



UCD to initiate graduate entry to medicine

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In a radical break with tradition, UCD is to introduce graduate entry to medicine on a phased basis.

Under the plan, 50 per cent of UCD's 108 places in medicine for Irish and EU students will be allocated to graduates by 2010.

UCD hopes to begin the process next March, when aptitude tests for entry to a new four-year, postgraduate medicine course are scheduled.

Although funding has still to be worked out, it is thought that fees of about €15,000 per year would be charged for the course. By contrast, school-leavers are not charged for undergraduate courses.

Last night, the university stressed that at least 50 per cent of its medicine places would continue to be reserved for school-leavers for the foreseeable future.

The surprise move by UCD comes amid increasing criticism of the very high CAO points needed for medicine. This autumn, students needed at least 570 points – the equivalent of six grade As in the Leaving Cert – to study medicine in the Republic.

A move to graduate entry for medicine was recommended by

an expert group chaired by Prof Patrick Fottrell. This would allow students to take a more mature decision, it said.

The Fottrell group also recommended an increase in the number of medical training places in the Republic from 308 to 725. Minister for Education Mary Hanafin has also signalled her backing for an expansion in medical places, pending further consultation with Minister for Health Mary Harney.

UCD sources say the college will press ahead with its plans for 50 per cent graduate entry – whether or not the cap of 308 places is lifted.

Last night, the head of the school of medicine at UCD, Prof Bill Powderly, said: "We have made this decision for strategic and educational reasons. We need to educate and train more doctors, and we need to encourage diversity by creating more entry pathways to our medical schools.

"We have notified the Medical Council of our intention, and will now enter discussions with the Higher Education Authority. All going well, we will take in our first cohort of graduate students next September."

UCD will accept applications from students who have achieved

at least an upper second honours grade in an honours bachelor degree.

Applicants will not have to have a science-based degree. UCD will accept applications from those with degrees in arts, social science and other areas.

The entrance exam for the course, however, will have a considerable scientific content. This will be taken in conjunction with an aptitude test.

The UCD graduate programme will take four years to complete. Students will receive the same bachelor of medicine, bachelor of surgery, bachelor of obstetrics (MB, BCh, BAO) degrees as the students entering through the traditional Leaving Certificate undergraduate route.

Last night UCD said several issues had still to be clarified, pending further discussions with the HEA. These include:

- how any proposed new places in medicine will be funded;
- the fee to be charged;
- whether Irish graduates will displace non-EU students.

At present, undergraduate medicine courses at UCD and four other third-level colleges are effectively subsidised by non-EU students. At UCD, for example, such students pay about €23,500 a year in fees.