

08/48

20 July 2009

Dr Richard Chadwick
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Australian Competition and Consumer Commission
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Dear Dr Chadwick

Thank you for your letter of 24 June 2009 regarding the application for authorisation A911444-A91145 lodged by the Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admissions Test (GAMSAT) Consortium.

The Australian Medical Association (AMA) believes that, on balance, the public benefits arising from granting the proposed authorisation will outweigh any potential detriments. There are clear benefits in relation to:

- Reduced administration costs for consortium members;
- The more effective use of limited community resources in the interview process;
- Reduced costs for applicants from not having to incur costs associated with attendance at multiple interviews.

While we recognise that public benefits will flow from the proposed authorisation, we do note that there are potential detriments. When the consortium was first established, only Flinders University, the University of Sydney and the University of Queensland used the GAMSAT. These medical schools used very similar criteria when selecting students and did not tend to weight their selection processes towards particular student characteristics.

The consortium has expanded significantly over the years and selection processes have changed significantly. It is now common for individual medical schools to look for specific qualities in applicants such as a rural background or a diversity of life experience. It is unclear from the application for authorisation how this is (or will be) handled within the one interview and preference policy.

If a medical school uses the interview process to look for certain qualities in a candidate, then it would appear that there is the potential for the interview process to disadvantage an applicant in some circumstances. An applicant may perform poorly in an interview with one medical school and, on the basis of this interview, fail to secure an offer of a place because they lack the qualities that the medical school is looking for. If this “poor” interview result is then passed on without explanation to the candidate’s next preferred medical school, which may or may not be looking for the same qualities, there is a concern that it may unfairly prejudice a candidate’s prospects of securing a place.

The ACCC should explore this issue further with consortium members to see how it is addressed in the selection process and to ensure that candidates, as far as possible, are not unfairly disadvantaged.

The AMA notes that there is ongoing debate over the merits or otherwise of using interviews as part of medical school selection processes. Concerns have also been expressed about the impact of various private sector courses designed to coach applicants to succeed in the interview process. The AMA has recognised that interviews may be a useful tool in the selection process as long as they are appropriately designed and not given undue weight in comparison to other criteria such as past academic performance.

The AMA appreciates the opportunity to provide this short submission to the ACCC. If you have any questions regarding the matters outlined above, please do not hesitate to contact Warwick Hough on (02) 6270 5488.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Francis Sullivan', written in black ink.

Francis Sullivan
Secretary General