

Fighting for our rights, fighting for our future

Medical students committee report to ARM

Introduction

The BMA Medical Students Committee (MSC) represents medical students in the UK. We consider and address issues of importance to medical students and make sure medical student views are represented in wider BMA policy. Our work this year has focused on changing the culture of what it means to be a medical student and to be political. Changing the culture so that we speak out even when it is uncomfortable. Mobilising our membership to create real change, in ways that are tangible and manageable alongside exams, placement and their own wellbeing. The following report provides an overview of the policy work and projects undertaken by the MSC over the past year.

COVID-19 Inquiry

We knew that the 2021-2022 academic year would not be without its challenges and during the past year we have supported our members to adapt to medical training during a global pandemic, provided guidance on returning to university and clinical placements and guidance to students who took up voluntary and non-voluntary roles during the Omicron variant in December last year.

The BMA has undertaken one of largest independent reviews of the COVID-19 pandemic and our medical students contributed and shared their experiences on placements, as volunteers and healthcare workers. We hope this inquiry will provide better conditions for when we enter the workforce and allow those in political spaces to fight for the profession.

Our role in shaping the future of medical education

This year we have been facing questions regarding the future of medical education for our membership ranging from pilots for new blended learning, medical apprenticeship plans and Health Education England (HEE) reforms as well as new medical schools being launched. We have worked to redevelop our working relationship with the UKFPO, and our deputy chair for education has worked hard to highlight last year's challenges with the situational judgement test (SJT) and to work with the UKFPO constructively to ensure that the mistakes our final year students have been grappling with are not repeated for years to come. Nevertheless, we remain cautious and ready to hold the UKFPO to account for the issues that medical students faced in the past and are still facing.

This year we also joined a roundtable discussion with the UKFPO and the Medical Schools Council at the Developing Excellence in Medical Education Conference to talk about changes to the foundation programme allocation process (FPAS). We have been engaging with students on what the future of the FPAS should look like and what metrics of achievement should be used.

MSC originally opposed the introduction of medical apprenticeships, however we continue to be a voice in the room where discussions are happening as HEE progresses with plans to enrol students on a pilot programme. Our chair of the representative body, Dr Latifa Patel, has centred this as a pan-BMA issue, championing our engagement and ensuring no student would be disproportionately impacted by the implementation of this scheme.

Issues with the SJT

This year's round of SJT was not without its problems. In October last year, inconsistent communication on the opening of the SJT examination window led to intense distress for students. Candidates requiring reasonable adjustments also struggled to book via the main booking window and had to contact the Pearson Vue team directly, while an SJT practice paper was not clearly signposted on the UKFPO website before the examinations began. Fortunately, an independent review found that this did not impact students who sat the exam, but MSC have since challenged the UKFPO on its communication and poor handling of these issues. This led to the UKFPO acknowledging its mistakes and publishing public apologies for SJT related issues for the first time, which was a significant achievement in the UKFPO taking accountability. We will continue to work to improve student experience and will also continue to call for a review of lessons learned on the SJT process next session.

Oversubscription to the foundation programme

This has been an issue that the MSC that has raised time and time again. This year we saw the foundation allocation programme oversubscribed by 791 applicants. In a time where student mental health is declining, this additional source of uncertainty and stress is particularly unacceptable and the responsibility for it lies with the Government. As co-chairs, we spoke out publicly on various national journalism platforms and [authored a piece in the BMJ](#) to engage the public and the BMA also wrote to the health minister on this. As a result of our lobbying, all UK graduates were allocated to a foundation post and the reserve list was announced earlier in April, rather than May/June as in previous years. With an increase in medical student places and the introduction of medical

apprentices, it is unjustifiable that plans do not accommodate for the increase in the number of students, without guaranteeing jobs at the end of their training. We will continue to lobby the Government to increase funding and improve the process for allocating foundation places.

Lobbying around the UK Medical Licensing Assessment (UKMLA)

This session we continued to meet regularly with the GMC on the UKMLA. In line with policy passed at 2021 conference, we discussed how questions in the Applied Knowledge Test section should not perpetuate stereotypes. The GMC have since released its content map and we remain in close dialogue with them over the provision of revision resources for the online exam. As part of our lobbying efforts, we were able to gain a seat at Medical Schools Council meetings to ensure students' interests were fed into the development process of the UKMLA and to avoid future pressures being put on students. We will continue to keep students updated with progress on the UKMLA and share student resources from the GMC and the Medical Schools Council on the exam.

Oral evidence to the health and social care select committee

We were invited to give oral and written evidence to the health and social care select committee on its inquiry on workforce, including recruitment, training and retention. We used this opportunity to flag the growing issue of medical student welfare and emphasised that any plans for a sustainable workforce should ensure that student mental health and wellbeing is protected. We called for a reform to medical student funding to address the impact on student welfare and also called for alternative entry routes to medicine (such as apprenticeships) to widen access to medicine to current undergraduate/graduate entry aspiring medics.

Anti-racist work and decolonising the medical curriculum

The MSC have been committed to supporting medical students and institutions in challenging institutional racism and continuing to raise the responsibility of pastoral care to be fit for purpose for a diverse population of students.

[The 2019 racial harassment charter](#) was signed by a majority of medical schools, but we understand that the work does not stop here. Since then, we have asked medical schools that signed the charter to send us examples of good practice and we will continue to work with the Medical Schools Council and the Association for the Study of Medical Education on the development of the decolonising the curricula network for medical curricula to facilitate student involvement in its workplan.

Medical Students Conference 2022

We were very pleased to hold an in person medical student conference with the timely theme of 'Unmasked - the injustices and health crises hidden by the pandemic'. It was refreshing to passionate speeches from students on a variety of issues including calling for vaccine equity, LGBTQIA+ teaching in the curriculum, improved pastoral care for ethnic minority students and the hardship faced by international students.

Response to international affairs

This year's conference passed policy calling for an international affairs portfolio on the MSC, to focus on international issues impacting medical students in the UK. We also spoke about the importance of allyship and students using their voice to speak out at the BMA Doctors and Genocide – medical involvement in the persecution of the Uyghur people webinar in April.

Engaging with our membership

This year we welcomed representatives from newer medical schools such as Ulster university and look to welcome representatives from new medical schools in the future. Our member relations liaison group chair has produced a MSC representative roles and responsibilities document. This articulates the roles and responsibilities of our incoming representatives and their deputies, supporting them in engaging with BMA staff locally, engaging members on the ground and responsibilities in the run up to the conference. Last year's committee supported the revision of the MSC representative structure, this year the groundwork has been laid to evaluate the effectiveness of representatives at multiple campuses and for the new Scottish graduate entry medicine programme. Feedback from representatives has been positive and we look forward to continuing this structure.

Medical student survey

This year we launched our medical student survey, which covered medical student finance, extra-curricular activities, bullying and harassment, reasonable adjustments and wellbeing. These findings once finalised will be shared with our members, will support the MSC's portfolio work and inform how we can better support students throughout their medical careers.

Medical student finances

In this session, we have worked to try and better understand the financial situation of some of our medical students. We believe that no medical student should be financially struggling to a point where they consider leaving their studies. In addition to developing a finance strategy, we have supported grassroots campaigners, the #LiveableNHSBursary, on this issue. Other key areas of lobbying include funding for graduate students, the lack of funding for international students, the hidden costs of studying medicine, travel and reimbursements. Our devolved nation medical student committees have also made headway with Scotland MSC publishing an updated finance guide for medical students and Wales MSC writing to the health minister to review the NHS bursary.

Student welfare and wellbeing

This session we have used every platform available to highlight key welfare issues. It is imperative that students that require reasonable adjustments receive them in a timely manner throughout their course. We led a successful campaign on social media, to raise awareness of students with specific learning difficulties and experiences in accessing diagnosis while at medical school. We have also produced a wellbeing checklist for medical schools with the support of the BMA junior doctors committee. We hope this checklist will inspire change at a grassroots level and support representatives in lobbying

for improvised local wellbeing support. We will begin the rollout of this checklist in the next session.

Widening access

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 are supported throughout their degree. Finance should not be a barrier to engagement in medical school and MSC are taking the results from the latest medical student survey to best lobby for increased bursary access for low-income students. It is important that aspiring medical students see medicine as accessible and do not fall victim to expensive medical school experience courses. We have worked hard this year meeting with various widening participation charities and grass root student organisations to support the re-development of our widening participation webpages. In order to support current medical students, we have been in discussion with BMA charities on how we can identify and support initiatives that empower and uplift medical students. We hope that these steps will place MSC in a better position to provide better aspiring and current students from widening participation backgrounds.

Looking ahead

In the coming years MSC will try to give students the tools to create real changes, in ways that are tangible. Changing the culture so that we mobilise our representatives to speak out even when it is uncomfortable and the confidence to take up space and challenge issues on a local and national level. 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 31 March and Saturday 1 April 2023. 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

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MSC UK co-chairs

www.bma.org.uk/what-we-do/committees