

SEEL Placement Panel 2018

I joined the SEEL Placement Panel in June 2018 as the Trainee Observer. I found it extremely interesting to witness the panel from an alternative perspective and I left re-assured that the process strives to be as equitable and favourable to trainees as possible.

The structure of the panel was as follows:

- 1) Discussion regarding trainees where progression on to the next year of their course had been raised as a concern – this is so that the panel know whether all trainees are in the position to be allocated a placement.
- 2) Provisional allocation of trainees with special considerations (medical and family needs). The impact of any need was discussed as a group and, providing the impact was clear, these trainees were the first to be provisionally allocated placements.
- 3) Provisional allocation of year 2 trainees requesting year 3 placements. A panel representative had reviewed these requests in advance and came to the meeting with suggested allocations. These were discussed as a group in relation to how they mapped onto the placement requests from year 1 trainees.
- 4) Allocation of placements to remaining trainees. The panel are provided with a trainee's candidate number and preference form, in exactly the same format as completed by the trainee. The panel are not able to identify a trainee's course provider. I was pleased to see that the panel have explicit systems in place to ensure the allocation is as fair as possible. For example, the panel alternate between starting with the first candidate (working forwards) and the final candidate (working backwards) each year.
- 5) Review of any trainees allocated their fourth or fifth preferences. These were discussed and, where possible, changes were made to improve the situation. For example, if two trainees could be allocated their third preference as opposed to one receiving their first and another their fifth.
- 6) Final review. This included considering whether any non-allocated placements could be offered to non-SEEL trainees.

I can say with full honesty that there was no point in the process where I felt that the panel had any other agenda than allocating in a trainee's best interest. Every effort was made to provide trainees with placements as high up their preference list as possible.

My advice to trainees is the same as that provided last year. Firstly, the panel will assume that the order of your preferences is genuine, so it is not worthwhile considering whether you can be tactical with the order that you give. Secondly, if you are listing popular placements (inner London or the South coast), please bear in mind that you **may** end up being allocated your fifth preference. All five choices should be realistic options.

It is clear that the panel look to improve the system year-on-year and I feel that it wouldn't be in line with true EP-ness if I did not offer an improvement suggestion. It is unsurprising that some of the most difficult placements to allocate were the inner London boroughs; these are listed as preferred options by more trainees than there are placements available. In these instances, it was often the case that a trainee received their fourth or fifth preference. As someone who has recently been on the other side of the process, I always feel dubious about the 'fifth preference' listed. Trainees are required to provide at least one out-of-London placement, meaning that the fifth option may well be a forced choice rather than their actual fifth preference considering all available placements. I wondered whether the form could include an additional box, offering trainees the opportunity to list

'Up to two other locations where you would consider being placed.' It could be clearly stated that these options would only be explored if a trainee was due to be allocated their fifth option, thus limiting the impact on the current process. I would suggest that the '3 inner-London' rule still apply; however, this approach could allow trainees to list, for example, other outer-London boroughs where they may prefer to be placed over their specified fifth preference.

In summary, I feel that the panel did an exceptional job of what is an incredibly tough challenge. The process attempts to be as fair as possible and the panel used every opportunity to consider how the allocations could be changed to make the overall situation fairer, and hopefully more positive, for the trainees involved.

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