



Department
of Health &
Social Care

From Karin Smyth MP
Minister of State for Health (Secondary Care)

39 Victoria Street
London
SW1H 0EU

PO-1715317

Layla Moran MP

By email to: layla.moran.mp@parliament.uk

23 September 2026

Dear Layla,

Thank you for your correspondence of 25 June to the former Secretary of State about British medical students at UK universities with overseas campuses. I apologise for the delay in replying.

I appreciate your concerns.

The Medical Training (Prioritisation) Act 2026 implements the Government's commitment outlined in *Fit for the Future: The 10 Year Health Plan for England* to prioritise UK medical graduates for foundation training places, and to prioritise UK medical graduates and other doctors with significant NHS experience for specialty training places.

As well as prioritising UK medical school graduates, the Act prioritises graduates from medical schools in the Republic of Ireland, reflecting the nature of the relationship between the UK and Ireland, which includes the free movement of people between the UK and Ireland, and other benefits conferred by the Common Travel Area. It also prioritises graduates from medical schools in some other countries with which the UK has entered into international agreements that include parity of access to the workforce.

The Act is designed to support a sustainable medical workforce that can meet population health needs, reducing the UK's reliance on an unpredictable international labour market. UK taxpayers make a significant investment of over £4billion each year in training doctors in medical school, foundation and specialty training. Prioritising UK medical graduates for postgraduate training aligns with the UK Government's workforce planning aims, which links the number of medical school places to postgraduate training capacity to meet the needs of the UK patient population. By creating a clear pathway from medical school to specialty training, we strengthen domestic talent and improve retention.

Data shows that domestic graduates are more likely to stay in the country where they trained than those trained internationally. Doctors trained primarily in the UK are also likely to be better equipped to deliver healthcare tailored to the UK's population because they have a stronger understanding of UK-specific epidemiology, clinical pathways and healthcare protocols. Prioritising applicants with this experience strengthens delivery of our aim to deliver a workforce that can best meet population health needs.

Under the Act, a UK medical graduate is defined as someone with a UK primary medical qualification who did not spend all or the majority of their time training for that qualification outside the British Islands.

The UK Foundation Programme Office is responsible for managing the recruitment to the UK Foundation Programme, including ensuring that prioritisation status is applied appropriately in line with the Act. Graduates of the Queen Mary University of London's Malta campus programme do not meet the criteria for prioritisation for the 2026 UK Foundation Programme under the Act.

I would like to reassure you that the Act is not designed to, and does not, exclude any eligible applicants from applying for postgraduate medical training. Non-prioritised graduates can still apply, and they will be offered places if vacancies remain after prioritised applicants have received offers.

Foundation posts are allocated across the UK to support workforce needs. The number of places is agreed on a four-nation basis by the statutory education bodies in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. This year, at the point of primary allocation, there were more applicants than programmes available. This meant that eligible non-prioritised applicants have been placed on a national reserve list.

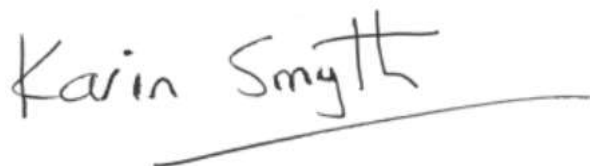
Five rounds of reserve-list allocation took place between June and August, resulting in 476 applicants being allocated to a foundation school. Following the final allocation round on 12 August, 188 applicants remained on the reserve list. Overall, 98 per cent of all eligible applicants, and 72 per cent of applicants placed on the reserve list, were allocated a place on the 2026 Foundation Programme.

For individuals who do not secure a foundation year 1 post this year, there are alternative routes to pursuing a medical career in the UK. These include obtaining full General Medical Council (GMC) registration through the established GMC pathways, such as completing an approved internship in the country where they trained and then entering the UK healthcare system through applying to a locally employed doctor role or another non-training post.

The Government will, as for all legislation, keep the Act under review to ensure that it delivers its policy intent.

I hope this reply is helpful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karin Smyth". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a horizontal line.

KARIN SMYTH