



2025

The Society of Apothecaries of London

Guide to The Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine (DPMSA) Incorporating the Regulations and Syllabus

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Notice of future amendments to the Guide (incorporating the Regulations and Syllabus) and revisions following publication of this version.

The DPMSA Examination will continue to change to reflect developments in philosophical thought as applied to current developments in medicine. While every attempt has been made to ensure that this version of the DPMSA Examination Regulations and Syllabus is accurate, further changes to the DPMSA examination, the Regulations and closing dates may be implemented during this time. Candidates should refer to the Society of Apothecaries website (www.apothecaries.org) for the most up-to-date information, and where any such changes will be detailed. In order that candidates are fully briefed about the status of any proposed changes, they are advised to also check regularly the “**Administrative Guidance for Candidates**”, the “Candidate Code of Conduct”, and the “Candidate Misconduct Policy”, all on the Society website.

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INTRODUCTION

The Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine was instituted by the Society of Apothecaries of London in 1978, as a natural development of the activities of the Society's Faculty of the History and Philosophy of Medicine and Pharmacy, which was established in 1959. The Diploma was revised extensively in 1993, and the name of the course was changed to 'Ethics and Philosophy of Healthcare' in 2002.

The Diploma is designed as a postgraduate qualification primarily for members of the health care professions, although it is open to a number of other graduates.

The Diploma is intended to indicate familiarity with contemporary philosophy of medicine and, in particular, with the philosophical aspects of problems within the theory and practice of medicine and healthcare; and with selected aspects of the history of philosophy related to those problems.

COURSE CONTACT DETAILS

For further details of the course please contact:

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EXAMINATION TIMETABLE AND FEES

Please refer to the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates** (available online at www.apothecaries.org).

REGULATIONS FOR ADMISSION TO THE EXAMINATION

1. Candidates must complete either:
 - a. The Diploma Course organised by the Society's Faculty of the History and Philosophy of Medicine and Pharmacy **OR**
 - b. **An appropriate higher education course, assessed and approved at the discretion of the Convenor and Deputy Convenor/Examiners Committee Representative OR**
 - c. Show evidence of competence (e.g. list of publications in the philosophy of medicine) before admittance to the examination. This will be assessed and approved at the discretion of the Convenor and Deputy Convenor/Examiners' Committee Representative.
2. **For those applying for the first time or for re-entrants) the fee must have been received by the closing date published in the Administrative Guidance for Candidates.**
3. If applicable, Form Q (Application for Special Examination Arrangements) must have been received by no later than 4 weeks before the application deadline for the examination, published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates**.
4. Entry and re-entry to the examination must be made within 3 years of completing the course or satisfying other course entry criteria.

THE EXAMINATION

1. The examination will be conducted in English throughout. From **March to June 2025** the exam will consist of:
 - a. **The Short article (Essay):** please refer to item 6 in the Administrative Guidance for Candidates (www.apothecaries.org) for the Course Director's essay brief. **The essay is to be submitted on the BrightSpace Learning Platform** no later than the deadline published in the Administrative Guidance for Candidates (www.apothecaries.org). This component must be passed and carries 20% towards the final award.
 - b. **Oral assessment/presentation:** Candidates will be asked to present an outline of their dissertation, including key premises, argument and conclusion and answer questions from an audience of examiners and peers. This will take place on the philosophy students and fellows' symposium in May – see details of '**Oral Presentation**' on page 5 below. This component makes up 20% of the marks that go towards the final award. The Oral Presentation takes place **in person** at the Apothecaries Hall, London. In extenuating circumstances, requests to present remotely will be considered by the Head of the Academic department.
 - c. The **Long article (Dissertation)** will be on a topic chosen by the candidate and approved by the Course Director. Please refer to the Administrative Guidance for Candidates for related deadlines. This component makes up 60% of the marks that go towards the final award.
- N.B.** All elements of the examination must normally be taken at first entry. The published deadlines for receipt of the essay and the dissertation will be strictly applied. In exceptional circumstances, at the discretion of the examiners committee, a candidate may be allowed to carry forward results from one or more element of the examination to the following year.

N.B. Please see Appendix 1 for marking guidance.

2. If only one of the latter three components is passed then it is permissible to carry that result forward to a subsequent entry, provided that this is within the time limits set out in paragraph 4 above.
 - 2.1 Candidates who fail any part of the examination will be marked as failing the whole examination.
 - 2.2. In cases where the candidate has failed to satisfy the examiners in the Long article (Dissertation) or Oral presentation or Short article (Essay), or where the whole examination has been failed, the Head of the Academic Department will notify the candidate whether or not the Dissertation, Oral presentation or Short Essay may be revised and resubmitted/retaken.
 - 2.3 At the discretion of the examiners committee and the academic department, candidates may be offered the opportunity to resubmit failed elements within one month of receiving feedback. Alternatively, all failed sections may be re-taken the following year. The resubmitted element will be capped at a simple pass mark.
 - 2.4 Candidates who fail/resubmit any written element, must submit their work with track changes and a brief letter outlining how they have addressed examiners feedback and offering reasons for any feedback they are declining to address. (This would be normal practice with any academic journal submissions where a revision has been requested).
 - 2.5 Individual elements can be retaken only once, failing which the examination must be reentered in full.
3. Candidates, should, however, note (point 2 above) that re-entry to the examination must be made within 3 years of completing the course or satisfying other course entry criteria.
4. Successful candidates are entitled to use the letters DPMSA after their names.
5. The examination fee will be determined from time to time by the Academic Strategy Committee. Candidates who withdraw from the examination after the closing date will forfeit a proportion of or the entire fee if they have taken part of the examination. For further details refer to the Administrative Guidance for Candidates (www.apothecaries.org)
6. Candidates will be issued with an admission document once a place for the examination has been confirmed.

REVIEW AND APPEALS PROCEDURE

11. The processes outlined below will be dealt with according to the Examination Review and Appeal Procedure, which is fully available on the website under the heading “Academic Policies for Candidates”. In no circumstances should a candidate make representations directly to an examiner.
12. The stages of the review and appeal procedures (which are on the examination area of the website) are as follows:
 - a. Feedback – first, compulsory stage;
 - b. Review – second, optional stage;
 - c. Appeal – third, optional stage.
13. **Feedback (compulsory).** The feedback process operates through the Head of the Academic Department (HOAD). Feedback on examination performance may be available to unsuccessful candidates at their request. Requests must be made in writing and be received by the HOAD within 28 days of the date of the result letter.
14. The HOAD has authority to pass to the candidate a breakdown of the results of each section of the examination where this is not provided with the result letter. This information should be read in conjunction with the explanation of the marking scheme and the standard that is required to achieve a pass in the examination contained in the relevant Guide to the Diploma.
15. The HOAD can also relay a transcript of additional general advice directly to the candidate, but only if such

advice is available. This is advice generated by the Examination Panel, which had been agreed at the time of the examination.

16. The HOAD's role is to distribute the prepared information but not to interpret it.
17. There is no charge to the candidate for this service.
18. **Review (optional).** A request by a candidate for a review of a paper must be received in writing within 28 days of the date of the notification informing the candidate of the feedback. A request for a review cannot be made without first going through the feedback stage. There is a fee of £175 for a review.
19. **Appeal (optional).** An appeal to the Society's Academic Quality & Standards Committee (the AQSC) is open to a candidate who is not satisfied with the decision of the Examination Panel, feedback or the Review Panel. In accordance with the Society's Examination Review and Appeal Procedures, available to download, the detailed grounds on which the appeal is made must be stated. The appeal must be received in writing within 28 days of the date of the notification informing the candidate of the examination result or the review. It is not necessary to seek a review before appealing but you cannot request a review of a paper under the appeal procedure. There is a fee of £250 for an appeal.
20. If the appellant is dissatisfied with the report of the AQSC's Appeal Tribunal and wishes to make an appeal to the Court, this should be communicated to the HOAD within 28 days of the date of the notification informing the candidate of the decision of the Appeal Tribunal.

ANONYMITY FOR MARKING

21. To ensure that examiners do not know which candidate's work they are marking, it is important that candidates' work be anonymized. You may submit your electronic essay (by the April deadline) as a Word document displaying your candidate number on the title page as per paragraph 26 of this guide. The Academic Department will assign a candidate number to anonymize your essay before marking, and advise you of such. For your dissertation, and essay, a formal candidate number will have already been assigned to you once your exam application and fee have been accepted. You should use this number to anonymize your dissertation (see para 58) and written papers (see para 34) prior to electronic submission. All electronic documents submitted to the **BrightSpace Learning Platform** will be anonymized before marking commences.

THE SHORT ARTICLE (ESSAY)

22. The current **essay brief**, is detailed in the [Administrative Guide for Candidates](#).
23. The essay should be no longer than max 1,200 words, 12 key references.
24. A machine readable, electronic (Word™) essay must be submitted **on the BrightSpace Learning Platform** no later than the date published in the [Administrative Guidance for Candidates](#).

N.B. Failure to submit the essay on the specified platform by the due date will result in rejection of the essay and will preclude the prospective candidate from entering the examination that year.

25. **File name** – Each essay should be presented as a single file. File names must be created as: Your candidate number DPMSA essay title Date (YYMMDD). For example:

Candidate number {xxxx} DPMSA Can Medical Ethics do without Moral Theory? 120626.doc

26. The essay should include a title page with the following:

<p style="text-align: center;">Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Essay title Candidate number* Date (e.g. 15 April 2024) Word Count: (e.g. 1,200)</p>

**Essays will be anonymised for marking.*

Note: The essay, in the form of **two electronic copies**, must be submitted to the Academic Department of the Society of Apothecaries by the specified closing date using the electronic protocol specified in the Admission Document provided to each candidate, no later than the deadline published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates**. You will be required to submit your completed essay on the Society's BrightSpace learning platform. On submission, Turnitin TM will automatically scan your essay for matching text from Turnitin sources. This will be used by the examiners as a tool to contribute to judgement as to the originality of candidate's work.

27. For information on referencing or sources refer to Regulations 36-44 (below).

ORAL ASSESSMENT/PRESENTATION

28. Presentation of argument examination (15 minutes and 5 minutes for questions) to take place on date published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates**.

THE LONG ARTICLE (DISSERTATION)

A longer dissertation on a different topic formatted as a long essay for the Journal of Medical Ethics original research/student essay (max 3500 words) https://jme.bmj.com/pages/authors#student_essay (with the stipulation that the dissertation must use philosophical methodology).

The abstract

A final submission of a 250 word abstract should be uploaded on the **BrightSpace Learning Platform** by deadline published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates**.

29. Before any detailed research or writing is undertaken the candidate must submit a proposed abstract of no more than 250 words via the **BrightSpace Learning Platform** for formative comment.
30. This process allows the examiners to monitor the relevance of proposed work and to point out any pitfalls.
31. Candidates must submit their proposed title and abstract on the (**BrightSpace Learning Platform**) no later than the deadline published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates** (www.apothecaries.org).

Advice on selecting an appropriate title

32. The topic, to be chosen by the candidate, is to be in a field of special personal and/or professional interest in the area of Ethics or Philosophy. This work must be well-documented with references and bibliography. It is not to be a paraphrase of standard works but should argue for a particular position, taking counter-arguments into account. The topic should be on a substantially different subject from that of the essay.
33. The Society is unable to offer candidates formal tutorial assistance but course tutors are usually willing to provide

guidance.

34. It is emphasized that although the dissertation allows the candidate to demonstrate specialist knowledge, it should be written with the non-specialist in mind.

References

35. The Candidates Plagiarism Policy is available in full on the website <https://www.apothecaries.org/diploma-in-the-philosophy-of-medicine/> under the banner “Academic Policies for Candidates” Plagiarism is the presentation of another person’s thoughts or words as if they were the writer’s own. If another person’s work (or even your own prior work) is quoted, it must be acknowledged fully by means of a reference within the text (source also to be given in the reference list) and putting the quotation in quotation marks, i.e. “...”.
36. This also applies to verbatim short sections from a source. Paraphrasing statements/text of factual knowledge or ideas from published works, lectures or web sources is not plagiarism if the original source is referenced and the paraphrasing is not extensive.
37. Any diagrams, tables, graphs etc which have been taken directly from a source or modified from a source must include appropriate details of the author and source, as well as being acknowledged e.g. from Bloggs et al 1998 or adapted from Bloggs et al 1998.

NB. The work of any candidate who is found to have plagiarised material in the dissertation will be rejected.

38. The text of the dissertation should be supported by references taken from the relevant published literature.
39. References to Internet sources should include all the information required for a full and complete reference plus full details of the website (the URL of the site) and the date on which it was accessed, as the content of sites may change with time.

Citing e-books (via internet or e-reader)

E-books and sections of them may be cited (if the content is appropriate) please ensure that you include a way of finding the relevant section that you are citing - this may be a chapter and page number if a pdf, or a chapter and position number or percentage completion of an e-reader.

e-book online

Author Family name, INITIAL(S). Year. Title. [Online]. Edition (if not first edition). Place of publication: Publisher. [Date accessed]. Available from: URL

Example:

Papanikitas, A. and Spicer, J. (editors) 2017. Handbook of Primary Care Ethics. [online e-book]. London: CRC Press.[Accessed 26 December 2017]. Available from: <https://www.crcpress.com/Handbook-of-Primary-Care-Ethics/Papanikitas-Spicer/p/book/9781785230905>

e-book reader format, eg Kindle

Family name, INITIAL(S). Year. Title. Edition (if not first edition). [Name of e-book reader]. Place of publication: Publisher.

Example:

Papanikitas, A. and Spicer, J. (editors) 2017. Handbook of Primary Care Ethics. [Kindle e-book]. London: CRC Press.

40. References should be numbered consecutively in the order that they are first mentioned in the text and placed in superscript each time the author is cited. The full list of references should be arranged at the end of the dissertation in numerical order.
41. The format of references should follow the Vancouver style and should be consistent throughout. Full details of the styles of referencing, which should be followed meticulously, can be found at:

<http://bma.org.uk> - search for “Vancouver” to display the BMA’s Reference Styles factsheet.

42. **Legal references** should be cited in the form used in reports issued by the Incorporated Council of Law Reporting:
e.g. DPP v Smith [1990] 2 AC 783
43. Guidance on legal references can be found in Raistrick, D. Index to Legal Citations and abbreviations. London. Sweet & Maxwell. 2008.

Further requirements

44. **Dissertations should be no more than 3,500 words** in length (including footnotes but not references). Appendices, if used, may be added only to inform the reader/examiner regarding sources mentioned in the text. It may offer relevance only, but will not generate further marks from examiners.
45. An electronic copy must be submitted on the **BrightSpace Learning Platform** no later than the deadline published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates** (www.apothecaries.org).
- N.B.** Failure to submit the **dissertation on the specified Platform** by the due date will result in its rejection and will preclude the prospective candidate from entering the examination that year.
46. Candidates are **strongly** advised to be thorough when proofreading for typing errors.
47. Any evidence of plagiarism at the time of the examination or subsequently will result in rejection of the candidate.
48. The dissertation should include a title page with the following:

<p style="text-align: center;">Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Dissertation title Candidate number Date (e.g. 24 June 2024) Word Count: (e.g. 3,500)</p>
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49. Candidates should make and sign a declaration such as the one given below. It should be submitted at the same time as the dissertation but **NOT** incorporated into the work and remain a separate document.

<p style="text-align: center;">Declaration</p> <p>Signature & Candidate number</p> <p>I certify that this dissertation is entirely my own work without plagiarism. I allocate joint copyright to the Society of Apothecaries.</p> <p>Signed Date</p>
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50. Dissertations should be produced in accordance with the guidelines set out in this guide and it is important that they be strictly adhered to. Dissertations not in this format may be rejected by the Examinations Panel.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF YOUR DISSERTATION

51. **Format** - Dissertations should be written in 12 point black type, as a double-spaced document.
52. **Headers and footers** – Your candidate number and the dissertation title should appear in the document header from page 2 onwards. The page and total number of pages, given as “Page x of y”, should appear in the document footer.
53. **One machine-readable, electronic (Word™) version** of your dissertation must be submitted **on the BrightSpace Learning Platform**, no later than the deadline published in the **Administrative Guidance for Candidates**.
54. **File name** – Each dissertation should be presented as a single file. File names must be created as: **Your candidate number DPMSA Dissertation title Date (YYMMDD)**. For example:

Candidate number (1112) DPMSA Can Medical Ethics do without Moral Theory? 200529.doc

Note: The dissertation, in the form of **two electronic copies**, must be submitted to the Academic Department of the Society of Apothecaries by the specified closing date using the electronic protocol specified in the Admission Document provided to each candidate. You will be required to submit your completed dissertation on the Society’s BrightSpace learning platform. On submission, Turnitin TM will automatically scan your dissertation for matching text from Turnitin sources. This will be used by the examiners as a tool to contribute to judgement as the originality of candidate’s work.

MARKING

55. Marks are awarded in the following proportions:

Short article (Essay) 20%
Oral assessment - 20%
Long article (Dissertation) - 60%

56. Pass mark for each component is 50%.

SYLLABUS

57. Candidates for the DPMSA examination are expected to have participated in relevant education and private reading:

- To understand and describe the tools of philosophical thought: Informal reasoning, the logic of real arguments, evaluating arguments in ordinary discourse, truth and falsehood of statements, validity and invalidity of arguments, clarity and coherence, ambiguity, assumptions, irrelevance and rhetoric and common fallacies.
- To describe philosophy as a reflective discipline, and offer and evaluate arguments in ethics
- To apply these philosophical tools to the discussion of issues in health care.
- To understand and describe sources of knowledge, such as: rationalist, empiricist, reason and experience as traditions in philosophy including the philosophy of science.
- To apply this knowledge to health care in relation to philosophy, science, and society.
- To categorise and appraise sources of moral theory, contrast morals and law, and distinguish moral feeling and moral thinking and apply these in healthcare settings.
- To recognise the importance of the history of medicine and medical humanities more broadly as a field contributing to the philosophy and ethics of healthcare, including approaches arising outside the classical western philosophical tradition.
- To identify and describe types of normative ethical theory (such as utilitarianism, deontology, rights-based theory, virtue, social contract theory, feminist ethics and other ethical theories) and apply these in healthcare settings.
- To explain the contribution to moral philosophy of Plato, Aristotle, Kant, the English Utilitarians, Rawls and other relevant authors
- To describe and critique principlism (the four principles of bioethics) and its relationship to moral theory in health care ethics, identifying the scope and applications, conflict between the principles in particular cases; weighing of the principles; and reasons for and against arguing from principles.
- To discriminate ethical issues in health care, and analyse in philosophical terms, including but not restricted to: issues at the beginning and end of life, reproductive technology, genetics, resuscitation, and research.
- To interpret the concepts of health, health care and the individual in relation to society.
- To describe sources of health equity: distributive justice and resource allocation, political philosophy and health care provision, responsibility for health and ill-health, and health promotion.

[DPMSA Syllabus Refresh Committee, October 2024]

Note. The syllabus will be covered as far as possible but not necessarily exclusively by lectures, discussions, some student-led seminars, reading and written work. The professional experience of members of the course will be drawn on throughout and the learning initiatives of candidates are encouraged.

DPMSA Essay and Dissertation marking.

The following are the characteristics on which marks are awarded.

What is the question to be answered? Is it clearly set out, preferably in first paragraph? Is it clearly captured in the title? Is it on an important topic, relevant to this course and to health care? Does it reflect the writer's past or proposed professional experience?

Is there a chain of argument, or to what degree? An argument of some sort is necessary as opposed, for instance, to empirical data alone, or unsupported valuative claims, or recitals of free-floating theory. But note that empirical data must normally be used within an argument, as fact-free ethics are vacuous.

Is the structure of the argument clear and systematic? Are the strongest counter-arguments clearly set out? Are these counter-arguments really the strongest, and are they responded to adequately? Does the final conclusion take the response to the counter-arguments into account? Is the argument logically valid? That is, does the reasoning work? (Validity, in this sense, is a property of argument.) If the piece centres on an ethical dilemma, what is the dilemma, and why does the writer come down, on balance, on one side rather than the other?

Is there evidence for, or acceptability, of premises (i.e. reasons)? Are the statements put forward as reasons empirically or logically true or (where valuative) acceptable? (This assumes fact/value distinction to some degree.) Is the writing well-informed as to relevant matters of fact and relevant theory? Does the dissertation demonstrate intellectual seriousness and humane sensibility?

Is the style of writing clear? Is there good use of 'topic sentences' at the start of each paragraph? (They say what the paragraph does.) Is there good use of 'linking' phrases and sentences? Is there proper use of English? Is the work free of grammatical errors and spelling mistakes? Has the writer 'proof-read' it?

Is there evidence of a literature search? Is there an appropriate choice of articles, books etc. referred to, used and commented on? (NB Sources available only online, e.g. non-peer reviewed websites, should not normally be relied upon as main sources, unless this is necessary because of the nature of the subject under discussion.)

Are the references consistently formatted? Use the Vancouver style and keep to it. If websites are referenced the full URL of the page must be cited, together with the date the page was accessed.

Andrew Papanikitas
David Misselbrook

DPMSA Examiners' Committee 2025