



Guide to The Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine (DPMSA) Incorporating the Regulations & Curriculum 2026

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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.



Contents

Introduction	1
Exam contact details	1
Course contact details	1
Date and place of the examination	2
Examination timetable and fees	2
Regulations for admission to the examination	2
The examination	3
Review and appeal procedures	4
Examination Structure	5
The Short article (essay)	5
The Oral presentation	6
The Long article (dissertation)	6
- The abstract	6
- Advice on selecting an appropriate title	7
- References (Short & Long article)	7
- Further requirements	9
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF YOUR LONG ARTICLE (DISSERTATION)	10
Grading allocation	11
Syllabus	12
Appendix 1 – DPMSA Short article (Essay) and Long article (dissertation) marking.	14



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. Until 2024, only candidates who had attended the Society's 'Ethics and Philosophy of Healthcare' course were eligible to apply. The syllabus and examination were revised and updated substantially in 2024.

The Diploma was originally designed as a postgraduate qualification primarily for members of the health care professions. Over the years the course and diploma have extended to anyone who can describe a valid professional or academic interest in medical philosophy and ethics. Eligibility to enter the examination now extends to candidates who have either completed a suitable course of study (including the Apothecaries' course) or who can demonstrate sufficient experience in the field, for example through extensive teaching or publication.

The Diploma is intended to indicate familiarity with, as well as professional and academic skills in, the contemporary philosophy of medicine. There is a particular focus on 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.

Exam Contact Details

Ome Obodo, Academic Assessment Officer
Centre for Health Studies (CfHS), Apothecaries' Hall
Black Friars Lane
London
EC4V 6EJ

Course Contact Details

For further details on the course and bursary applications, please contact:

Matt Scudder, Academic Training Manager
Centre for Health Studies, Apothecaries' Hall
Black Friars Lane
London
EC4V 6EJ

Tel: 020 7236 1189

academictraining@apothecaries.org
www.apothecaries.org



Date and Place of the Examination

The Examination is held annually. Please refer to the [Administrative Guidance for Candidates](#).

Examination Timetable and Fees

Please refer to the [Administrative Guidance for Candidates](#).

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 Reasonable Examination Adjustments) 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

5. The examination will be conducted in English throughout. From **March to June 2025** the exam will consist of:
- The Short article (Essay):** please refer to item 6 in the [Administrative Guidance for Candidates \(www.apothecaries.org\)](http://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.
 - Oral assessment/presentation:** Candidates will be asked to present an outline of their Long article (dissertation), including key premises, argument and conclusion and answer questions from an audience of examiners and peers. This will take place at 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 Executive Director for Centre for Health Studies.
 - 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](http://www.apothecaries.org) 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 be taken at first entry. The published deadlines for receipt of the essay and the Long article (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.
6. 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.
- Candidates who fail any part of the examination will be marked as failing the whole examination.
 - In cases where the candidate has failed to satisfy the examiners in the Long article (Long article (dissertation)) or Oral presentation or Short article (Essay), or where the whole examination has been failed, the Executive Director for CfHS will notify the candidate whether or not the Long article (dissertation), Oral presentation or Short Essay may be revised and resubmitted/retaken.
 - At the discretion of the examiners' committee and the Centre for Health Studies, 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 re-entered in full.

7. 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.
8. Successful candidates are entitled to use the letters DPMSA after their names.
9. The examination fee will be determined from time to time by the AQSC. 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 \(www.apothecaries.org\)](http://www.apothecaries.org)
10. Candidates will be issued with an admission document once a place for the examination has been confirmed.

Review and Appeal Procedure

11. The processes outlined below will be dealt with according to the Examination Review and Appeal Procedure. Candidates must not make representations directly to an examiner.
12. The stages of the review and appeal procedures 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 Executive Director of the Centre for Health Studies. Feedback on examination performance may be available to unsuccessful candidates at their request. Requests must be made in writing and be received by the Executive Director within 28 days of receipt of the result letter.
14. The Executive Director 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 this Guide.
15. The Executive Director can also relay a transcript of additional general advice directly to the candidate, if such advice is available. This is advice generated by the Examiners' Committee, which had been agreed at the time of the examination. The Executive Director's role is to distribute the prepared information but not to interpret it.



16. There is no charge to the candidate for the feedback service.
17. **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 £180 for a review.
18. **Appeal (optional).** An appeal to the Society's AQSC is open to a candidate who is not satisfied with the original decision of the Examiners Committee, or the Feedback, or the Review. The candidate must state in writing the grounds upon which the appeal is being made. 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. There is a fee of £275 for an appeal.
19. If the appellant is dissatisfied with the report of the AQSC and wishes to make a final appeal to the Society's Court of Assistants, this should be communicated to the Executive Director within 28 days of the date of the notification informing the candidate of the decision of the AQSC.

Examination Structure

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 Short article (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 Centre for Health Studies will assign a candidate number to anonymize your Short article (essay) before marking, and advise you of such. For your Long article (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 Long article (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 **one electronic copy**, must be submitted to the Centre for Health Studies 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™ will automatically scan your essay for matching text from Turnitin's sources. This will be used by the examiners as a tool to contribute to judgement as 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 Long article (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 Long article (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 Long article (dissertation) allows the candidate to demonstrate specialist knowledge, it should be written with the non-specialist in mind.

References (Short & Long article)

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 Long article (dissertation) will be rejected.

38. The text of written submissions 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 written submissions 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.
44. The examiners' committee recognizes the potential use of AI technologies in a range of applications relevant to the completion of written assignments, such as searching for literature and correcting grammar, and does not prohibit their use by DPMSA candidates.
45. However, it is the expectation of the examiners that all submissions for the examination are the independent work of the submitting candidate, written in their own words, and incorporating their own ideas an interpretation.
46. Any ideas or content originating from a third party, including any content generated by AI tools, should be appropriately cited within the submission in accordance with normal academic standards. Any failure to attribute the origin of third-party content or ideas to the appropriate source is considered plagiarism; in this sense, the examiners consider content and ideas generated by AI technology to be no different from any other third-party source. The DPMSA plagiarism policy is available on the DPMSA website: <https://www.apothecaries.org/diploma-in-the-philosophy-of-medicine/>



47. All candidates must additionally complete an AI usage statement (see below) and include this on the title page of their submissions.

AI usage statement
Candidate number.....
<input type="checkbox"/> I certify that I have made no use of generative AI technology in the completion of this written submission.
<input type="checkbox"/> I acknowledge the use of [name and version number of generative AI tool] ([publisher and URL of AI tool]) in the completion of this written submission. I used this tool specifically to [briefly describe elements of the work for which you used the tool].
<input type="checkbox"/> I certify that no ideas or content generated by AI is presented as my own.
Date.....

Further requirements

48. **Long article (dissertation)s 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.

49. An electronic copy must be submitted on the **BrightSpace Learning Platform** no later than the deadline published in the [Administrative Guidance for Candidates \(www.apothecaries.org\)](http://www.apothecaries.org).

N.B. Failure to submit the Long article (**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.

50. Candidates are **strongly** advised to be thorough when proofreading for typing errors.

51. Any evidence of plagiarism at the time of the examination or subsequently will result in rejection of the candidate.

52. The Long article (dissertation) should include a title page with the following:

Diploma in the Philosophy of Medicine
Long article (dissertation) title
Candidate number
Date (e.g. 24 June 2024)
Word Count: (e.g. 3,500)

53. Candidates should make and sign a declaration such as the one given below. It should be submitted at the same time as the Long article (dissertation) but **NOT** incorporated into the work and remain a separate document.

Declaration
Signature & Candidate number
I certify that this long article (dissertation) is entirely my own work without plagiarism. I allocate joint copyright to the Society of Apothecaries.
Signed Date

54. The Long article (dissertation) should be produced in accordance with the guidelines set out in this guide and it is important that they be strictly adhered to. A long articles (dissertation) not in this format may be rejected by the Examinations Panel.

REQUIREMENTS FOR THE ELECTRONIC SUBMISSION OF YOUR LONG ARTICLE (DISSERTATION)

55. **Format** - Long articles (dissertation) should be written in 12 point black type, as a double-spaced document.
56. **Headers and footers** – Your candidate number and the Long article (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.
57. **One machine-readable, electronic (Word™) version** of your Long article (dissertation) must be submitted **on the BrightSpace Learning Platform**, no later than the deadline published in the [Administrative Guidance for Candidates](#).
58. **File name** – Each Long article (dissertation) should be presented as a single file. Files names must be created as: **Your candidate number DPMSA Long article (dissertation) title Date (YYMMDD)**. For example:

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

Note: The Long article (dissertation), in the form of **one electronic copy**, must be submitted to the Centre for Health Studies 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 Long article (dissertation) on the Society’s BrightSpace learning platform. On submission, Turnitin™ will automatically scan your Long article (dissertation) for matching text from Turnitin sources. This will be use by the examiners as a tool to contribute to judgement as the originality of candidate’s work.



Percentage allocation

59. Marks are awarded in the following proportions:

Short article (Essay) 20%

Oral assessment - 20%

Long article (dissertation) - 60%

60. Pass mark for each component is 50%.



SYLLABUS

61. The current examination reflects the following high order descriptors:
- Academic writing
 - Development of Argumentation
 - Real-world relevance
 - Orientation to publication
 - Skills in Oral argument and engagement
 - A full understanding of the Theory and practice of applied philosophy
62. Candidates for the DPMSA examination are expected to have participated in relevant education and private reading towards the following learning outcomes:
- To understand and describe the tools of philosophical thought: Informed 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.

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 Long article (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 evaluative 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 evaluative) 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 Long article (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.

DPMSA Examiners' Committee 2026