

# Barriers to access, transition and progression of widening participation students in UK medical schools

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Barriers to access, transition and progression of Widening Participation students in UK Medical Schools: The students' perspective [version 1]

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## Abstract

This article was migrated. The article was marked as recommended.

Much attention is being given to the implementation of fair selection criteria for access to Medical Schools in the UK, in order to address an imbalance in social class representation in the medical professions. Largely overlooked however, are the disadvantages faced by potential applicants both before and after selection by the Medical Schools. Here, we explore the nature of the barriers - both real and perceived - to accessing, transitioning and progressing in the medical education system as experienced by 125 current students at three UK Medical Schools. An online survey was conducted and responses to open and closed questions were categorised on the basis of the number of Widening Participation (WP) flags (e.g. index of multiple-deprivation, parental education and school Higher Education participation rate). The results show that differences in economic, social and cultural capital that students acquire through their background impact on their chances of admission to medical schools, highlighting issues such as access to finance and privileged knowledge, with school support and work experience opportunities being less available to WP students. Equally, these students found the transition to Medical School harder, and highlighted a lack of peers from similar backgrounds, a perception of being less well prepared academically and generally finding it difficult to fit in. Money worries and having to work for extra income, exacerbated the feeling of not fitting in, by losing out on key extracurricular activities. The data presented stress the importance of early support of (potential) WP students in secondary schools, and of a strong support network throughout their

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#### Invited Reviewers

1

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#### version 1

17 May 2021

report

report

1. **John Cookson**, University of Worcester

2. **Enam Haque**, University of Manchester

Any reports and responses or comments on the article can be found at the end of the article.

medical education.

### Keywords

Widening Access, Admissions to medicine, Transition to university, Barriers to integration, Social, Economic and Cultural capital

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- 1) Did you participate in the Reach programme in High School?
- 2) Did you participate in any other outreach programme before you joined the medical school?
  - If you answered 'yes' to the question above, can you tell us what other program you took part in?
- 3) What is your home postcode? (this is to correlate to Government SIMD data)
- 4) What is your current year of study?
- 5) Which school did you attend before medical school?
- 6) Were you entitled to FSM (Free School Meal) in High School?
- 7) Were you a recipient of the EMA (Educational Maintenance Allowance) in High School?
- 8) Do you come from a cared for background, where you did not live with you parents?
- 9) Are you the 1st person in your family to have attended university?
  
- 10) How supportive have your parent(s) / guardian(s) / carer(s) and/or other family members been in relation to your education and your decision to apply to study Medicine? What type of support (if any) did they provide?
- 11) Have you ever felt that your background has disadvantaged you in any way during your time at Medical School?
  - If you answered 'yes' - can you tell us in what way you felt disadvantaged?
- 12) Do you feel your coursework grades accurately reflect your critical thinking ability?
- 13) Do you feel your exam grades accurately reflect your academic ability?
- 14) Do you feel confident in asking/emailing staff for further explanation or clarification on concepts you find difficult?
  - Have you ever felt that you could have benefited from extra support?
  - Have you ever done this?
- 15) How well has the medical school supported you academically?
  - If 'not very well/not at all', how do you feel the medical school could better support you academically?
  
- 16) Do you feel you would benefit from academic support or it is more of a generic support you would benefit from?
- 17) Which type of exam do you find most difficult (e.g. knowledge based end of year assessments, coursework and critical appraisal, situational OSCE scenarios?)
- 18) Why do you feel this is (e.g. gaining sufficient breadth of knowledge is difficult, judging depth, writing skills (grammar, arranging thoughts in an organised manner), pressure of being observed in an OSCE scenario?)
- 19) During your time at medical school, which coursework exam have you found the most challenging?
  
- 20) Did you feel adequately prepared for the transition to Medical School from High School? If not, in what ways did you feel unprepared?
- 21) What types of support did your school or college provide to help you prepare your application to medical school? e.g. Personal statement, UKCAT, interview skills...
- 22) Are you aware of the REACH/WP student society within the medical school?
  - If you answered yes to the previous question, have you been involved with?

- What are the benefits of being part of this network?

23) Have you encountered any financial difficulty during your time at medical school? MedEdPublish 2021, 10:132 last updated: 13 DEC 2021

24) Has your financial situation at any point ever affected your performance at University?

25) Have you ever benefited from bursaries or loans from the University or trusts or extra means tested SAAS/SLC contributions?

26) Are you a commuting student, living at home?

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## Migrated Content

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### Version 1

Reviewer Report 18 June 2021

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### Enam Haque

University of Manchester

This review has been migrated. The reviewer awarded 5 stars out of 5

Widening participation is key to Medicine, if we are to have doctors that are representative of the population they serve. There has been excellent progress, through the work of the Medical Schools Council Selection Alliance and National Medical Schools Widening Participation Forum. However, the inequalities facing applicants and medical students still exist. This pansector study clearly lays out the issues, and opens up discussions on what medical schools need to do, in order to address student access, success and progression issues. Well done to the authors on producing this excellent paper.

**Competing Interests:** No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

Reviewer Report 02 June 2021

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### John Cookson

University of Worcester

This review has been migrated. The reviewer awarded 5 stars out of 5

Thank you. An interesting and important contribution and the use of the number of 'flags' as a measure is innovative. My only problem was that I couldn't find the denominator for the number of respondents. It

looks as if the research sample was a sub group of a sub group, so generalising the findings could be difficult.

**Competing Interests:** No conflicts of interest were disclosed.

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