Dear Derek

**Remarking of Situational Judgement Test (SJT) papers**

Firstly, thank you for your candour explaining the situation regarding the errors in marking the SJT papers of approximately 1250 Foundation Programme candidates, uncovered this week.

As we understand it, all FP applicants have now been contacted and told the disappointing news that their job allocations will remain on hold until next week when the correct result of their SJT paper will be known and the algorithm is re-run. This comes a day after the allocations were originally released to applicants. Some students, who will have been delighted to receive their foundation school allocation, may even be told within a matter of days that they are now on the reserve list and that they may not find out their final allocation for weeks or months to come. The way in which students were contacted last night to inform them of the problem was disappointing, as the lack of detail and timing of the communication left many applicants with unanswered questions and a huge amount of anxiety, and we would be very happy to work with your team on the timing and content of any further communications to students.

Most concerning is that this latest error follows closely behind a similar problem identified last week relating to the marking of SJT papers of the lowest scoring candidates. Errors in the machine-marking system led to incorrect scoring and the potential for applicants to be rejected from the foundation programme entirely. At the time we were assured that this was an isolated incident that had been identified early in the process, and that no students’ allocations would be affected. It is disappointing that we are now faced with a second problem of such enormous significance, and frustrating to conclude that it could have been avoided.

This situation is hugely regrettable. It is unacceptable that the FP application and scoring process failed to validate adequately or check the machine-marking system to prevent errors like this occurring. We need to understand how this failure came about and what will be done to avoid this happening again.

There are a number of actions we believe should immediately be taken on behalf of affected students:

1. Applicants must be told exactly when they will be given their final allocation, and by what means. Given the levels of anxiety students will now be feeling there can be no room for uncertainty about when they should expect advice about their revised offer. The timing of the final notification of changed allocations should be publicised immediately, and there must be a telephone helpline for students to call with any subsequent queries. All communication with applicants must be done sensitively and with due regard for their well-being, given that many are in the middle of their final examinations.

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By email: Derek.Gallen@foundationprogramme.nhs.uk
2. Once affected candidates have been informed, the UKFPO must explain to all applicants the detail of what has happened and how this is to be addressed through regular direct emails and updates on the FP website.

3. Many students may have already acted in good faith on the information they were given on Monday about their foundation school allocation. Some may have made financial commitments relating to their placements from August. It would not be acceptable for any student to lose out financially through an unexpected change in their FP placement, and we would expect the UKFPO to compensate them accordingly.

4. The UKFPO and the Medical Schools Council must agree to an independent review of the application process this year, particularly examining what went wrong, to ensure similar problems are avoided for 2014, and to maintain confidence in all electronic recruitment, selection and offer systems. This review should examine the outsourcing of SJT machine-marking and recommend an improved process for future years that includes the validation of marked papers. We would want the BMA to be involved in the review.

In the shorter-term, please keep us fully informed of developments by the UKFPO and involved in how the problems will be resolved. In particular, we would like to be involved in decisions about the re-running of the algorithm. We are still largely unclear why these mistakes occurred and would like to work together with you and the Medical Schools Council to ensure that these events are not repeated, and that medical students regain confidence in the application process.

The BMA views this problem very seriously and will be taking action to inform and support students who are affected, beginning with a statement on our website today.

Yours sincerely

Ben Molyneux
Chair
Junior Doctors Committee

Alice Rutter & William Seligman
Co-Chairs
Medical Students Committee

c.c. Professor Tony Weetman, Chair, Medical Schools Council
Chris Welsh, Director of Education and Quality, Health Education England