.pdf*

4. I would like to see both pros and cons for this matter.

The attached consultation documents provide educational arguments for the cessation of distinctions. We provide the following summary of the pros and cons that were obtained during consultation.

Reasons given for supporting the proposal were:

- Better preparation for long-term learning after graduation.
- Greater focus on ready to progress decisions and developmental feedback for all students.
- Supports collaboration and student well-being.
- Supports the acknowledgement of excellence in important areas that are not currently well-recognised.
- Creates a more equitable system for students from diverse academic and socio-economic backgrounds, and for those experiencing hardships.

Reasons given for opposing the proposal were:

- Loss of an important motivator and performance indicator.
- Fosters mediocrity and over-confidence.
- Reduces students' resilience.
- Devalues the MBChB degree.
- Disadvantages students in scholarship applications, job placements and postgraduate opportunities.

Concerns expressed in many responses:

- Potential distinction grades may not reflect the qualities of a good doctor and judgements made by assessors can be variable.
- Students perceive the quality of feedback on their performance in assessments can sometimes be improved.
- Implementing the proposal across all years from 2026 would be unfair for those students already in the programme who have been aiming for an MBChB with distinction.
- Allowing modules to choose whether or not to award an overall module "distinction" risks creating perverse incentives for students to achieve in some modules relative to others, and giving a false impression of how students perform in some modules relative to others.

We hope this information is useful.

If you are not satisfied with our response to your information request, section 28(3) of the Act provides you with the right to ask an Ombudsman to investigate and review this response. However, we would welcome the opportunity to discuss any concerns with you first.

Ngā mihi



Bill Frewen
Manager Policy and Compliance