

UK medical schools failing to deal with racism, finds BMJ investigation

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Medical schools in the UK are unprepared to deal with the racism and racial harassment experienced by black and ethnic minority students, an investigation by *The BMJ* has found.

The BMJ sent freedom of information requests to the UK's 40 public undergraduate medical schools. Of the 32 that responded, only half (16) collect data on complaints from their students about racism and racial harassment. And since 2010 they've recorded just 11 complaints.

This number is lower than that documented by UK universities in general. Last year the Equality and Human Rights Commission reported that UK universities recorded just 560 complaints of racial harassment over three and a half years, although 60,000 students said they had made a complaint.

The figures were described as "sad and shocking" and showed that some universities were "oblivious to the issue" of racism.

It is against this background that the British Medical Association (BMA) has today launched a charter for medical schools "to prevent and effectively deal with racial harassment" and guidance for students on addressing and preventing racial harassment.

The issue of racism in medical schools is important because students from ethnic minority backgrounds make up 40% of undergraduates, compared with 22% in universities generally.

And perhaps more importantly, racial harassment is seen as a contributing factor to the attainment gap observed between ethnic minority and [white students](#), and later between doctors.

In the charter Chand Nagpaul, chair of council at the BMA, said such behaviour "damages self-esteem and confidence, affects learning, and contributes to the ethnic attainment gap that

emerges through medical education and training."

The BMJ's investigation also finds that lines of responsibility for medical students during clinical placements are not always clear. Although most medical schools have a published protocol for dealing with complaints from students about racial incidents while they are on university premises, this is not the case when students are in hospitals or GP surgeries.

Dr. Nagpaul said that medical schools needed to take ownership of the current situation. "Medical students are the future of the profession. They need to know that they can expect an inclusive and [safe environment](#) at medical [school](#) and on work placements."

The BMJ also looked at the ethnic makeup of students and staff. It found that while 40% of the UK's medical students are from [ethnic minority](#) backgrounds, this applies to only 13% of teaching staff.

In its charter, the BMA recommends that all medical schools have a policy aimed at improving the diversity of [medical school](#) lecturers.

More information: Are medical schools turning a blind eye to racism? [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.m420](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.m420)

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