

Medical Council Presentation to the Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection by CEO, Ms Caroline Spillane

Wednesday 2nd April 2014

Chair and members, on behalf of the Medical Council I welcome the opportunity to address the Committee on this topic.

The role of the Medical Council is to protect the public by promoting and better ensuring high standards of professional conduct and professional education, training and competence among medical doctors. We are responsible, under Part 10 of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, for setting and monitoring standards in undergraduate, intern and postgraduate education and training in Ireland. We also ensure that doctors engage in lifelong learning and skills development activities by monitoring the ongoing maintenance of doctors' professional competence. We accredit the bodies that deliver medical education and training and professional competence schemes against robust and validated international standards; and we ensure through monitoring processes that accredited bodies maintain and improve their standards. Where education, training and professional competence standards are not met, the Medical Council can take action in the public interest, through applying conditions or refusing to approve relevant bodies and programmes.

External accreditation ensures education and training is delivered to defined high standards, while also fostering institutional improvement and promoting high-quality experience. It encourages organisations to think about, respond to, and deal with the strengths and weaknesses of their programmes.

In line with the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 and Medical Council rules, globally recognised standards are used in accreditation - the "World Health Organisation, World Federation for Medical Education, Global Standards for Quality Improvement in Medical Education: European Specifications 2007." A standard procedure is used by the Medical Council in the application of these standards to its consideration of any programme of basic medical education. That procedure, and the approach of the Medical Council, has

been externally reviewed and benchmarked by the US Department of Education's National Committee on Foreign Medical Education, which provides assurance that a proper approach is taken by the Medical Council.

The principles underpinning these accreditations ensure that they are:

- Based on a sound legal footing
- Independent from the medical schools, the medical profession and government
- Trustworthy and recognised by all
- Fair
- Possess a high degree of transparency and
- Involve assessors who are respected in the field, and are recognised as such internationally.

Council's accreditation teams normally comprise a combination of lay and medically qualified members of the Medical Council and external assessors. The external assessors have expertise in medical education and / or quality assurance, or represent the public interest. They are drawn both from within Ireland and from other jurisdictions.

Dialogue with students is a key part of accreditation visits. We aim to meet students in each year of the programme and one of the key elements of the dialogue is that it is confidential, and this is emphasised to students at the start of every session.

Professionalism and ethical issues always feature in the discussions, particularly with students in the later stages of the course, who are experiencing in 'real life' (on the wards or in a general or community-practice setting) the type of scenarios they met in a more theoretical way earlier in the course.

Accreditation outside of Ireland

Many medical schools in Ireland, approved by the Medical Council for the purposes of the delivery of programmes of basic medical education, have expanded operation to deliver medical education globally. The Joint Committee on Education and Social Protection will be aware of increasing delivery by Irish universities of third and fourth level education around the world and of the support of the Department of Education and Skills for such overseas activity.

As the responsible body for approving programmes of medical education and training, and the bodies that deliver these in Ireland, the Medical Council has been invited to consider these same bodies delivery of medical education internationally for the

purposes of quality assurance. In the case of some programmes, these are co-delivered in Ireland and in another country; some are delivered in total outside the state. The Medical Council has considered how it should approach such requests. In the context of increasingly globalised medical education and training, the Medical Council takes the view that, in safeguarding the reputation of Irish bodies' role in medical education and training, it does consider requests to review programmes delivered by Irish bodies outside the state. We understand from the bodies that make this request that the quality assurance role of the Medical Council is highly valued. Indeed the Department of Health has expressed to the Council its view that programmes delivered under the auspices of an accredited Irish education body should be of equivalent standard and quality as programmes delivered by that body in this country.

Medical education and training is increasingly globalised. Medical schools in Ireland welcome students from around the world, who enrich medical education in the state. Their study at Irish medical schools also makes an important contribution to the funding base for medical education in Ireland.

The Medical Council has received and is processing a request to review the programme of basic medical education delivered by RCSI-Bahrain. The WHO standards and procedures will be used by the Medical Council to review the programme of basic medical education at RCSI Bahrain and to inform a decision by the Medical Council in respect of that programme under S88(2)(a) of the Medical Practitioners Act.

At this stage, a review has not taken place but is being planned. An assessment team is being identified and pre-assessment visit information has been requested by the Medical Council from RCSI Bahrain.

The Medical Council is conscious of the political developments in Bahrain; indeed our earlier plans to review the basic medical education programme at RCSI-Bahrain were postponed owing to same. The President of the Medical Council term 2008-2013, Prof Kieran Murphy, and the President of the Medical Council term 2013-2018 Prof Freddie Wood have both written to a number of political leaders, including An Taoiseach, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Health and to the Higher Education Authority, expressing the Medical Council's concern at the situation there.

In this accreditation visit, we will apply our standards and procedures to review the programme of basic medical education at RCSI Bahrain and to inform a decision by the Medical Council in respect of that programme under S88(2)(a) of the Medical

Practitioners Act. That decision will, as with every decision by the Medical Council, be made in an independent, informed and objective way. The outcome of the decision and the report based on the review which informs it, including discussion of all issues germane to the standards and the procedure used by the Medical Council to review the programme of basic medical education at RCSI Bahrain, will be available for public scrutiny.

Thank you for the opportunity to explain the role of the Medical Council in medical education and training and to set out for you the Medical Council's process for considering the accreditation of RCSI Bahrain. At this present time, we must be careful not to pre-empt our visit and its findings, so as such we are somewhat limited in the information we can provide as we are constrained by the requirements of our work. As previously stated, the Council has plans to visit RCSI-Bahrain later this year and we would be pleased to provide an update to the Committee after that visit.