

## National Evaluation of Specialty Selection (NESS) at The University of Birmingham Project Summary

### Introduction

Selecting the right doctors for speciality training is important for the doctors applying, those with whom they will work and for the patients who will be treated by them in the NHS. Recent changes to the way in which post-graduate medical training is structured (Modernising Medical Careers, MMC) enabled previous selection processes to be revised. The initial change, to a national application system, MTAS, was rolled-out in 2007 but was ill-received by applicants and other doctors and was also subject to serious security breaches. The initial response to these problems was a return to pre-MMC selection procedures.

The Department of Health is now keen to build up an evidence-base for best practice in the selection of specialty trainees and are subsequently funding a number of pilot schemes across regions, specialties and entry levels for training. These pilots will run alongside existing selection processes, so that the results from the pilots will not contribute to selection outcomes. The aim of NESS is therefore to provide an objective evaluation of these pilots, synthesising the results of the individual pilots with an analysis of data from existing national selection processes. The evaluation will be centred on four key criteria:

1. Validity (selecting the right doctors for training)
2. Reliability (consistency in selecting the right doctors for training)
3. Cost-effectiveness (value for money)
4. Acceptability (by applicants and the profession)

### Methods

We will apply a common methodological protocol across all 13 specialties involved to collect a wide range of data. For the larger nationally recruiting specialties, we are focusing on five deaneries: London, North West, Oxford, West Midlands and Yorkshire & Humberside.

#### Information about the pilots and existing selection processes (Context and cost-effectiveness)

Key personnel at each site will be interviewed and an analysis of key documentation will be undertaken in order to obtain detailed information about the selection processes and their development, as well as costs data. Where feasible, selection processes (e.g. assessment centres) will be observed by a member of the evaluation team.

#### Quantitative Data (Validity, reliability and cost-effectiveness)

Applicants' scores at each stage of the selection process, personal characteristics and subsequent performance in training will be obtained from Deanery and Royal College databases (subject to agreement).

#### Views about the pilots and existing selection processes (Acceptability)

Applicants will be invited to complete up to three brief surveys to determine their views on the selection processes. Applicants will be asked for consent to link their views to selection outcomes. Interviews and focus groups will be undertaken with assessors and applicants.

Each pilot site will be conducting a local evaluation and it will be necessary for them to obtain informed consent from applicants prior to their inclusion in the pilot scheme and local evaluation. This consent will extend to our national evaluation. Participation will be voluntary.

### Ethics and Confidentiality

All data collected in relation to the study, including data from secondary sources, will be managed in accordance with the strict protocols that exist within The University of Birmingham to ensure security and confidentiality. The project has been registered on the University's Data Protection System. All data will be kept secure (in locked filing cabinets and password-protected computers in personal offices) and coding will be used to ensure that no data will be stored in a form that would allow individual participants to be identified. We have been informed that this project is defined as service evaluation and does not require NHS ethical approval. Nevertheless, the research will adhere to the ethical guidelines of the British Educational Research Association (BERA) and has been approved by The University of Birmingham ethics committee.