Medical students committee
ARM report 2021

The [Medical Students Committee (MSC)](https://www.bma.org.uk/what-we-do/committees/medical-students-committee/medical-students-committee-overview) represents medical students in the UK. We consider and address issues of importance to medical students and make sure your views are represented in wider BMA policy. The following report provides an overview of the policy work and projects undertaken by the MSC over the past year.

Responding to the COVID-19 pandemic

We knew that the 2020-2021 academic year would not be without its challenges and during the past year we supported our members to adapt to medical training during a global pandemic, provided guidance on returning to university and clinical placements, supported students in receiving COVID-19 vaccinations by writing to deans of all medical schools in England and continued to [provide employment support to those students volunteering and working during this time to support the NHS.](https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/covid-19/vaccines/covid-19-vaccination-programme-extra-workforce)

Addressing the pandemic’s impact on medical education

*Addressing issues with online examinations*

Supporting students to navigate remote learning away from their peers and overcoming the challenges of online examinations was a key priority for the MSC this session. We supported our final year medical students as they experienced a series of hurdles during their application cycle for the UK foundation programme. We were made aware of errors occurring where slots for situational judgement test (SJT) exams became available the weekend prior to the official opening of the booking window, disabled applicants were unable to apply for reasonable adjustments for the test and reasonable adjustments were not correctly allocated to applicants at the point of the SJT slot booking.

Upon hearing these issues, we intervened on behalf of our members and [wrote](https://twitter.com/BMAstudents/status/1352643552665346048) in January 2021 to the UK foundation programme office (UKFPO) to raise concerns that the allocation process could be potentially discriminating against disabled candidates who would have to rebook slots for unadjusted exams they had had to cancel. We warned the UKFPO that it could be in breach of requirements under equalities legislation to promote equality of opportunity and called for it to prevent disabled students from suffering unlawful discrimination. In our letter we also called on the UKFPO to review all applications involving requests for adjustments and to ensure candidates would be able to either sit the exam at their first-choice location or be able to complete the test remotely. In addition, we called for a review on the processes that led to these unacceptable issues taking place.

In response to our lobbying of the UKFPO and the grassroot work of other student organisations, we successfully managed to ensure that the foundation application platform issues were resolved and that internal policies and processes for the booking platform would be streamlined to prevent this from happening again for the next cohort of finalists. Throughout this period, we kept our members informed over social media and our regular medical student newsletter, as well as supporting individual members to ensure that a satisfactory resolution according to their needs and requirements was reached.

The MSC has also continued to be involved in discussions and meetings with the Medical Schools Council (tMSC) and the General Medical Council (GMC) to ensure that medical education and summative assessments are prioritised, reinforcing the public’s trust in medical training and the confidence of students who will be soon entering the NHS workforce.

*Educational achievements and engagement with the UKFPO*

In February 2020, the Medical and Dental Recruitment and Selection group (MDRS) and the UKFPO [announced its decision in a letter](https://www.bma.org.uk/media/3595/for-entry-to-ukfp2023-1.pdf?id=%2FUKFPO%2FWebsite%20Documentation%2F6%20%2D%20Resources%2FFOR%20ENTRY%20TO%20UKFP2023%2Epdf&parent=%2FUKFPO%2FWebsite%20Documentation%2F6%20%2D%20Resources&p=true&originalPath=aHR0cHM6Ly9oZWFsdGhlZHVjYXRpb25lbmdsYW5kLnNoYXJlcG9pbnQuY29tLzpiOi9nL1VLRlBPL0VSSWpoM245ZDJkSm5VckNHeG1vdTVJQnlxLVFscHd0NXlPZEJsVF9WRTNZQlE_cnRpbWU9d2Q1UDZUR2MyRWc) sent to medical schools to remove the points for educational achievement (EAs) for medical students from the 2023 allocation when applying for the foundation programme. This meant that previous undergraduate degrees, Masters degrees, PhDs, publications and any intercalated degrees would no longer grant students extra points for the purposes of ranking.

The MSC has continuously opposed the removal of EAs on the basis that it is not made in the interest, nor to the benefit of students. The MSC has engaged with the UKFPO in regular stakeholder meetings where we have strongly opposed this decision and called for more evidence to be presented. With the BMA’s medical academic staff committee (MASC), we jointly wrote to the UKFPO on numerous occasions to flag the lack of transparency and consensus at stakeholder meetings where this decision was made. The latest MSC letter is available [here](https://www.bma.org.uk/media/3603/201209-final-draft-ukfpo-eas-corrected.pdf).

Given the wider ramifications that this will have for medical education and the impact of the decision on widening participation students, the MSC will be leading on developing a strategy for engagement with the UKFPO, working in collaboration with key stakeholders and our membership to ensure that a fair and equitable process and scoring system is developed for access to foundation training. As part of this, a key focus for us will be to understand the impact of removing EAs on widening participation students.

*Lobbying around the UK Medical Licensing Assessment (UKMLA)*

For several years, the MSC has campaigned against the introduction of the UKMLA, remaining engaged with the GMC and tMSC through key stakeholder events and quarterly meetings. In July 2020, the GMC announced that given disruptions caused by the pandemic, the implementation schedule for the UKMLA would be extended – students graduating in 2025 would now be the first to sit the UKMLA exams, rather than those graduating in 2024. Furthermore, the GMC announced changes to the proposed applied knowledge test (AKT) to achieve more consistency. As part of our lobbying efforts led by our deputy chair for education, we were able to gain a seat at tMSC meetings to ensure that interests of students were fed into the development process of the UKMLA and to avoid future pressures being put on students.

Over the past few months, we have collaborated with tMSC on developing policy on the allocation of reasonable adjustments, applications for mitigating circumstances, number of attempts and the equality impact assessment for the AKT portion of the UKMLA. We have started working with tMSC on updating and reviewing information and resources currently available online. We remain in close dialogue with the GMC and tMSC on the introduction of the UKMLA and are committed to ensuring that student interests are central to its development. We are also working towards creating a series of easily accessible resources to share on the newly updated BMA website and as part of that, we started our [series on changes to look out for with the UKMLA.](https://www.bma.org.uk/news-and-opinion/the-ukmla-change-is-coming-what-you-need-to-know)

*Supporting medical students’ transition to the foundation programme*

The transition from medical school to becoming a new doctor was paved with added difficulties this year and the MSC focused on supporting final years in navigating this stage. While oversubscription to the foundation programme has been a recurring issue in recent years, there were significant numbers of oversubscriptions this year. This meant that a higher number of final year students were waiting with increasing uncertainty and anxiety regarding the start of their new careers. We were pleased to share that following our lobbying efforts with UKPFO and Health Education England (HEE), all students placed on the reserve list for the foundation programme this year were allocated to their posts as in previous years. We worked closely with BMA’s junior doctors committee (JDC) on this to ensure prompt communication with applicants and the creation of these posts in a timely manner. We will continue to work with stakeholders to ensure that oversubscription will not present as an issue in future years, and that the UKFPO is prepared for the incoming higher numbers of graduates following the expansion of medical school places and the creation of new medical schools across the country.

In addition, we worked with the UKFPO to better support new graduates with their transition from medical school to training, securing an additional period of five extra days of paid shadowing for doctors starting F1 in August 2021. Attendance at the extended shadowing was on a voluntary basis and was offered in recognition of disruptions to training caused by the pandemic, as well as to enhance the confidence of new FY1 doctors as they embark on their first steps into their careers. This provided a good opportunity for our new doctors who wished to familiarise themselves with their new clinical environments and meet senior clinicians as well as for those that graduated oversees and who would be unfamiliar with the NHS.

Protecting student welfare and wellbeing

Many students have experienced increased pressures during the pandemic in both their academic and personal lives, along with safety concerns for them and their loved ones around contracting COVID-19. As we continue to emerge from and learn to live with COVID-19, it is important that we continue to advocate for change to improve studying conditions for medical students and provide the support they need.

The MSC has long advocated for the importance of prioritising and maintaining student wellbeing and welfare to ensure that students have access to appropriate support services. [BMA Wellbeing Services](https://www.bma.org.uk/advice-and-support/your-wellbeing) continue to offer support to both BMA members and non-members and we are pleased that this has now been extended to dependents of medical students and doctors too. We have seen a 33.7% increase in calls to BMA wellbeing services from medical students between 2019 and 2020 and hope that these statistics may remind you that you are not alone, and that there is support available.

The MSC is also developing best practice on how medical schools can support their students to ensure consistency across the schools. We have been liaising with our MSC representatives to understand the UK landscape of welfare support and how it has changed in the last year. Our COVID-19 tracker survey has also gathered evidence on how the pandemic is impacting students’ wellbeing. We will continue to work with our welfare lead to gather evidence and develop this project, with the hope of publishing a list of recommendations and good practice for medical school.

Addressing financial worries for students

For this session, we worked on better understanding the financial burden on medical students as a result of COVID-19. The MSC have started to gather more evidence on the financial situation of students by including questions as part of the BMA COVID-19 tracker survey and we will be looking into developing a questionnaire for members and non-members in order to understand the breadth of this issue. Other key areas we have been investigating this year as part of our work on addressing financial worries for students have been issues around funding for graduate students and the NHS bursary, the lack of funding for international students and the hidden costs of studying medicine. We are also currently in the process of reviewing and updating the BMA website with the financial information available to students.

Widening access to medicine

As part of our work to widen access to medicine, we want to ensure that students from the most disadvantaged backgrounds are encouraged to apply to study medicine, and that schools and universities do more to support these students throughout their degree. The MSC has been in discussions with various teams across the BMA to develop resources for pre-medical school students in the UK and abroad. Our objective is to assist pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds with applications to medical school as well as to demystify contextual admissions. We have also been exploring the development of a new bite-size resource on current ethical issues and how to navigate and discuss them at the interview stage when applying to medical school. We hope that by providing better guidance and information that is easy to navigate, this will help bridge the gap for students from widening participation backgrounds.

Conference

We were very pleased to see our grassroot members get together and engage at our 2020-21 annual MSC conference that took place virtually in the spring. The agenda committee did a fantastic job this year to ensure that our members voices continued to be heard and that medical student policy was formed despite ongoing disruptions from the pandemic. Delegates called for action on a variety of topics ranging from how medicine is taught in universities to the experience of international students. We look forward to implementing these motions passed on the day which will continue to direct our MSC lobbying efforts.

Supporting MSC representatives in their role

Ensuring that MSC representatives are supported in their role so that they can represent medical students’ interests in your medical schools has been a key piece of work for MSC this year taken forward by our member relations chair. We worked with representatives to better understand how we can best support them in their role and provided the tools to engage and lead their delegations to the annual MSC conference.

A key achievement this session has been the reconfiguration of the current MSC representative structure. We have worked with our devolved nations colleagues and member relations together this session in an effort to improve representation for graduate-entry medical students, students at multi-campus medical schools or at satellite campuses, and those on the new Scottish Graduate Entry Medicine (ScotGEM) programme. The selected cohorts will be electing their own specific deputy as part of a pilot for the 2021- 2022 session.

Looking ahead

The MSC will continue to represent medical students on the key issues surrounding medical education, welfare, finance and widening participation to medicine. The annual medical students conference will be held on Friday 8 and Saturday 9 April 2022. Interested in attending? You can hear more about the conference [here.](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tXl7ZQ5OW9Y&list=PLw2rKIESoTrufNGYhvcjHd7SWtNtaNBzu)

If you would like to know more about MSC’s work or have any feedback that you would like to share please get in touch with us at info.students@bma.org.uk