

## Medical Schools Council and Dental Schools Council Admissions Deans Meeting Woburn House, London, 20 April 2010

The now annual Medical Schools Council and Dental Schools Council Admissions Deans meeting was held on the 20<sup>th</sup> of April 2010 in London. Whilst representatives from all of the 31 undergraduate Medical Schools and 13 Dental Schools were registered to attend, an unprecedented closure of UK and overseas airports meant that all delegates from schools in Scotland and Northern Ireland were unable to attend. This also meant a slight change in the scheduled programme, as Co-Chair Dr Keith Steele, Director of Admissions for Queens University Belfast and speaker Dr Jon Dowell of Dundee Medical School were both unable to attend. Professor Jon Cohen, Dean of Medicine Brighton and Sussex Medical School led an informative agenda exploring issues in undergraduate admissions including widening participation, verifying work experience and conducting interviews. Mr Don Spence of Birmingham Dental School stepped in to chair the panel session on conducting interviews.

### Update from SPA - Supporting Professionalism in Admissions Programme

*Dan Shaffer, Senior Project Officer, SPA*

The [Supporting Professionalism in Admissions](#) (SPA) Programme promotes best practise in admissions and is independent of UCAS, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) and government. Dan Shaffer highlighted that whilst there had been a significant increase in this year's UCAS applications selecting programmes like medicine and dentistry had been far less affected by this increase than other courses. He noted a number of changes to UCAS Apply 2011 including the introduction of a personal identifier to replace the old UCAS application number; that references for independent applicants to be sent direct from the referee; and the introduction of an additional course level question on criminal convictions. He also encouraged delegates to plan for the move to paperless processing by 2013. He highlighted SPA's current key priorities including the use of contextual data such as postcode analysis to consider equity as well as equality at admissions. He commended delegates for the revised *MSC Guiding Principles for Admission of Medical Students*, which he felt was a highly positive step for medical schools. He encouraged medical schools to consider agreeing a review structure for updating the principles, and to link to the revised principles on their websites. He added that if an institution's policy or practice diverges from the principles, which it may, there should be a solid and defensible rationale.

### Widening participation in medicine and dentistry: Best practice at admissions

*Kenton Lewis, Head of Widening Participation and Student Recruitment at St George's*

Kenton Lewis described the approach to widening participation at St George's, which includes: outreach activities with children as young as five, young people and adult learners; a bespoke website <http://www.tasteofmedicine.com/>; and adjusted entry criteria for educationally disadvantaged applicants. The *taste of medicine* website is an interactive resource to help young people find out about and pursue a career in healthcare. The website includes guidance on obtaining and making the most of relevant work experience. He added that at St George's the emphasis is not on the experience itself but on the applicant's ability to reflect on it. Applicants are scored against eight competencies only one of which is academic performance. St George's has been applying adjusted entry criteria since 2003, whereby applicants are guaranteed an interview with AAAb or BBCb if this is 60% higher than the applicant's school average. He emphasised that selection using adjusted entry criteria was still about selecting those with the greatest potential to be the best healthcare students and professionals. Whilst he acknowledged that this tool was a 'blunt instrument' it did allow admissions teams to recognise performance in relation to peer group rather than the national average. Applicants are then selected purely on the basis of their performance in the interview. He acknowledged that whilst the approach described had worked very well for St George's it would not be appropriate for all institutions. He cautioned against the deficit model approach to widening participation which encourages institutions to work with those who are not engaged with higher education, to raise their aspirations and improve their acceptability to study at university. He encouraged medical and dental schools to look at widening participation not simply in terms of raising aspirations but

also in a way that addresses the culture of university and medicine and dentistry; as for universities it is also about being something that people want to aspire to. He added that the reasons why someone is not engaged with higher education are often complex and that the higher education sector is just one of the contributors to widening participation in the professions.

### **Applicants' work experience: Verification, reflection and barriers**

*Dr Gordon Dent, Director of Admissions for Undergraduate Medicine, Keele University*

Dr Gordon Dent spoke to the meeting on the issues around applicants' work experience. Verifying applicants' work experience claims is made difficult by the volume of applications and the poor quality of some host organisations' record keeping. He asked whether there was an appetite for a national approach to verification, and suggested medical and dental schools conduct a pilot using a common paper verification form. It was noted that many schools had existing processes to verify work experience claims. Some schools use their own work experience forms and then verify a random sample of claims; schools may also ask applicants to reflect on their work experience during the interview. Delegates agreed that a template form for verifying work experience should be made available for schools to use and or adapt if they wish but that a national pilot was not appropriate at this time. It was also felt that schools should make clear on their websites and in communications to applicants what work experience information will be asked for, when and how it is verified. This information should also make it clear that should someone be found to have made a false claim they may be excluded at any point in the duration of the course.

### **Update from UKCAT**

*Dr Sandra Nicholson, Chair, UKCAT*

Dr Sandra Nicholson updated the meeting on UKCAT deadlines, developments and research priorities. She reminded delegates of UKCAT's commitment to widening participation, and asked UKCAT medical and dental schools to link to the information on bursaries (<http://www.ukcat.ac.uk/pages/details.aspx?page=Bursaries>) on their websites. She noted that this year's deadline for registration, bursary applications and exemption applications was 27 September 2010, and that the last test date was 8 October 2010. The 2009 UKCAT technical report indicated a significant increase in candidates taking the test in 2009; an increase in the average score for Decision Analysis; a similar performance pattern for different groups taking the test to previous years; and increases in measures of reliability across the sections. In response to concern about candidates not finishing the quantitative reasoning paper there will be fewer questions in this section. It has been found that as a group, SEN candidates tend to do better than other candidates and so work is being conducted to explore how timing may affect scores. She noted that UKCAT has research as one of its priorities and demonstrating whether UKCAT really does add value to the admissions and selection process for undergraduate medical and dental students is key. Areas of research will look at: whether the test is reliable and fair; whether there is any predictive validity in relation to medical/dental school progression data; the value of the non-cognitive components of the test; and the effect of the test on the medical and dental school student profiles in terms of socio-demographics.

### **Panel Discussion: Conducting interviews**

A discussion of best practice and different approaches to conducting interviews was facilitated by a series of presentations:

*Leslie Currie, SPA - Conducting interviews: What is good practice?*

*Mr Don Spence, Birmingham Dental School - Interview practice in Dental Schools*

*Dr Aileen O'Brien, St Georges Medical School - Multiple Mini Interviews in practice*

*Dr Jane Kidd, Warwick Medical School - Assessment Centres*

All presentations, including those from the panel discussion have been made available via a link to the Dental Schools Council website: <http://www.dentalschoolscouncil.ac.uk/Admissions.htm>