

WITS UNIVERSITY REVISES ITS MBBCH DEGREE ADMISSIONS POLICY

In 2014 Wits University revised its admissions policy for all programmes offered by the Faculty of Health Sciences. This followed the recommendations of a task team, commissioned by the Vice-Chancellor. Applicants who are currently applying for entrance in 2019 will not be required to complete a Biographical Questionnaire (BQ). Their matric results will carry a 50% weighting and the results of their National Benchmark Tests (NBTs) will make up the other 50%.

Selection will be made according to the following broad categories:

- 40% of the places will be offered to the top performing candidates based on academic merit;
- the remaining 60% will be offered as follows:
 - approximately 20% of the places will be offered to top performing rural learners;
 - approximately 20% of the places will be offered to top performing learners from quintile 1 and 2 schools;
 - and approximately 20% of the places will be allocated to high achieving African and Coloured learners.

Wits University is committed to being a demographically diverse and cosmopolitan world-class institution furthering the Constitutional vision of a democratic and non-racial South Africa. We will continue to research and review admissions policies in line with achieving this goal.

Background

The new admissions policy is based on recommendations by a Wits University task team, consisting of members of the Wits Faculty of Health Sciences, the Wits Student Representative Council, other Wits Faculties and the Senior Executive Team, that was commissioned to review the admissions policy. The activities of the task team included a public meeting that was held in April 2014 to discuss the current and future admissions criteria and policies for entry into the medicine degree.

The review was prompted by a number of concerns.

Higher education in South Africa has come to be characterised by what is termed the “revolving door” syndrome, with high dropout and failure rates. Deviations from this norm are seen in programmes where strict admissions criteria are enforced, such as programmes in health sciences faculties where a fair amount of consensus exists on the minimum requirements for entry into a medical degree.

At Wits, the Faculty of Health Sciences carefully selects students through a combination of criteria which include merit, performance on national standardised examinations, race and other competencies. Substantial student supports as well as a system of remediation to avert outright failure have been implemented in the MBBCh programme.

Yet, the admissions strategies in the Faculty of Health Sciences still have a long way to go in fully addressing the historical disparities of the last 50 years, and meeting the health care demands of the country's largest metropolis and beyond.

It is also evident that the current selection criteria do not necessarily result in the kind of medical doctor required to meet the health challenges facing South Africa in the 21st century. Ideally, such an individual should be socially responsive, act as a change agent, work well in teams, be equipped to work at all levels of health care, and be ready to operate and take the lead in an environment which is plagued by high levels of infectious diseases, breakdown in access to health care and an increased mistrust of primary health care provision.

Applicants must also be able to possess the skills to apply best evidence from research in resource-poor settings as well as manage an ever-changing landscape as the country moves to universal health care access.

While the current admission criteria have gone some way to transform the student profile since the early 90s by increasing the numbers of African students who can access the MBBCh, they have not fully addressed the changing landscape outside the University.

The revised admissions policy is in line with Wits' commitment to the goal of becoming a diverse and cosmopolitan world-class institution with an equal representation of all race groups.