

AMEE abstract:

The demoted apprentice - undergraduate clinical placements within the changing NHS

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Background: Concerns about the state of junior doctor training in the UK are well documented (1). “The main problems are lack of confidence and competence in clinical-decision making, clinical procedures and prescribing (...), lack of understanding of the NHS and how it works” (2). Our research focused on the ‘firm’, i.e. the site and mechanism through which apprenticeship-style teaching was delivered. Despite its centrality, the concept has remained under-explored within the literature. Our research asked: What was the firm? How has it changed? What is the impact on undergraduates?

Summary of work: One-to-one semi-structured interviews with 34 clinicians were conducted, transcribed and analysed thematically by the team (ethics nr: SOMSEC028.09).

Summary of results: The European Working Time Directive, in conjunction with the changes to junior doctor training have severely weakened firm structures with shift-working delivering the final blow. The ‘absence’ of junior doctors has resulted in a loss of continuity for patients and undergraduates and thus threatens apprenticeship-style learning.

Conclusions/Take-home messages: With the disruption of the firm structures, undergraduates have lost their main access point, mentor and guide on the wards. Structured teaching sessions ensure their instruction, but remove them from everyday practice. On ever-shorter attachments, ever-larger teams become impenetrable. Increasing numbers of sub-specialties hinder satisfying teaching relationships. In this context undergraduates struggle to demonstrate their engagement; they are effectively demoted to the side-lines.