



BMJ Open Observational cohort study with internal and external validation of a predictive tool for identification of children in need of hospital admission from the emergency department: the Paediatric Admission Guidance in the Emergency Department (PAGE) score

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ABSTRACT

Objectives To devise an assessment tool to aid discharge and admission decision-making in relation to children and young people in hospital urgent and emergency care facilities, and thereby improve the quality of care that patients receive, using a clinical prediction modelling approach.

Design Observational cohort study with internal and external validation of a predictive tool.

Setting Two general emergency departments (EDs) and an urgent care centre in the North of England.

Participants The eligibility criteria were children and young people 0–16 years of age who attended one of the three hospital sites within one National Health Service (NHS) organisation. Children were excluded if they opted out of the study, were brought to the ED following their death in the community or arrived in cardiac arrest when the heart rate and respiratory rate would be unmeasurable.

Main outcome measures Admission or discharge. A participant was defined as being admitted to hospital if they left the ED to enter the hospital for further assessment, (including being admitted to an observation and assessment unit or hospital ward), either on first presentation or with the same complaint within 7 days. Those who were not admitted were defined as having been discharged.

Results The study collected data on 36 365 participants. 15 328 participants were included in the final analysis cohort (21 045 observations) and 17 710 participants were included in the validation cohort (23 262 observations). There were 14 variables entered into the regression analysis. Of the 13 that remained in the final model, 10 were present in all 500 bootstraps. The resulting Paediatric Admission Guidance in the Emergency Department (PAGE) score demonstrated good internal validity. The C-index (area under the ROC) was 0.779 (95% CI 0.772 to 0.786).

Conclusions For units without the immediate availability of paediatricians the PAGE score can assist staff to

Strengths and limitations of this study

- This study was novel in that it was based on data from children attending three non-tertiary (non-specialist) hospitals (n=36 365). Non specialist hospitals are where the majority of children are seen by emergency and urgent care practitioners in the National Health Service in England.
- The Paediatric Admission Guidance in the Emergency department score, was built from the clinical prediction model derived by both an internal and external data validation set.
- Admission rates varied between hospitals and while internal and external validation occurred the impact of prospective use to guide decision will need confirmation.

determine risk of admission. Cut-off values will need to be adjusted to local circumstance.

Study protocol The study protocol has been published in an open access journal: Riaz *et al* Refining and testing the diagnostic accuracy of an assessment tool (Pennine Acute Hospitals NHS Trust-Paediatric Observation Priority Score) to predict admission and discharge of children and young people who attend an ED: protocol for an observational study. *BMC Pediatr* 18, 303 (2018). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12887-018-1268-7>.

Trial registration number The protocol has been published and the study registered (NIHR RfPB Grant: PB-PG-0815–20034; [ClinicalTrials.gov:213469](https://clinicaltrials.gov/213469)).

INTRODUCTION

Attendances at emergency departments (EDs) by children and young people have risen year on year in the UK and are now in excess of 4 million per year.¹ The majority of

these attendances are at services where the professional contact is by a practitioner without formal paediatric training. Given that a large proportion of these children and young people are discharged safely, the delivery of emergency and acute care does not rely on direct paediatric review.

However, systems are needed to recognise children who require further observation and investigation. Triage processes are well established to determine the order in which patients should receive clinical review. Increasingly, a fuller assessment, including the patient's vital signs, is used to determine an acuity score to define risk of illness or deterioration. These scores, often termed Early Warning Scores (EWS), originated in adult in-patient environments where it was recognised that death or intensive care admission was often preceded by derangement of the patient's physiology.² These findings led to the development of paediatric EWSs (PEWS) which have been shown to have utility in the detection of deterioration, but not always in the prevention of mortality.³ The face validity of such scores led to widespread utilisation and attempts to employ them in different emergency and prehospital environments from those where the scores were devised. Initial reviews demonstrated relatively poor performance,⁴ in turn leading to the development of bespoke scores validated in EDs themselves.

There is no existing gold-standard outcome measure for the decision to admit or discharge a child or young person from the ED,⁵ and the decision to admit is a complex one, which can vary between clinicians and hospitals. One EWS system, the Paediatric Observation Priority Score (POPS), recommended by the Intercollegiate Committee for Standards for Children and Young People in Emergency Care Settings⁶ has shown initial promise in aiding recognition of unwell children but also aiding safe discharge decisions.^{7,8}

A modified version of POPS, developed at The Pennine Acute Hospitals National Health Service (NHS) Trust (PAT-POPS), has been shown to have greater discriminatory power than an inpatient PEWS.⁹ The majority of EWS systems are derived and validated at large teaching institutions ('tertiary centres') and so may not be applicable outside tertiary centres.¹⁰ In this study, PAT-POPS was used as the initial starting point to derive and validate a score to aid disposition decisions in non-tertiary centres. This would have external validity in the majority of locations where children and young people are assessed in the UK and potentially beyond.

METHODS

A published protocol is available¹¹ and only the core components of the methods are summarised in this paper. In this paper, 'participant' means a patient recruited into the study at one of the study sites.

Patient and public involvement

The study was supported by a patient advisory group which provided input to the programme of research. This patient advisory group met with author TL during the study. Patients partnered with the study team for the design of the study, the informational material to support the opt-out consent process. At the end of the study twenty-one parents were consulted in one of the EDs on how the cut point might be made. Most found this a particularly difficult task, hovering around the centre of the scale. When the notion was introduced of a supporting community service that would know about their child and for which they had a contact number if worried, a remarkable difference was observed. All but two (both fathers) considered correct discharge to be more important than correct admission, and, overall, most thought that about 60%–70% correct discharge was optimal. Two mothers would be sufficiently confident for a much higher specificity, being prepared to discharge 90%–95% patients correctly.

Sample population

The study population was recruited consecutively. Data collection was prospective over a whole year (1 March 2018–28 February 2019) to avoid the effects of bias from seasonal variability. The eligibility criteria were children and young people 0–16 years of age who attended one of three hospital sites within one NHS Trust (NHS organisation) in Greater Manchester, UK. Children were excluded if they opted out of the study, were brought to the ED following their death in the community, or arrived in cardiac arrest when the heart rate and respiratory rate would be unmeasurable.

Admission

A participant was defined as being admitted to hospital if they left the ED to enter the hospital for further assessment, (including observation and assessment unit or hospital ward), either on first presentation or with the same complaint within 7 days. This was approved by the study patient and public involvement group, which saw admission and discharge in such terms, and by discussion with three ED doctors.

The decision to admit the participant was made by a clinician (either a doctor or a nurse practitioner). They followed existing guidelines, using usual methods of clinical judgement, and were blinded to the score as this had not yet been derived at the point of participant assessment (but had access to all vital signs and observations normally collected). Admission data from all three hospitals was accessed from existing NHS trust electronic systems.

Predictors

All of the variables in the modified PAT-POPS plus additional variables included in other scores were considered for inclusion in the Paediatric Admission Guidance in the Emergency Department (PAGE) score (table 1).

Table 1 Characteristics of the sample population at each site (who met the inclusion criteria)

Variable	Site 1 (emergency department) (Development dataset)			Site 2 (emergency department)			Site 3 (urgent care centre)		
	Summary	Min/max	Missing (%)	Summary	Min/max	Missing (%)	Summary	Min/max	Missing (%)
	Visits=21 480			Visits=9972			Visits=13 429		
	Participants=15 484			Participants=7817			Participants=9971		
Age in years (median, IQR)	3 (1–8)	0/15	0	7 (3–12)	0/15	0	6 (2–10)	0/15	0
Gender			0			0			0
Female	9384 (44%)			4486 (45%)			6131 (54%)		
Ethnicity			0			0			0
White British	11 162 (52%)			7081 (71%)			7046 (52%)		
Irish+Gypsy or Irish Traveller	34 (0%)			26 (0%)			61 (0%)		
Other white	569 (3%)			298 (3%)			369 (3%)		
White and black Caribbean	158 (1%)			89 (1%)			51 (0%)		
White and black African	121 (1%)			53 (1%)			80 (1%)		
White and Asian	255 (1%)			118 (1%)			217 (2%)		
Other mixed	294 (1%)			107 (1%)			244 (2%)		
Indian	75 (0%)			45 (0%)			51 (0%)		
Pakistani	4245 (20%)			1165 (12%)			61 (0%)		
Bangladeshi	2060 (10%)			36 (0%)			524 (4%)		
Chinese	46 (0%)			42 (0%)			29 (0%)		
Other Asian+Asian/Asian British	302 (1%)			202 (2%)			213 (2%)		
African	374 (2%)			114 (1%)			242 (2%)		
Caribbean	24 (0%)			8 (0%)			21 (0%)		
Other Black+Black/African/Caribbean/Black British	149 (1%)			54 (1%)			168 (1%)		
Unknown/not stated	1010 (5%)			270 (3%)			169 (1%)		
Heart rate (mean/SD)	121.6 (30.5)	11		104.5 (26.1)	4		109.7 (27.0)	2	
Temperature (median/IQR)	36.9 (36.5 to 37.4)	32.6/41.7	10	36.7 (36.4 to 37.1)	34.4/41.1	3	36.7 (36.4 to 37.1)	35.0/41.2	1
Respiratory rate	26 (22 to 32)	10/90*	10	22 (20 to 26)	Dec-88	3	24 (20 to 26)	Dec-80	2
Oxygen saturation	99 (98 to 100)	63/100	10	99 (98 to 100)	70/100	4	99 (99 to 100)	67/100	2
Requires supplement oxygen	386 (2%)		0	31 (0%)		0	99 (1%)		0
Breathing			2			0			0
None of the above	19 678 (93%)			9713 (98%)			13 038 (98%)		

Continued

Table 1 Continued									
Site 1 (emergency department) (Development dataset)			Site 2 (emergency department)			Site 3 (urgent care centre)			
Visits=21 480			Visits=9972			Visits=13 429			
Participants=15 484			Participants=7817			Participants=9971			
Variable	Summary	Min/max	Missing (%)	Summary	Min/max	Missing (%)	Summary	Min/max	Missing (%)
Audible grunt	52 (0%)			9 (0%)			25 (0%)		
Wheeze	709 (3%)			135 (1%)			190 (1%)		
Stridor	52 (0%)			6 (0%)			9 (0%)		
Tracheal tug	624 (3%)			68 (1%)			102 (1%)		
Recession			0			0			0
No recession	18 757 (87%)			9 748 (98%)			12 900 (96%)		
Mild recession	1 764 (8%)			153 (2%)			338 (3%)		
Moderate	743 (3%)			43 (0%)			114 (1%)		
Severe	213 (1%)			27 (0%)			75 (1%)		
Responsiveness			0			0			0
Alert	21 044 (98%)			9 775 (98%)			13 252 (99%)		
Responds to pain	53 (0%)			10 (0%)			5 (0%)		
Responds to voice	126 (1%)			15 (0%)			19 (0%)		
Unresponsive	253 (1%)			171 (2%)			151 (1%)		
Nurse judgement			0			0			0
No concern	6 476 (30%)			6 894 (69%)			9 888 (74%)		
Low level concern	11 645 (54%)			2 756 (28%)			3 268 (24%)		
Child looks unwell/high concern	3 355 (16%)			321 (3%)			271 (2%)		
Behaviour			0			0			0
Normal for age	20 349 (95%)			9 720 (97%)			13 105 (98%)		
Agitated	356 (2%)			105 (1%)			121 (1%)		
Floppy	138 (1%)			22 (0%)			23 (0%)		
Inappropriate	54 (0%)			9 (0%)			8 (0%)		
Listless	579 (3%)			115 (1%)			170 (1%)		
Multi-morbidity	749 (3%)		0	148 (1%)		0	551 (4%)		0
Arrived by ambulance	4 539 (21%)		0	20 (0%)		0	50 (0%)		0
Admitted now or next 7 days	6 810 (32%)		0	600 (6%)		0	1 009 (8%)		0

*This was the highest value that could be entered.

Other data collection included reason for attendance at the ED, diagnosis, death in the ED, children leaving the ED before admission decision, children's characteristics (age, gender and ethnicity), investigated deaths and serious incidents. These variables were chosen as in the authors clinical experience they may have dependency on the decision to admit but have also not been formally studied in previous analyses.⁴

Sample size

In the protocol, it was estimated that 9000 children were needed for the development of the prediction model and 7000 children in the independent validation. The minimum sample size needed to do both analyses was therefore estimated as 16000 children. More data than needed was allowed for (and this approach was granted at ethics review) due to the need to collect data for a full year to capture seasonal variation in childhood illness and injury. Intermittent data collection would not help implementation of the tool and would have required the employment of specific staff for the project, which would have been significantly more costly.

Analysis

Analysis was conducted in StataMP V.14¹² using two-sided 95% CIs and the 5% significance level. Analysis was reported according to the Transparent Reporting of a multivariable prediction model for Individual Prognosis Or Diagnosis (TRIPOD¹³) and Standards for Reporting of Diagnostic Accuracy¹⁴ reporting guidelines. A flow diagram summarises participant opt-out, recruitment and data collection, by site (figure 1).

Final analysis was undertaken after all data had been entered into the database, and the database had been cleaned and locked. Children were excluded from the analysis if the outcome variable (admission) was missing or if all the independent variables were missing. For variables with over 4% rates of missingness data was imputed using hot-deck imputation.¹⁵ This involves stratifying

participants by key predictive variables (injury/illness status, admission status and age) and replacing missing values with those of a participant from the same strata. Participants were described with respect to the variables in the model, both overall and by site, reported as number (%) for categorical variables; mean (SD, min, max) for normally distributed variables; median (IQR, min, max) for other numeric variables.

Stage 1: model development

Children from one hospital site were utilised for the model development. Logistic regression models were developed with hospital admission as the outcome and including all candidate variables. Due to several of the variables being non-linearly associated with the outcome a closed test procedure was used to determine the best functional form of each continuous variable and concurrently whether it should be included. This involved starting with a model that included all potential predictors and testing the best fitting fractional polynomial form of each continuous variable individually.¹⁶ Variables were removed from the model according to p values with any less than 0.10 being excluded. For categorical variables, if at least one category was significant all were included initially. Quality of the data and risk of bias was assessed using the Prediction model Risk Of Bias ASsessment Tool (PROBAST).¹⁷

Stage 2: internal validation

The calibration score and calibration slope were examined to assess how well the predictions from the model matched the data and calibration plots were used to compare agreement between predicted and observed injury and illness. Discrimination was also considered, to measure how well the model separated between individuals who were admitted and those who were not (C-statistic, which is equivalent to area under the receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve).

The Brier score has been reported. Internal validation was performed by applying the original model to 500 bootstrapped samples. The discrimination and calibration performance of the model in each of the bootstrap samples was compared with the model fitted to the original data to provide a measure of optimism. Due to the large sample size, it was not necessary to adjust for the optimism.¹⁸ The inclusion/exclusion of any predictors which featured in the selected model but only rarely across the bootstrap samples (or vice versa) was noted.

The output of stage 1 and 2 was the PAGE score which aimed to predict hospital admission, based on the weight of each predictor.

Stage 3: external validation

Assessing model performance

External validation was undertaken using data from two other hospitals. The developed model was applied to each external dataset, and calibration and discrimination measures were reported, as above.

ANALYSIS COHORT		VALIDATION COHORT	
Site 1 (ED)		Site 2 (ED)	Site 3 (UCC)
Attended 26,376 visits 18,655 participants		Attended 10,170 visits 7911 participants	Attended 13,996 visits 10,275 participants
Excluded Opt-out = 4 Duplicate = 124 Blanks = 3866 Deceased = 8 Left before admission decision = 894 Missing = 421		Excluded Opt-out = 4 Duplicate = 19 Blanks = 95 Deceased = 0 Left before admission decision = 80 Missing = 52	Excluded Opt-out = 71 Duplicate = 26 Blanks = 60 Deceased = 0 Left before admission decision = 410 Missing = 75
Observations = 21,059 Participants = 15,330 Injury = 7740 (36.8%) Illness = 12,928 (61.4%) Admission rate = 30.8%		Observations = 9920 Participants = 7786 Injury = 5974 (60.2%) Illness = 2907 (29.3%) Admission rate = 6.0%	Observations = 13,354 Participants = 9929 Injury = 6291 (47.1%) Illness = 6372 (47.7%) Admission rate = 7.4%

Figure 1 Development of the dataset. ED, emergency department. UCC, Urgent Care Centre

Recalibration

After looking at both the development and the external datasets, and with clinical opinion, consideration was given to which dataset most closely represents the majority of UK EDs at which children attend, and accordingly whether or not to recalibrate the model based on one of the external validation datasets.

Stage 4: developing a point scoring system

The model's regression coefficients were used to assign integer points to each level of each risk factor, and a reference table of risk per possible points total was produced, following established guidelines.¹⁹ Together these provide a clinically useful score. By applying the points scores to the development dataset it was possible to calculate the sensitivity, specificity, positive and negative likelihood ratios of PAGE (index test) in predicting admission (reference test) with 95% CIs. A cross tabulation of the results of the index test by the results of the reference test was reported, including indeterminate and missing results.

Consensus meeting

A meeting was held to examine the statistical data, and to agree which cut points of the PAGE score were most suitable to predict (1) safe admission decision and (2) safe discharge decision, including consideration of what weight to give to sensitivity and specificity in making the decision. All of our research team, plus paediatric ED clinicians and an independent methodologist, were invited to attend.

Stage 5: further analyses

The usefulness of the PAGE score was assessed by calculating the sensitivity, specificity, positive and negative likelihood ratios at the chosen cut-points, to predict admission and discharge.

Research governance

An opt-out consent design was approved, and there were no plans to disseminate the results to participants.

RESULTS

The unit of analysis was a visit by a child to the ED. Figure 1 shows the numbers and reasons for exclusions of visits (and participants) from the dataset. Children were omitted because they opted out of the study (n=4, site 1), died in the ED (n=8, Site 1) or left the ED before an admission decision was made (n=892, site 1).

Duplicate entries where participants had more than one entry with the same date and time (n=199, site 1) were deleted.

Missing visits

There were two types of visit that were excluded completely from the development dataset due to extensive missing data. The first (marked as 'blanks' in figure 1) were missing all data except for patient demographics. After

data collection was completed, we discovered that site 1 had a two-tier system which funnels off particularly 'well' children into a separate nurse-led service where no further study information was recorded (n=3865, site 1). The second were visits where data were missing for enough clinical measures and judgements to prevent imputation and inclusion in the analysis. This was likely due to them being measurements that would not routinely be taken for certain types of attendances, such as minor injuries (n=421, site 1).

Missing variables

Most variables had very low rates of missingness (0%–2%) and no imputation was required. Four variables: heart rate, temperature, respiratory rates and oxygen saturation had higher rates, which varied by site: site 1 (8%–11%), site 2 (2%–4%) and site 3 (1%–2%). Reasons for the missingness, and differences in missingness by site, are not clear. Values were imputed using hot-deck imputation.¹⁵

Descriptive statistics/summary of population

Table 1 summarises the demographic and medical characteristics of the sample population at each site. This comprises all participants who met the inclusion criteria. The admission rate of site 1 (the development dataset) was 32% compared with 6% at site 2 and 8% at site 3. Compared with the external validation sites, children in the development dataset were younger, showed signs of being more unwell (higher heart rate, more prevalence of recession and breathing abnormalities) and were more likely to show cause for concern for the nurses. Temperature, oxygen saturation, responsiveness and behaviour were very similar across the sites.

The form of variables and their suitability for inclusion in the model were considered and adjusted as necessary. Categorical variables were recoded to avoid any small categories. Abnormal breathing was recategorised as 'normal' and 'abnormal'. 'severe' and 'moderate' recession were amalgamated. Two continuous variables (heart rate and oxygen saturation) were categorised as in their continuous form we were unable to model them adequately while keeping the final score readily usable in clinical practice.

Regression results

The final multivariable logistic regression model is shown in table 2. Responsiveness was omitted from the final model, because once the other variables were accounted for, it had no effect on admission. All other variables were retained in the final model and had a statistically significant relationship with admission except for the 'under 75 bpm' heart rate category.

The younger the child the more likely admission is and the effect is much stronger for much younger participants. Compared with those aged 4–16 years old, those aged 0–1 months had an increase in admission odds of 1.880 (95% CI 1.876 to 1.885). Low oxygen saturation was the strongest predictor of admission in the study and

Table 2 Final regression model

Variable	OR	95% CI low	95% CI high	P value
Age				
0–1 months	1.88	1.876	1.885	<0.001
2–5 months	1.279	1.276	1.282	
6–11 months	1.125	1.122	1.282	
1–3 years	1.031	1.029	1.034	
4–16 years	Reference			
Heart rate				
<75	0.959	0.807	1.141	0.638
75–125	Reference			
>125	1.422	1.303	1.552	<0.001
Temperature (degrees Celsius)				
<38	Reference			<0.001
38–39	1.365	1.307	1.424	
>39	1.763	1.689	1.84	
Respiratory rate	1.029	1.023	1.035	<0.001
Oxygen saturation				
95–100	Reference			<0.001
90–94	3.381	2.654	4.305	
<90	5.477	2.953	10.157	
Requires supplementary oxygen	1.872	1.437	2.44	<0.001
Breathing				
Normal	Reference			<0.001
Abnormal	1.681	1.423	1.985	
Recession				
None	Reference			<0.001
Mild	1.281	1.117	1.469	
Moderate/severe	1.484	1.183	1.863	
Behaviour category				
Normal	Reference			0.023
Agitated	1.353	1.043	1.754	
Floppy	2.046	1.371	3.054	
Listless	1.498	1.217	1.843	
Nurse judgement				
No concern	Reference			<0.001
Low level concern	1.361	1.258	1.473	
High concern	2.677	2.388	3.002	
Multimorbidity	1.937	1.599	2.346	<0.001
Arrived by ambulance	2.416	2.223	2.625	<0.001
Advised by medical professional	2.159	1.975	2.361	<0.001
Constant	0.144	0.133	0.156	<0.001

nurse judgement was strongly associated with admission. Variables that were introduced in this study as additional to the existing PAT-POPS score were multimorbidity, (1.94 (95% CI 1.60 to 2.35)), arrival by ambulance (2.42 (95% CI 2.22 to 2.63)) and being advised to attend by a medical professional (2.16 (95% CI 1.97 to 2.36)).

Internal validation

As would be expected from such a large sample size, the model demonstrated good internal validity. The discrimination (C-index) of the model in the original dataset was 0.779 (95% CI 0.772 to 0.786) and the mean in the bootstrap samples was 0.779 (95% CI 0.767 to 0.789).

Table 3 External validation results

Site	Briers score	Calibration slope	CITL	E/O	C-index
2	0.065	0.986 (0.897 to 1.076)	-1.219 (-1.306 to -1.132)	2.673	0.763 (0.742 to 0.783)
3	0.073	1.075 (1.002 to 1.149)	-1.055 (-1.123 to -0.987)	2.275	0.753 (0.737 to 0.770)

CITL, Calibration in the Large E/O, Expected/Observed

suggesting no model optimism. Full calibration and discrimination results are reported in the online supplemental file.

Calibration

The Brier score was 0.1664, the calibration slope was 1.000 and calibration-in-the-large was -0.000. The calibration plot indicates that predictions from the model match the data very well for low to moderate risk individuals. Above this, the model slightly overpredicts the probability of admission.

External validation

The external validation was undertaken in each of the two external datasets separately (table 3).

These results indicate that the model transportability is good overall, with only slight over/underfitting present at each of the external validation sites and C-indexes (0.763 and 753 for sites 2 and 3, respectively), only modestly smaller than were found in the original model. It is clear however that the model may over-estimate the probability of admission in external populations, probably owing to the unusually high admission rate of the development site (site 1).

Of the three sites, site 1 is most typical of UK EDs in respect of annual attendances and size of unit. This being the case, recalibration of the model so it performed better in the two external datasets was not necessary. The original model was carried forward to the stage of developing the point scoring system.

Derivation of PAGE score

The PAGE score has a minimum value of 0 and a maximum of 30 (table 4). The characteristic that yields the largest numbers of points is having a lower than normal oxygen saturation, worth four or five points depending on severity. Age, against clinical expectation, seemed only predictive of admission when the participant was younger than 6 months.

The sensitivity and specificity of each potential cut-point of the tool is shown in table 5. As the development of the point-scoring system was effectively a simplification of the regression model, we expected a relative decrease in its predictive power. The difference in the discrimination of the regression model and the resulting point scoring tool however proved to be minimal (figure 2): a drop from 0.779 (95% CI 0.772 to 0.785) to 0.775 (95% CI 0.768 to 0.781).

The cut-point for PAGE that most closely aligns with the sensitivity and specificity of the chosen original PAT-POPS

cut-off is a score of 7 or more. This yields a sensitivity of 48.21% and specificity of 87.61%. Based on the preferences of those at the consensus meeting the chosen cut-off for their organisations would be either six or seven

Table 4 PAGE point scoring tool

Variable	Category	Point(s)
Age (months)	0–1	2
	2–5	1
	≥6	0
Heart rate (BPM)	≤125 (ie, 0–125)	0
	>125 (ie, 126 and above)	1
Respiratory rate	0–25	0
	26–60	2
	>60	3
Temperature (degrees Celsius)	<38	0
	38–39	1
	>39	2
Oxygen saturation (%)	>94	0
	90–94	4
	<90	5
Requires supplementary oxygen	No	0
	Yes	2
Breathing	Normal	0
	Abnormal	2
Recession	No recession	0
	Any recession	1
Behaviour	Normal	0
	Agitated or Listless	1
	Floppy	2
Nurse judgement	No concern	0
	Low level concern	1
	High concern	3
Multi-morbidity	No	0
	Yes	2
Arrived by ambulance	No	0
	Yes	3
Advised by medical professional to attend	No	0
	Yes	2

PAGE, Paediatric Admission Guidance in the Emergency Department.

Table 5 Sensitivity and specificity for each cut-point of PAGE

Cut-point for admission decision	Sensitivity (95% CI)	Specificity (95% CI)	Likelihood ratio+	Likelihood ratio–	Positive predictive value	Negative predictive value
≥0	100%	0%	1.0000	–	–	–
≥1	96.83 (96.38 to 97.23)	15.80 (15.22 to 16.41)	1.1501	0.2010	34.8 (34.2 to 35.4)	91.5 (91.1 to 91.9)
≥2	91.13 (90.42 to 91.79)	36.34 (35.56 to 37.13)	1.4315	0.2441	39.9 (39.3 to 40.6)	89.8 (89.4 to 90.2)
≥3	87.70 (86.89 to 88.46)	45.84 (45.03 to 46.65)	1.6192	0.2684	42.9 (42.3 to 43.6)	88.9 (88.5 to 89.3)
≥4	78.87 (77.90 to 79.81)	61.03 (62.23 to 63.82)	2.1330	0.3353	48.5 (47.8 to 49.1)	85.7 (85.2 to 86.2)
≥5	68.61 (67.49 to 69.70)	73.69 (72.97 to 74.40)	2.6074	0.4261	54.8 (54.1 to 55.4)	83.5 (83.0 to 84.0)
≥6	59.47 (58.29 to 60.64)	80.86 (80.21 to 81.49)	3.1070	0.5012	59.1 (58.4 to 59.7)	81.1 (80.6 to 81.7)
≥7	48.56 (47.37 to 49.76)	87.89 (87.03 to 88.11)	3.9099	0.5873	64.5 (63.8 to 65.1)	78.6 (78.0 to 79.1)
≥8	38.88 (37.73 to 40.06)	92.20 (91.75 to 92.62)	4.9819	0.6629	69.8 (69.2 to 70.4)	76.5 (75.9 to 77.0)
≥9	29.84 (28.76 to 30.94)	95.34 (94.99 to 95.68)	6.4089	0.7359	74.8 (74.3 to 75.4)	74.5 (74.0 to 75.1)
≥10	22.11 (21.14 to 23.12)	97.43 (97.16 to 97.68)	8.6053	0.7994	80.0 (79.4 to 80.5)	72.9 (72.3 to 73.5)
≥11	16.36 (15.49 to 17.26)	98.56 (98.35 to 98.75)	11.3733	0.8486	84.1 (83.6 to 84.6)	71.7 (71.1 to 72.3)
≥12	12.03 (11.27 to 12.83)	99.28 (99.12 to 99.41)	16.6441	0.8861	88.5 (88.1 to 89.0)	70.9 (70.3 to 71.5)
≥13	8.33 (7.69 to 9.01)	99.60 (99.48 to 99.69)	20.7021	0.9204	90.6 (90.2 to 91.0)	70.1 (69.5 to 70.7)
≥14	5.49 (4.97 to 6.07)	99.79 (99.70 to 99.85)	25.9892	0.9471	92.4 (92.0 to 92.7)	69.5 (68.9 to 70.1)
≥15	3.25 (2.84 to 3.70)	99.85 (99.77 to 99.90)	21.6398	0.9690	91.0 (90.6 to 91.3)	69.0 (68.4 to 69.6)
≥16	2.14 (1.82 to 2.52)	99.90 (99.83 to 99.94)	20.9674	0.9796	90.7 (90.3 to 91.1)	68.7 (68.1 to 69.4)
≥17	1.12 (0.89 to 1.40)	99.97 (99.92 to 99.99)	32.7436	0.9867	93.8 (93.5 to 94.2)	68.5 (67.9 to 69.2)
≥18	0.65 (0.48 to 0.88)	100 (99.97 to 100)	–	0.9935	100.0 (100.0 to 100.0)	68.4 (67.8 to 69.1)
≥19	0.34 (0.22 to 0.52)	100 (99.97 to 100)	–	0.9966	100.0 (100.0 to 100.0)	68.4 (67.8 to 69.0)
≥20	0.12 (0.06 to 0.24)	100 (99.97 to 100)	–	0.9988	100.0 (100.0 to 100.0)	68.3 (67.7 to 68.9)
≥21	0.04 (0.01 to 0.14)	100 (99.97 to 100)	–	0.9996	100.0 (100.0 to 100.0)	68.3 (67.7 to 68.9)
≥22	0.02 (0.00 to 0.10)	100 (99.97 to 100)	–	0.9996	100.0 (100.0 to 100.0)	68.3 (67.7 to 68.9)
≥23	0	100	–	1.0000	100.0 (100.0 to 100.0)	68.3 (67.7 to 68.9)

PAGE, Paediatric Admission Guidance in the Emergency Department.

points on the basis that consensus meeting attendees indicated a preference for giving more weight to higher specificity (ensuring the right children were discharged)

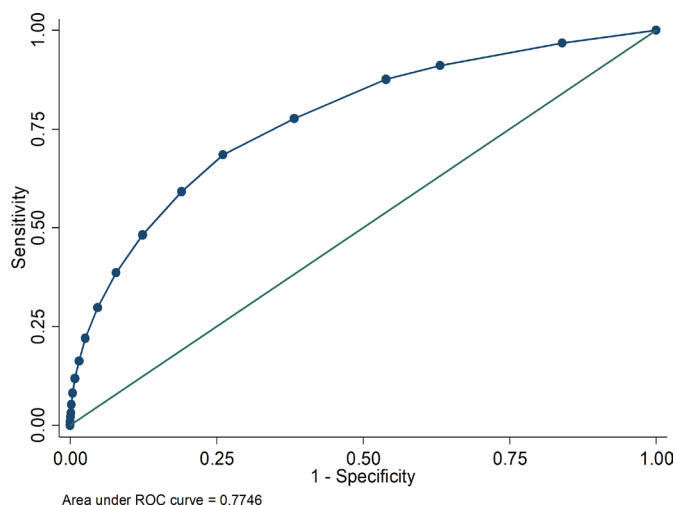


Figure 2 Area under receiver operating characteristic (ROC) curve V.2.

than sensitivity. It is, of course, a matter for healthcare organisations to determine their own cut-off based on local service arrangements, including what community services may be available to those patients who are discharged.

DISCUSSION

In this study of over 30 000 children the PAGE score was derived. This is the first study of its kind in non-tertiary EDs and therefore should have good external validity in the majority of locations in which children are treated and in which paediatricians are not immediately available. While the development site (site 1), a type 1 ED with trauma unit status, had a high admission rate, it is noted that the national average is 13.8% (CIs unavailable).²⁰ At site 1, the participants presenting with minor injury are streamed into an emergency nurse practitioner stream which artificially increases the apparent admission rate. When tested on the sites with admission rates of 6% and 8% the score still performed well, highlighting that the score may have utility in organisations with a range of

admission rates. The AUROC curve 0.779 (95% CI 0.772 to 0.785) performing better than any other previously published similar tool.²¹

The PAGE score should not be considered a typical EWS as it has been derived for the sole purpose of determining risk of admission, rather than risk of deterioration. A number of the components are temporally fixed (ie, arrival by ambulance and referred by healthcare professional) and will not change, so the PAGE score is not a sequential scoring tool, either. However, as all the components are commonly utilised it provides an easy to measure score at initial assessment that can guide the emergency pathway utilisation for the child or young person. It is important to note that age is a component of the score itself (ie, there are not separate scores for each age group). For those used to traditional EWS approaches this may cause uncertainty as the heart rate cut-off appears low for many young infants (>125 gives a score of 1 across all ages). However, it is important to remember that this is a population-derived tool and therefore at a patient level some features may not seem clinically relevant. This is why, importantly, it will be necessary for local departments to derive their own cut points for the overall PAGE score as where they are set depends on what the local services can offer both in the hospital and in the community. We also suggest in future validation it will be possible to assess its feasibility as part of an electronic health record which will reduce the burden on healthcare staff calculating the total score.

The derivation of score revealed some interesting results in relation to the relative importance of the different components. While nurse judgement was the categorical variable with the strongest association with admission this was only marginal. The CI for 'floppy' means that this may also be a strong predictor, but there were insufficient numbers of participants presenting with this characteristic to be able to demonstrate this. Although from a continuous variable, having an oxygen saturation below 90 was a much stronger predictor of admittance, which is in keeping with known clinical practice. However, in a group of objective measures, it is perhaps surprising one of the most subjective, judgement, was one of the strongest associations. This may reflect the important predictive information that cannot or will not be obtained through clinical measurements and is clearly an area worthy of further study.

The PAGE score did not assess individual illness categories (it was not designed to highlight risk of sepsis) nor did it determine length of stay. Both of these can be determined in future prospective observational cohorts.

LIMITATIONS

There are limitations to the study design. Admitting or discharging a participant based on the PAGE score is only as appropriate as the original judgement of the clinicians on which the score is based. That is to say we do not know what proportion of admission decisions ultimately

prove beneficial to the participant. This is not a limitation specific to our study but a wider consideration for any score that predicts admission. A number of factors influence the decision to admit a participant, and while we have attempted to determine all relevant components there may be sociocultural factors which were missed in the initial derivation work.

CONCLUSION

For units without the immediate availability of paediatricians the PAGE score can assist staff to determine risk of admission. Cut-off values will need to be adjusted to local circumstances.

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Contributors Initial study design was by DR, AR, TL, SC, CH and SW with NG, LJB and SB contributing to development. Study data was collected, processed and evaluated by SB, CH and SC. LJB contributed to statistical analysis and review. NG managed the project under the leadership of DR and AR. All authors contributed to both initial and final drafts and agreed to the submission of the final draft.

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Statistical Appendix

This appendix contains only details not included in the main paper. It is intended that this Appendix will be made available online-only as a supplementary file.

Use of variables in the model

All of the variables were used in the model with the form of the individual variables and their suitability for inclusion in the model considered and adjusted as necessary.

Categorical variables with small categories

The category of behaviour 'inappropriate' was recorded for 54 children (<1%). This was too small a category to include in the modelling, and it was not clear what other category to amalgamate it with, as both 'floppy' and 'listless' could be considered 'inappropriate'. These were marked as missing, removing those children from the analysis. The four categories of abnormal breathing (audible grunt, wheeze, stridor and tracheal tug) were very small (0 to 3%) and so breathing was re-categorised as 'normal' and 'abnormal'. The category 'severe recession' was recorded for only 311 children over the three sites (between 0 and 1% per site), so 'severe' and 'moderate' recession were combined.

Continuous variables

During the regression modelling the fractional polynomial command made suggestions for the transformation of continuous variables. Age was included as reciprocal fractional polynomial of the original variable. Temperature and respiratory

rate had a linear relationship with admittance and were included in the model as continuous variables.

For heart rate and oxygen saturation the plots of the fractional polynomials laid over the data were examined to visually assess how the models fit. These plots and the findings from the exploratory analysis jointly led decisions on the ultimate form of each of the variables.

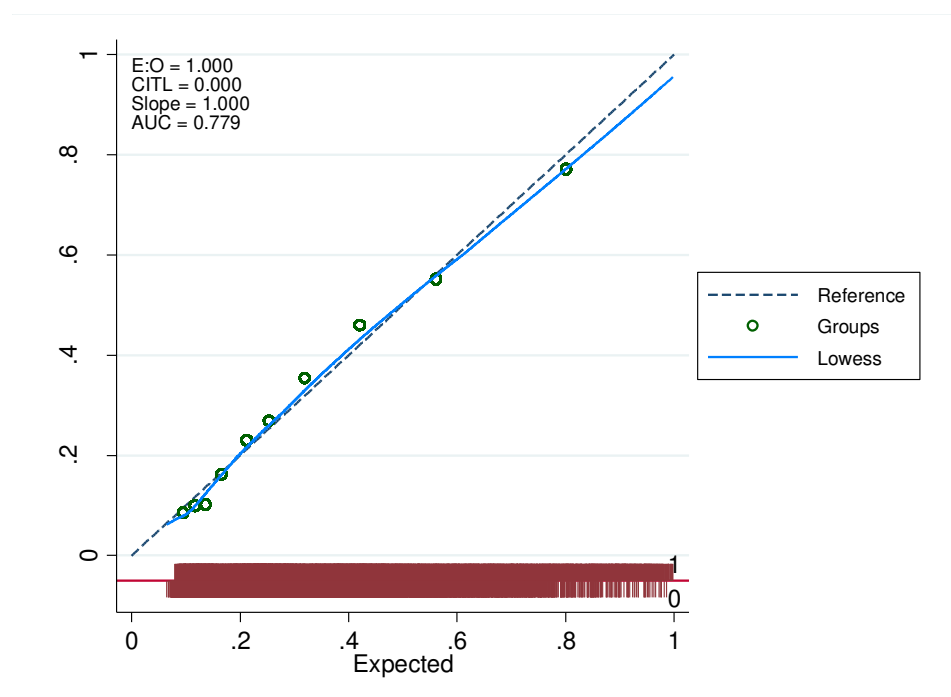
- **Heart rate:** The fractional polynomial suggested a linear association with admittance. Examining the plot revealed that although a linear relationship is broadly appropriate it does a poor job of capturing the two large dips in probability of admittance. A more complex plot would have captured better the association between heart rate and admittance. With the large sample size such a curve could have been fitted without being overly concerned about overfitting. However, this would have defeated the overall aim of an easily used paper-based point scoring tool by requiring multiple coefficients in the final model. Heart rate was categorised as under 75, 75 to 125 and over 125.
- **Oxygen saturation:** The multivariable fractional polynomial modelling suggested that the raw oxygen saturation variable taken to the power of -2 was the best fitting form. On examination of the fractional polynomial plot it was clear that the plot fitted the data very well for oxygen saturations up to 90%, but above 90%, where 99% of the data lay, the polynomial failed to capture the more erratic association between saturation and admittance. Accordingly, a decision was taken to categorise the oxygen saturation variable based on the frequencies of the responses at each saturation

percentage, its observed relationship with admittance from the graph and on the previous PAT-POPS model (which aligns with clinical opinion of oxygen saturation cut-offs): 95%-100%; 90%-94%; <90%.

Being aware of the statistical implications of categorising continuous variables these decisions were not made lightly, however it was clear that no fractional polynomial would be able to capture the nature of the relationship better than categorisation.

Internal validation

Figure A shows the internal validation calibration plot. The blue 'lowess' line fitting the reference line so well is a demonstration of how well the model is fitting the data. Given the large sample size however this is to be expected. **Table A** shows the various internal validation results. The 'apparent' results are the average measures of validation for the 500 models created from the 500 bootstraps of the data. The 'test' results show the average performance of the models developed for each of those 500 bootstraps when applied to the original dataset. The 'optimism' results are the 'apparent' results subtracted from the 'test' results. 'test' results similar to 'apparent' results (and subsequently small 'optimism' results) suggest strong internal validity.

Figure A. Calibration plot for internal validation.**Table A.** Results of internal validation.

Measure	Bootstraps	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Apparent C-index	500	.7790287	.0035788	.7685792	.7889659
Apparent CITL	500	0.0000000393	0.0000000181	-0.000000103	0.000000190
Apparent slope	500	1	0.0000000549	1	1.000001
Test C-index	500	.7780273	.0005261	.7751072	.7791697
Test CITL	500	.0000289	.0158041	-.0458299	.0523462
Test slope	500	.9934335	.0175813	.9502897	1.043822
Optimism C-index	500	.0010013	.0035684	-.0097837	.0107504
Optimism CITL	500	-.0000289	.0158041	-.0523462	.0458299
Optimism slope	500	.0065665	.0175813	-.0438216	.0497103

External validation: Site 2

Model reproducibility or transportability

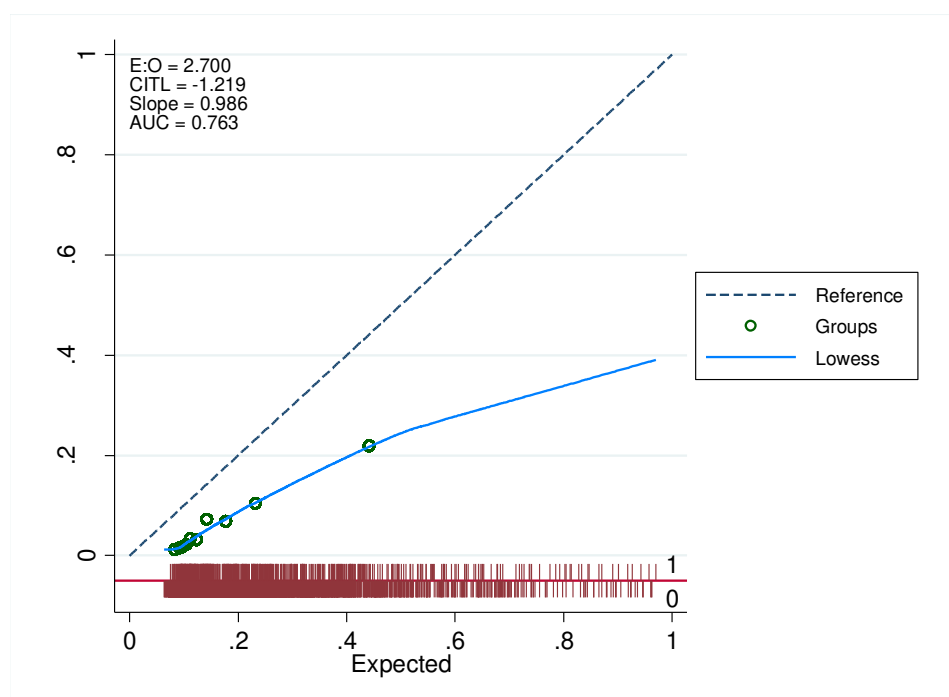
The C-index for this membership model was 0.8078. The closer this number is to 1 the more likely it is that this represents model transportability rather than model reproducibility. So, in carrying out external validation using the Site 2 dataset an assessment is being made of whether the model works well in a different but related population. This was as expected given that from the exploratory analysis it could be seen that Site 2 represent a different mix of ethnicities as well as generally older and healthier patients.

Calibration and discrimination

The Brier score was lower in the Site 2 data (0.0653) than in the model development dataset, suggesting very good prediction accuracy in this external dataset. At 0.9864908 (0.896986 to 1.075996) the calibration slope was also close to the ideal of 1. Calibration-in-the-large (CITL) was less impressive at -1.218977 (-1.305886 to -1.132068). This suggests that the predicted probabilities were higher than the observed proportions. So, children in Site 2 were less likely to be admitted than the model predicted; a child with equivalent characteristics presenting at Site 1, for example, would be more likely to be admitted. This can be seen in the calibration plot (**Figure B**) where the observed probabilities are consistently lower than the expected probabilities, especially as the expected probabilities near 1. This was also evident in the E/O ratio of 2.7. This is the expected/observed ratio, how many were expected to be admitted based on the model versus how many actually were

admitted, so ideally this would be 1. That it is higher here suggests less people were admitted than would have been expected from the model. In terms of discrimination, the C-index was 0.7626 (0.74244 to 0.78279) (**Figure B**).

Figure B. Calibration plot for Site 2 external validation.



External validation: Site 3

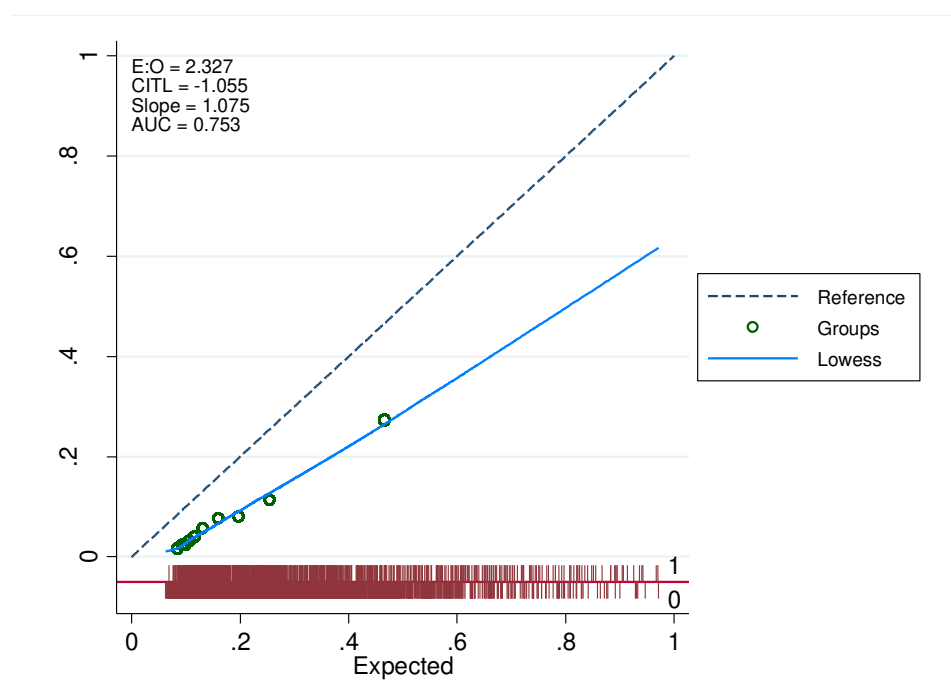
Model reproducibility of transportability

The C-index for this membership model was 0.8154. This suggests that Site 1 and Site 3 are also quite different from each other in terms of their populations and therefore model transportability was assessed with the following results. That these two sites differ is expected; aside from the difference in ethnic make-up of the populations, Site 1 is an ED whereas Site 3 is an Urgent care centre and therefore sees healthier children.

Calibration and discrimination

As with Site 2, when the model was applied to Site 3 the Brier score was a very low 0.0732. The calibration slope was over 1 at 1.075, this time suggesting overfitting, but as with Site 2 the CI also crossed 1 (0.976 to 1.123). The CITL was -1.055 (-1.123 to -0.987) suggesting predicted probabilities were higher than the observed proportions, again evident in **Figure C**. The E/O ratio was 2.3. The C-index was 0.7533 (0.734 to 0.770).

Figure C. Calibration plot for Site 3 external validation.



Overall

From these results it can be determined that the model transportability is good overall. With only slight over/under-fitting present at each of the external validation sites and C-indexes only modestly smaller than was found in the original model. It is

clear however that the model may over-estimate the probability of admission in external populations, probably owing to the admission rate at the development site (Site 1).