



**Observations made by The Medical & Dental Council
after deliberation on the meeting held by the PMC President
with Student Delegation**

A group of students who had taken the MDCAT 2021 examination met with the President of the Council on 23rd September 2021 at Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC), Islamabad.

The students put forward multiple grievances, which have been summarized as follows:

- a) The internet at the centers was not working, which resulted in many answers not being recorded and scored
- b) The system has a technical fault due to which skipped or edited questions do not get scored later
- c) Questions were out of syllabus

The consequent demands of the students were:

- a) Re-conduct of the MDCAT, or
- b) lowering of passing marks or additional marks being given to each student, or
- c) allowing every student to see their paper and recheck physically

The detailed briefing of the meeting and the students' issues were placed before the Council by the President in an urgent meeting to discuss the matter.

The Council also took note of the messages sent by a large number of students expressing their satisfaction with the exam result and requesting that no re-conduct of the exam be considered.

It was also noted that thousands of students have already passed the exam – a number which is already well in excess of the approximately 20,000 medical and dental college allocated seats available.



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The Council has reviewed the grievances and the extensive data available relating to the conduct of the examinations.

The Council's views regarding each of the grievances are as follows:

i) The examination system does not work on live open internet. It is designed to operate on a wireless local area network (LAN) at each center. Therefore, the concern regarding internet or Wi-Fi being down is misconceived. All the final answers submitted by each student at the end of the exam are uploaded to the server at each exam center through the local area network securely without exception.

ii) The up-to-date data for questions marked as skipped or not attempted by all students up to date was examined. Only 0.13% of the total answers submitted by over 140,000 students who have already taken the exam were marked as skipped or not attempted. In effect, only 1 skipped or not attempted question showed up for every 5 students on average. This is well below the overall average, expected number of skipped questions in any MCQ-based exam. Therefore, the concern that skipped questions attempted later or edited answers are not being uploaded to the system and scored is not correct. All the answers are being properly uploaded and scored.

iii) The MDCAT Syllabus was prepared by the National Medical & Dental Academic Board for the 2021 MDCAT. For preparation of the syllabus representatives of all provincial boards, the Federal Board and IBCC were invited to review the syllabus to ensure it covered the curriculum of each region. In fact, the scope of the syllabus for the 2021 MDCAT is less than that of the syllabus which was previously approved by the Board of the 2020 MDCAT. Therefore, students have known about the scope of the syllabus for a year now and, if anything, were provided a reduced syllabus for 2021 MDCAT compared to 2020 MDCAT.



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Furthermore, in terms of the structure of the MDCAT, the Board decreased the difficulty index compared to the 2020 MDCAT exam. The only addition for the 2021 MDCAT is the section on reason and logic which only consists of 10 questions out of the total 210 questions. The question bank was created by experts in each subject and thereafter, reviewed by two separate panels of experts to verify the difficulty indexing ascribed to each question. The detailed process was undertaken and, therefore, as a whole, the exam is within the prescribed syllabus. The Council also notes that none of the students were able to identify the exact questions they claimed were out of syllabus and only made general allegations.

The Council has further noted the following for general information of all concerned:

A) As part of the standard process, the entire exam system is constantly put through a technical audit to ensure the system is working fine. This is continuing and the final results of the technical review specifically pertaining to the concerns raised by the students will be made public at the conclusion of the exam.

B) At the conclusion of the exam a post exam analysis will be carried out by a team of experts as per international standards. The results will be made public. Any questions found to be contrary to the principles of examination in terms of being vague or sufficiently discriminatory shall be removed and any student attempting such removed question would be given a full mark for the question.

C) After conclusion of the exam, every paper will be automatically re-checked by the system for any errors or anomalies as well as verified and reviewed.





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E) A student can neither be provided a copy of their question paper and answers, nor shown their paper physically. The paper is in a digital format and so are the answers which are scored by a computer. There is no human error element involved. Furthermore, releasing the question papers containing the questions and answers is contrary to best practices internationally as that results in the question bank being exposed and results in academies developing keys to prepare students through the rote system. A question bank is meant to be confidential and not opened so that it can be used for a considerable period of time. There are limited number of questions which can be framed to test the grasp of a particular concept. Constantly making questions from the question bank public will result in students having all possible exam questions at one stage to prepare for future exam and lower the quality and competitiveness of future exams. Lastly, each student's paper and score are encrypted. Showing it to a student would require decrypting and will result in a process that will take at least 6-8 months considering there are almost 200,000 students – making the exercise unfeasible. Students have to accept the result and the integrity of the result. Mere allegations by a student who did not pass cannot be the basis to open an entire exam disclosing the confidential question bank.

The Council has been consistently reviewing the issues being raised by students and parents and is concerned that a few important aspects (regarding the MDCAT and the potentially fewer students qualifying this year) are not being taken into account. The Council has sought to reiterate them:

- The National Medical & Dental Academic Board for the 2021 MDCAT recommended passing marks of 65% which was approved by the Council. Last year, the passing marks were 60%. Hence, a higher threshold for passing this year is more likely to result in a lower number of students qualifying the MDCAT compared to last year.

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- The inclusion of 30% application-based questions to test cognitive learning and reducing recall questions to 70% of the total questions in the test by the National Medical & Dental Academic Board for the 2021 MDCAT will have an obvious effect on the final result. A high dependency on the rote system will not result in high scores seen in the past. The intent of the exam is to determine the competency of students in terms of having grasped concepts rather than just memorized answers.
- High marks achieved in FSc/A Level are not a valid basis for expectation of similar marks in a competitive medical entry test. The MDCAT is not a retake of the FSc or A level exam. It is a competitive assessment exam for entry into the extremely competitive medical and dental programs. The purpose is to select competitively the best suited student for the medical and dental programs who are capable of coping with the rigors of the university program and can graduate as quality medical and dental professionals who can provide quality healthcare to the citizens of Pakistan. Therefore, there can be no question of reducing the quality and competitive benchmark of the entrance exam. A high quality competitive exam is analyzed and its quality and veracity in part determined by the percentage of students qualifying and the number achieving high marks. It is expected that in a robust competitive exam, neither the number of students who pass nor the number of those who obtain marks in the high 90s percentile would be very high. This is also the case with other competitive exams even in Pakistan like the CSS or the ISSB exams. The medical entrance exam should be considered even more competitive than these exams considering that medical practitioners have to make critical decisions about the health and safety of our citizens, which is supreme.
- Students that are repeaters claim that they expected better marks than last year. It is a factually incorrect assumption that a repeater will improve their result the next year. Repeaters also need to note that under the





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PMC Regulations, an MDCAT result is valid for 2 years. Therefore, students who attempted the 2020 MDCAT can rely on their 2020 MDCAT after it is equivalenced by PMC, for applying for admission in 2021 subject to the 2021 admission criteria. It will be a student's choice to apply on the basis of their equivalenced 2020 MDCAT result or the 2021 MDCAT result if they have taken the exam in both years. The equivalence of the 2020 MDCAT result for admissions in 2021-2022 will be available and undertaken after conclusion of the 2021 MDCAT exam.

- Many students who took the MDCAT for the first time in 2021 have also communicated that they expected much higher marks and while they have passed, they did not get the high marks they expected. This is a misconceived perception. Students need to understand that if the 2020 MDCAT and 2021 MDCAT are compared and indexed for equivalence, the probability is that a lower score in the 2021 MDCAT would be comparable to a much higher score in the 2020 MDCAT. The merit will be determined based on the 2021 MDCAT result and admission criteria.

The Council, after detailed deliberations on the issue, concluded that the 2021 MDCAT exam is being conducted strictly as per the syllabus and structure prepared by the National Medical & Dental Academic Board, the exam system is functioning properly and the interim results are correct, subject to the post exam analysis and the final results to be issued thereafter.

The 2021 MDCAT exam will, therefore, continue as scheduled. All results shall be subject to the post exam analysis and any corrections required after rechecking will be made.

