State school students twice as likely as private school peers to finish top in medical school

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Study shows state school pupils are more likely to outperform privately educated students. Credit: University of Aberdeen

Medical students from state schools are nearly twice as likely to graduate

in the top 10% of their class as students from independent schools, according to a new study by the University of Aberdeen.

That is despite students from independent schools scoring slightly higher in the entry tests required to get into medical school.

Researchers behind the study say it provides evidence that all other things being equal, students from state schools are likely to outperform those from independent schools once at medical school.

The study, published in *BMJ Open*, is the first in the UK to look at the relationship between students' secondary school grades, the school they attended and their performance through medical school.

The results will feed into ongoing discussions about changing admission criteria for medical school to take into account the context and circumstances that applicants have achieved their secondary school grades.

The study analysed data from students who graduated from 33 UK medical schools between 2012 and 2013.

The study considered candidates' demographics; pre-entry grades (UCAS tariff scores) and their pre-admission test scores to medical school (UKCAT and GAMSAT). The study used the score each student achieved in their Educational Performance Measure (EPM) on their completion of medical school as the overall measurement of success.

The study showed that whilst there was no significant difference between UCAS scores, students from independent schools scored significantly higher in their pre-admission tests (UKCAT and GAMSAT) compared to students from state schools. However, over the course of medical school, state school students were more likely to

outperform their independently schooled classmates.

"This study adds to the debate about who is admitted to medical school in the UK and how they are selected," explains Professor Jen Cleland, Chair of Medical Education at the University of Aberdeen and lead author of the paper.

She adds: "While this study didn't look at why students from state schools significantly outperform students from independent schools, one possibility is that that once given equal access to resources, state-educated students take advantage of the opportunities available to them.

"All students who get into medical school have had to work hard, but those from state schools may have had less support in place to assist them, and so once they get to university, they may already have well developed non-academic attributes such as motivation and resilience, which set them up to manage medical school effectively.

"There is a need for further research to explore the relationship between such non-cognitive attributes and performance at medical school and beyond".

"Currently the students being trained at medical school do not want to do the jobs that society needs and so it makes sense that we look at ways to encourage students who are more open to the wide breadth of possible careers to consider medical school."

More information: Ben Kumwenda et al. The relationship between school type and academic performance at medical school: a national, multi-cohort study, *BMJ Open* (2017). DOI: 10.1136/bmjopen-2017-016291

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