

Academic performance of UK doctors and medical students varies by ethnicity

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UK trained doctors and medical students from minority ethnic groups tend to underperform academically compared with their white counterparts, finds a study published in the British Medical Journal today.

This attainment gap has persisted for many years and must be tackled to ensure a fair and just method of training and assessing current and future doctors, say the authors.

A third of all UK medical students and junior doctors are from minority ethnic groups. Although universities and the NHS are legally required to monitor the admission and progress of students and staff by ethnic group, evidence remains patchy.

So researchers at University College London analysed the results of 22 reports comparing the [academic performance](#) of 23,742 medical students and UK trained doctors from different ethnic groups.

They found that candidates of non-white ethnicity underperformed compared with white candidates.

The effect was statistically significant and widespread across different medical schools, different types of exam (including those marked by machines), and in both undergraduate and postgraduate assessments.

Ethnic differences in attainment seem to be a consistent feature of

[medical education](#) in the UK, say the authors. They have persisted for at least the past three decades and cannot be dismissed as atypical or local problems.

While exam performance is by no means the only marker of good performance as a doctor or medical student, they add, the fact remains that without passing finals, [medical students](#) cannot become doctors, and without passing postgraduate exams, it is much harder for doctors to progress in a medical career.

The authors call for more detailed information to track the problem as well as further research into its causes.

"Without these actions, it will be a struggle to ensure a fair and just method of training and assessing our future and current doctors," they conclude.

"Such complex problems are unlikely to have simple solutions - what happens in medical schools is a reflection of wider society," argues Professor Aneez Esmail from the University of Manchester in accompanying editorial. He believes the solutions will be found "through critically appraising assessment methods, curriculums, the way that we engage with students in an increasingly multicultural society, and the role models that we provide."

Provided by British Medical Journal

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