Reviewer's report

Title: UKCAT and medical student selection in the UK – what has changed since 2006?

Version: 0 Date: 02 Feb 2020

Reviewer: Jill Yielder

Reviewer's report:

Title: UKCAT and medical student selection in the UK - what has changed since 2006?

This is an interesting article that reports on the use of the UKCAT for the selection of students for medical programmes. It is methodologically simple, using retrospective annual telephone interviews with medical schools belonging to the UKCAT Consortium (how many interviews were there annually? The methods section doesn't specify). While it doesn't offer anything new conceptually, it does present information useful for medical schools internationally that use UCAT, or that may be thinking of taking this approach.

I have minimal suggestions for change, focusing on editing issues:
*I suggest that some attention is paid to the hierarchy of headings used. These were confusing. There need to be major headings for Background, Methods, Results, Discussion and Conclusions, then there seem to be two layers of sub-headings within these, but they aren't consistently indicated by heading type, with some having the same level of heading as the major headings above and others written in italics. In addition, all the figures need to have their own headings, as distinct to the section headings.
*I the way numbers are written is inconsistent, sometimes being in words, other times numerals. Generally, a consistent approach is to put numbers less than 10 in full and others in numerals.
*There are many places where it is written 'medical selection'. I think it would be more useful to write this as 'medical student selection', as these students may not graduate into the profession of medicine.

Further details are noted by page, not to be pedantic, just to help the reader:
*P.2 Abstract, line 9 '…student numbers have increased…'
*P.2, line 29, I suggest that the term 'borderline' is added to, is borderline what? Could be borderline for selection. I think that to put '… at a decision borderline' would be sufficient here.
*P.2, line 36, 'Whilst student numbers have increased…'
*P.2 Background, line 56 (and in other places in the article), 'Medical student selection…'
*P.3, line 1, commas needed either side of 'and challenge'
*P.3, line 6, UCAS needs to be written in full first time
*P.3, line 18 - I assume this too means medical student numbers?
*P.3, line 39 - are they not called 'medical programmes' rather than 'medicine programmes'?
*P.3, line 51 - why is Jane Adam named specifically while RG isn't? It's not usual to name the people involved in data collection explicitly like this.
*P.4, Borderline description - I think it would be useful for a very brief explanation of the term 'light touch' that is used through the article - this is the first mention.
*P.6, line 2, it might be useful to elaborate this a little further, ie 'This number rose steadily over time, from one school in 2007'.
*P.8, line 14, '…use of the test to distinguish…'
*P.8, section on widening access - it would be helpful for the reader to have some examples here, particularly for an international audience. Also, the first sentence of the third paragraph says some schools did not require some widening access candidates to take the test - why not, how did they decide who should take it and who didn't need to?
*P.9, line 23 'medical and dental schools', ie plural
*P.9, line 37, rather than saying 'all but 3 schools used…', it may be more meaningful to the reader to say 'x out of y schools used…'
*P.10, lines 22-23, this sentence needs reworking. Maybe deleting the first 'and' with a comma after 'above' would help.
*P.10, line 48, egs of under-represented groups would be useful for an international audience

**Are the methods appropriate and well described?**
If not, please specify what is required in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Does the work include the necessary controls?**
If not, please specify which controls are required in your comments to the authors.

Unable to assess

**Are the conclusions drawn adequately supported by the data shown?**
If not, please explain in your comments to the authors.

Yes

**Are you able to assess any statistics in the manuscript or would you recommend an additional statistical review?**
If an additional statistical review is recommended, please specify what aspects require further assessment in your comments to the editors.

Not relevant to this manuscript

**Quality of written English**
Please indicate the quality of language in the manuscript:

Acceptable

**Declaration of competing interests**
Please complete a declaration of competing interests, considering the following questions:
1. Have you in the past five years received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

2. Do you hold any stocks or shares in an organisation that may in any way gain or lose financially from the publication of this manuscript, either now or in the future?

3. Do you hold or are you currently applying for any patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

4. Have you received reimbursements, fees, funding, or salary from an organization that holds or has applied for patents relating to the content of the manuscript?

5. Do you have any other financial competing interests?

6. Do you have any non-financial competing interests in relation to this paper?

If you can answer no to all of the above, write 'I declare that I have no competing interests' below. If your reply is yes to any, please give details below.

I declare that I have no competing interests

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal. I understand that my name will be included on my report to the authors and, if the manuscript is accepted for publication, my named report including any attachments I upload will be posted on the website along with the authors' responses. I agree for my report to be made available under an Open Access Creative Commons CC-BY license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). I understand that any comments which I do not wish to be included in my named report can be included as confidential comments to the editors, which will not be published.

I agree to the open peer review policy of the journal.