

Appendix 2: Negative comments in the academic reference [posted as supplied by author]

The list below was provided to the three experienced admissions staff at Nottingham who reviewed the academic references, They were asked to highlight any comments that they found, then to grade them as likely to have a potentially minor, moderate or major effect on the student's progress on the course. This checklist was used in our previous work on Struggling students¹¹ and the unpublished pilot for this study.

Negative comments in Academic references	
The following categories of negative comments have been identified, with some examples given of the type of comment noted.	
Please view this only as a general guide and use your own discretion & experience.	
Academic aspects	
insufficient work	lack of self-discipline
slow to grasp new concepts	careless
takes short cuts	lacking in accuracy
lack of independent thought	conceptual difficulties
lack of focus	unwilling to take academic risks
excess social activities	poor motivation
finds A level work demanding/challenging	disorganized, deadlines not met
language problems	
Personality - introversion	
reserved during lessons	lacking in confidence
self-effacing	not confident in novel situations
reticent	passive / unresponsive
anxious / nervous	shy
reluctant to participate in class discussions	prefers to work alone
self-conscious	unduly quiet
Personality – unsuitable attitude	
blasé	impatient
intolerant, “does not suffer fools gladly”	diffident
brusque	aloof
arrogant	casual
laconic	truculent
forceful, over-assertive	over-confident
self-opinionated	laid-back
ruthless, over-ambitious	
Medical or social problems	
affected by family anxieties / troubles (eg divorce, bereavement)	
difficulties adjusting to cultural change / new environment	
dyslexia	
eating disorder	
ME	
“concerns over health”	
recurrent illness	
Late decision to read Medicine	
little or no work experience	

The highlighted comments and codings were added to a database, and then a final rating given based on either the ‘majority view’ (if at least two of the reviewers gave the same rating) or the average of the three if they were all different. A final rating of 2 (moderate) or 3 (major) was then coded as a negative reference, whereas 0 (none) or 1(minor) was not.