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Vash Loffelmann
Scottish Medical Students Committee, Chair
British Medical Association

Date: 4 April 2024

Via email: AJenkins@bma.org.uk

Dear Vash,

Allocation Process to Foundation Programmes in Scotland

Thank you for your letter and for sharing your blog with me.

On behalf of the BMA Medical Student Committee ('the committee') you raise a number of issues which I am pleased to respond to on behalf of NHS Education for Scotland (NES).

You raise a number of points which I will address in turn.

Under the previous arrangements, there was significant challenge raised by medical students and medical schools about the previous merit based system which included performance through medical school and an additional exam - the Situational Judgement Test. The committee will recall a number of criticisms of this process and what many considered to be a level of inherent unfairness. Accordingly, there was a level of support for the move to the new system as is set out in the Foundation Programme Allocation Process Stakeholder Engagement Outcome - UK Foundation Programme.

This year there are 1002 foundation posts in Scotland and 42 placeholder posts. The placeholder posts are there to accommodate initial oversubscription to the programme and provide a buffer so all students know they will have a post from August. We know that approximately 5% of medical students put forward for the foundation programme will be unable to take up their post (typically due to illness or failing finals), hence the need for placeholders.

Of the posts across Scotland, 60 were pre- allocated as per the advertised criteria, 59 posts are Foundation Priority Programme posts (Difficult to recruit areas – Aberdeen/Highland locations, Clyde Coastal and Dumfries) and 51 are Specialised Foundation Programme (SFP) posts, typically medical education leadership and research.

The remaining posts, 832, went to the general allocation pool with all but one of the successful candidates ranked Scotland as their first preference.



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Chief Executive: Professor Karen Reid

We believe this is an excellent result for Scotland and for medical students in achieving allocation to their foundation school of choice. As the committee will be aware, in recent years Scotland has been able to demonstrate strong progress in fill rates.

In your correspondence you go on to describe the next stage in the process and the challenges experienced. It is important to note that this is the same process as previous years for allocation within Scotland.

While the Scottish Medical Student Committee (SMSC) is correct that there are “over 800 possible job placements”, this figure represents all possible placements. Applicants generally select one of 4 geographical regions first; this narrows the placements/programme numbers significantly. The Scotland Foundation School has considerably increased the level of granular detail about groups and rotations for this year on the ScotMT website. If the committee has suggestions for further improvement, I will ensure they receive the necessary attention.

I wish to clarify that the first stage of preferencing is not “week-long” but ran from 7th to 18th March. This is to programme group (based on region). This is a UK wide process and is a UK decision. I can confirm that NES is exploring with the UK Foundation Programme Office (UKFPO) if this first stage could be extended to give additional time for applicants. Preferencing for individual programmes opened on 18th March and closed on March 27th. The Scotland Foundation School welcomes individual enquiries and has received enquiries from around 30 of the 1044 applicants who have been placed in Scotland. Each has received a bespoke response on the same day (or within 1 working) day.

While it is correct that some placeholder groups had zero places available, applicants including them in their ranking will not be disadvantaged. This has been clarified with applicants and we will ensure the guidance is reviewed and clarified.

I acknowledge that information from UKFPO on placeholders could have been provided earlier – ideally on 7 March. Following requests from Scotland (and elsewhere in the UK), this information was received from UKFPO on Monday 11 March and was posted the same day on the ScotMT FAQ website ([Placeholders more information \(scot.nhs.uk\)](https://www.scot.nhs.uk/placeholders)). All applicants allocated to the Scotland Foundation School were emailed on 11 March to inform them of this update. Feedback has been provided to UKFPO and we will work with UKFPO to ensure this issue does not reoccur in 2025.

I note you state in the blog that “the feeling among many students that we are not appropriately consulted on changes”. I would highlight that senior staff from the Scotland Foundation School held briefing meetings with all of the Scottish Universities and their final year students and took/responded to questions relating to the new Preferred Informed Allocation (PIA) process. The UKFPO also ran a number of webinars early in the academic year to provide as much information as possible to support applicants.

In summary, the process of ranking groups is not new and is exactly the same as in previous years. Although the current cycle is ongoing, NES notes that all UK-based applicants who first-preferenced the Scotland Foundation School have been allocated to Scotland. The withdrawal of the Situational Judgement Test from the application process has been a positive development. I note the comments on changes to the Specialised Foundation Programme allocation from 2025 and I would refer to the recent correspondence from NES to BMA SMSC on this.



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I was pleased to read in the blog that the SMSC are ready to work with NHS Education for Scotland and other relevant stakeholders to improve the whole process of entering medical practice as a Foundation doctor in NHS Scotland. Accordingly, I would anticipate that you will be publishing my response alongside your previous blog post so that all who read it will understand the value NES places on managing a successful transition from medical school to foundation year – which we all know is both an exciting, and challenging time and the culmination of many years of hard work at medical school.

Collectively, we have an opportunity to work collaboratively to develop our arrangements, recognising that we do so in the context of UK wide arrangements. I am confident that you will want to reinforce to the committee the opportunities we have to support this transition and make it a positive experience.

Best wishes



Professor Karen Reid

Chief Executive, NES



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