PTAS Project Report (for SMALL PROJECT GRANTS)

Key Information

Project Title: ⬛ **Assessing medical students' preparedness to engage in clinical research practice**

Principal Investigator: ⬛ **Danielle Marlow**

School / Department: **Edinburgh Clinical Research Facility**

Team members: **Carol Porteous, Prof Jeremy Hughes**

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Final Report

Grant recipients are expected to submit a brief report within one month of the conclusion of their project which briefly outlines the following: nature of work completed; outcomes; benefits to student learning/student experience; dissemination activity (where relevant – actual and planned) and how the activity could inform future work or be transferred to other subject areas in the University. The brief report will be published on the IAD web pages. Suggested word count is 500-1000 words.

What did you do?

With the support of the Medical Teaching Organisation Year 3 & 4 Coordinators, we contacted all BMedSci Year 4 students asking if they would be prepared to share their experiences, feedback, and stories from their intercalated research project with us. We applied for ethical approval from EMREC,and once we had ethical approval, the invitation to join a townhall session and workshop went out in September 2022 closed in October 2022. This allowed us to schedule and confirm the workshop before the October break.

What did you find out?

We had 22 students register their interest in the townhall and workshop session, of these 8 from Year 4 and 1 from Year 3 attended. This was expected as students were balancing this invitation with placements and/or teaching sessions.

Overall, the conversations showed what a mixed experience choosing and undertaking an intercalated research project is for Year 3 BMedSci students. While some of those who attended the workshop had made some preparations and engaged with some form of peer support, it was found that:
- The overarching feeling was fear and nervousness, particularly around:
    o the new experience
    o unknown expectations
    o the limited guidance available on how to pick a project
    o going into the lab
    o their lack of research methodology knowledge and experience
- Most students wanted to see what research looked like; if they would like it; and to gain insight into the practical application of what was in lectures
- Project selection process was tedious
    o some areas were extremely competitive, so students did not bother applying
    o Some project summaries were overly complex; a universal template including a lay summary would have helped
    o felt like the options were to (1) do a project you are interested in in a field you are not, or (2) do a project you are not interested in in a field you are interested in
    o some students focused on how supportive a supervisor (and/or their team) would be and this influenced their ranking of projects
    o want the intercalation to mean something/have value, not just part of the curriculum
- Transition from Medical School to project placement was 'weird' as there was:
    o Little support from medical school, as students expected to be embedded in their new school/unit and there needs to be some links maintained with the medical school to assist transition
    o No information on how to link in with your new school – resulting in the potential to miss dissertation fairs and other events
    o Surprised by how unstructured the transition was

- The pressure to publish is always there, and the change in the points system means it is more difficult to stand out
- The intercalated project did not give in-depth insight into clinical research for future careers

What have been the benefits to student learning?

This small pilot study has allowed us to begin to understand what student's experiences are of choosing and undertaking their intercalated research project. We intend to use the findings to open conversations with the Medical School about an easier way for students to select their intercalated research project, as well as signposting to additional recourses to help them find and access support with the process.

How could these benefits be extended to other parts of the university?

To better support and direct students in the selection of intercalated research projects and create a smoother transition between the Medical School and other Units or Schools, we hope to engage with the Medical School and project partners to create specific guidance on:

- selecting intercalated research projects
- undertaking your research project including ethics, data protections etc.
- expectations of you and your supervisor during the research project

Students should be more easily be able to navigate their intercalation, maximising the value garnered from the project.

How did you disseminate your findings?

We are writing a blog for the Teaching Matters website (link to follow)

Financial Statement

This project has remaining funds unused, and we require details of how to return the balance. The Principal Investigator or School Administrator appropriate can provide financial statements showing the funding usage as and when required by the UoE Development Trust who may require it for auditing purposes.

Please send an electronic PDF copy of this report to:
Email: iad.teach@ed.ac.uk