

UK Foundation Programme (UKFP)

Removal of Educational Achievements (EA)

Background

On the 24th February 2020, the decision was taken by MDRS Programme Board for the Educational Achievements component of the total application score for entry to foundation training to be removed (the rationale for this decision has been provided below). There was a requested for the impact of this decision to be modelled alongside the development work of geographical hotspots (i.e. additional points for preferencing typically hard to fill foundation schools and/or programmes) in order to determine a reasonable timeline.

The UK Foundation Programme (UKFP) have discussed the option of removing the educational achievements score for 2022 and for 2023. The Co-Chairs of UKFP are keen for the change to be implemented in 2022. However, there are significant risks and concerns from a reputational perspective that have been highlighted at UKFP Board. These concerns have been exacerbated by delays in decision-making in light of the pandemic.

Rationale

The percentage of applicants choosing to submit evidence of additional educational achievements has increased considerably over the years from approximately 30% when the process was first introduced to over 70% in the latest application round. The majority of applicants are now claiming for additional points, thereby resulting in less differentiation between application scores.

The number of universities where students now graduate with two degrees rather than a classic intercalated degree is also a concern as additional points are awarded to students for having completed the requirements of the university course, rather than going over and above to complete an entirely additional degree. The following universities graduate students with two degrees, which would therefore attract additional points as standard: Oxford, Cambridge, University College London (UCL), Imperial, Edinburgh, Nottingham, and any student who went to St. Andrews and finishes their studies at another medical school.

A recent paper by McManus et al¹ has explored the predictive validity of a number of different aspects of undergraduate medical education for a variety of post graduate metrics (including Post Graduate Exams, ARCP outcomes and sanctions by the GMC). The paper represents the aggregated data for 29 medical schools over the period since the introduction of the Improved Selection for Foundation Process. The SJT is a significantly stronger predictor of post graduate performance than the EPM by all measures.

It has been acknowledged that the opportunities to students to obtain additional degrees are not consistent across the applicant cohort, for example, in cases where all courses are intercalated, and the graduating cohort all have an additional degree. As such, there are concerns over the implications of the EA score in terms of widening participation and those who applicants who experience financial hardship².

Recruitment to and progress within the Foundation Programme does not require additional degree qualifications.

¹ McManus, I.C., Harborne, A.C., Horsfall, H.L. *et al.* Exploring UK medical school differences: the *MedDifs* study of selection, teaching, student and F1 perceptions, postgraduate outcomes and fitness to practise. *BMC Med* **18**, 136 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12916-020-01572-3>

² Kumwenda B, Cleland J, Prescott G, *et al* Relationship between sociodemographic factors and specialty destination of UK trainee doctors: a national cohort study *BMJ Open* 2019;9:e026961. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2018-026961

Modelling

Modelling work has been carried out and considered in regard to the implementation of hotspots, and the national Recruitment Delivery Group (RDG) have since recommended not to progress this proposal, particularly in light of the current position of oversubscription for foundation.

In regard to the removal of the educational achievements score specifically, the RDG have used data from previous years has been used to compare allocation results. Data was tested for two identical cohorts of applicants, one with the inclusion of the EA scores and one without.

The results showed that when applicants were ranked based on their academic decile and SJT score alone, 43% received a higher rank, 6 were assigned the same ranking and 57% moved down in the ranking. The data also showed that the disadvantage suffered by applicants after removal of the additional points was proportional to the number of points they had, with candidates with the most EA points suffering most, as one might expect to be the case. Interestingly, applicants with one or two EA points received higher ranks after the points were removed. Unfortunately, the data lacked granularity to be able to distinguish whether these were applicants with a higher level degree or 'no degree and one or two publications'.

It has been difficult to carry out robust modelling work through the system as the development and transition to the new Oriol had to be prioritised during the pandemic, at a time when resources have been stretched. There has also been some debate as to the relevance of modelling as this would be to assume no change in applicant behaviour following the removal of the educational achievements score.

Timeline

In March 2020, the national Recruitment Delivery Group (RDG) considered the options for when this change should be implemented, and the majority voted for the removal of the EA to take effect no sooner than for UKFP 2023.

Further to recent discussions and the decision for the Educational Achievements (EA) score to be removed from the application process for foundation training, the Co-Chairs of the UK Foundation Programme (UKFP) have proposed for this change to take effect for UKFP 2022.

At the last meeting of the UKFP Board, the point was made that administrative systems have inertia and medical students will have employed long-term strategies for optimising their application outcomes for foundation training. Now that we have reached October 2020, students who have opted to intercalate will have also commenced their courses. Students will have made commitments to gaining additional points and might have a just grievance if the rules are changed without due notice. Since intercalation frequently occurs between year 4 and 5 of a medical programme, it could be argued that two years' notice would be the minimum that should be given to removing the additional points.

In light of this, the preferred option would be to defer the removal of the educational achievements score until 2023 to ensure sufficient notice is provided and to mitigate the potential for adding greater uncertainty for applicants at a time when there is already considerable uncertainty worldwide following the impact of the pandemic. In separate discussions with the BMA and MSC, it appears that 2023 would be more agreeable for all stakeholders.

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