

# Recognition of professional qualifications and regulation of professions

Response from the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges to BEIS call for evidence

October/ 2020

## Introduction

The Academy of Medical Royal Colleges (the Academy) is the representative body for medical royal colleges and faculties in the UK. We speak on standards of care and medical education across the UK. By bringing together the expertise of the medical royal colleges and faculties we seek to drive improvement in health and patient care through education, training and quality standards.

## Professional standards and regulation

Regulation in medicine is essential to ensuring patient safety and high-quality care. These must be the guiding principles behind any system of regulation. The system must also be proportionate, fair, transparent, and consistent for all clinicians, whether they have qualified in the UK or abroad.

The Academy values the work of the General Medical Council (GMC) as the UK's professional regulator and supports its efforts to modernise medical education and training through improved flexibility. The Academy, royal colleges and faculties work extensively with the GMC on issues relating to postgraduate medical education and training.

We do not feel that a UK-wide, cross-sectoral strategy for the regulation of the professions is needed from a medical perspective. We would prefer to continue working directly with the GMC on issues relevant to the medical profession.

The Academy has [called](#) for the statutory regulation of Medical Associate Professionals (MAPs) to ensure common, consistent standards across this increasingly important part of the clinical workforce. We welcomed the decision for physician associates and anaesthesia associates to be regulated by the GMC and maintain that surgical care practitioners and advanced critical care practitioners should also be regulated. Healthcare professionals cannot be trained and approved to prescribe medicines independently without registration and regulation.

## Workforce supply and international recruitment

EU and international staff play a crucial role in health and social care services in the UK, as has been evident during the COVID-19 pandemic. Overseas recruits help supply the workforce needed to care for patients and they enrich medical knowledge, practice and professional life. Regulation is an important part of international recruitment, ensuring that high standards of care are maintained.

The UK is currently a popular destination for international medical graduates (IMGs). In 2019, more graduates joined the workforce from overseas than from UK medical schools, as [reported](#) by the GMC. The number of doctors joining UK practice from the European



Economic Area (EEA) has not declined since the EU referendum. These numbers should be kept under review following the end of the transition period.

Given the long-term workforce shortages across health and social care, it is vital to make sure that the UK and the NHS remain attractive places to work for international recruits. As the transition period closes, there need to be long-term arrangements in place for the legal rights of EU staff working in both the NHS and social care. As part of this, the proposed NHS Visa should be extended to social care staff. The arrangements must be clearly communicated to all those affected.

IMGs [from outside the EEA and Switzerland] who wish to apply for registration with a licence to practise in the UK have traditionally taken the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) test. From early 2024, these candidates will take the [Medical Licensing Assessment](#) (MLA). UK medical students graduating in the academic year 2024-25 will need to pass the MLA as part of their medical school degree before they join the medical register. The Academy looks forward to seeing further details regarding how the new system will work in practice. Ensuring robust and consistent assessment across UK medical graduates and IMGs would help to ensure a fair and effective regulatory system.

The Academy supports the GMC's [call for legislative reform](#) so that it can make changes to the international recognition routes for specialist or GP registration for international doctors coming to the UK to work as consultants or GPs. While maintaining standards, these changes would make it more straightforward for senior international doctors to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. This would help the UK to attract medical professionals working at an advanced level.

The UK must adopt an [ethical approach](#) to overseas recruitment. The Academy sponsors the Medical Training Initiative (MTI), which enables IMGs – particularly those from Department for International Development priority countries – to come to the UK for a maximum of two years to train within the NHS. The benefits of this scheme are reciprocal. The UK hospitals that provide placements gain the skills and expertise of the IMGs, who help to increase workforce capacity. At the same time, IMGs can develop their knowledge and techniques within the NHS and take these skills to their home country on their return. The Academy continues to advocate for the expansion of the MTI.

## Social mobility

Promoting social mobility within medicine is important for ensuring a diverse workforce which is representative of the patient population it serves. Research suggests that widening participation in medicine can have a direct impact on service delivery – for example, [one study](#) showed that it may improve GP recruitment in deprived and rural communities.

A report produced by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Social Mobility on [Increasing access to the leading professions](#) highlighted that there is more to be done to widen access to the top professions in the country. More resources are required for training to encourage people to enter medicine. This needs to start from primary school upwards and to be continued throughout higher education. If we are looking to attract people from diverse backgrounds and underrepresented socio-economic groups there needs to be greater investment early on.

The royal colleges and faculties promote medical careers through initiatives working alongside schools and universities. Such engagement is an important way to introduce medical careers to people who may not have previously considered this route.

Tackling differential attainment and ensuring greater diversity at senior levels in healthcare are also vital ways to address inequalities and to make the NHS a modern employer and an attractive place to work, in which staff feel valued and supported.