

Overseas doctors shoulder blame for recruitment crisis

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International medical graduates (IMGs) have once again been blamed for last year's specialty recruitment disaster.

Prof Sarah Thomas, postgraduate dean at the South Yorkshire and South Humber Postgraduate Deanery, has told the Commons Health Select Committee that deaneries signed up to MTAS 'with the agreement that numbers of applicants would be controlled'.

According to Prof Thomas, deaneries believed that excluding IMGs would ensure that the number of applicants was broadly equal to the number of available posts.

But she told MPs that the eventual inclusion of IMGs in the process – thanks to BAPIO's hard-fought judicial review appeal – turned it from one of simple 'allocation' to one of 'high volume competition'.

Prof Elisabeth Paice, dean director of the London Deanery and chairman of the Conference of Postgraduate Medical Deans, concurred, saying: 'The outcome that everyone was included in round one came as a shock.'

She added that the UK either had to have an 'open door policy' where IMGs are welcomed, or a policy of 'self-sufficiency' where enough home-grown graduates are trained. 'You cannot have both,' Prof Paice warned.

Earlier in the evidence session, Prof Dame Carol Black, chairman of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges, told the Health Committee the same thing.

Dame Carol said: 'In 1997, the government decided it would become more self-sufficient. That was the time they should have been in conversation with the Home Office about transition and preventing IMGs being disadvantaged in the way they have been. It was a failure of two policies to come together.'

The Health Committee is investigating the Government's immigration rule changes as part of its on-going inquiry into MMC and MTAS.

Remedy UK has supported IMGs and voiced continued concern over their treatment throughout the specialty recruitment process. In its written submission to the inquiry, Remedy UK criticised the DH for 'believing they could easily discard tens of thousands of doctors recruited from overseas at will when they became surplus to requirements'.