

**NEWS RELEASE BY
THE AUSTRALIAN MEDICAL COUNCIL
AND
THE FACULTY OF MEDICINE, THE UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND
QUEENSLAND'S GRADUATE MEDICAL COURSE IS ACCREDITED**

Australia's national accreditation and standards body for basic medical education, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), has granted conditional accreditation to the Faculty of Medicine at the University of Queensland to commence its Graduate Medical Course in 1997. The decision means that the first group of students entering the new course will be eligible, upon graduation, for registration to practise medicine in any state or territory of Australia.

The new four-year course aims to develop in its graduates: a life-long commitment to continuing education, with enhanced critical reasoning and communication skills; a highly developed awareness of their ethical and professional responsibilities to individual patients and to the community; skills to cope with the challenges of medicine, both technical and humanistic; and an ability to contribute to the continuing evolution of medical knowledge. In order to obtain entry to the course, students will need to hold a primary degree in any area of study, sit the Graduate Australian Medical Schools Admission Test (which tests problem-solving, writing and verbal reasoning, and knowledge of the physical and biological sciences), and participate in a semi-structured interview.

The AMC decision is based on the report of an assessment team which spent a week at the Faculty in May 1996, considering the Faculty's plans and talking to the curriculum planners, teaching staff, and students of the present six-year course about the changes. A small subgroup returned to the Faculty in August 1996 to further review progress.

In announcing the decision AMC President, Professor John Horvath, said: "The decision to move from a six-year undergraduate medical course to a four-year graduate-entry course using small group, problem-based learning represents a radical and exciting change in the style of medical education offered by the Queensland Medical Faculty. The enthusiasm for the Graduate Medical Course evident in the Faculty and its associated teaching hospitals, the strong commitment shown by the Queensland Health Department, together with the enormous amount of work that is being done gives the AMC confidence that the new Graduate Medical Course will be ready for introduction in 1997."

A feature of the new course which is particularly commended in the AMC report is the opportunity for a group of up to 40 students to spend the last two years of the course at the North Queensland Clinical School. The Clinical School, which is located at the Townsville General Hospital with additional teaching facilities at the Cairns and Mackay Hospitals, is seen as a major initiative by the University and the Queensland Health Department. Also commended are the Faculty's approaches to stimulating student interest in research and in the scientific basis of medicine; the quality of the information technology available to the students and the ways in which information technology is being used to deliver the new curriculum; and the fine teaching facilities, especially at the St Lucia campus of the University.

In addition to these strengths, the report also draws attention to several areas of relative weakness where further development is required. The most important of these relate to the finalisation and implementation of the course management structure; the refinement of curriculum material for Year 1 of the course; and the detailed development of the curriculum for Years 2, 3 and 4 of the course.

Professor Horvath said: "The Council understands that it is assessing an evolving course. It does not expect all four years of the course to be developed in detail at this stage. While the AMC has granted conditional accreditation to the Faculty for the first cohort to commence the course, the Faculty still has further development to undertake. The design of Years 2, 3 and 4 of the course is still at a fairly early stage, and the AMC will need to assess the final plans for these years before students progress to them.

The Council also wishes to review aspects of the program for Year 1, once the course is operational and before the second cohort of students commence.”

The AMC’s detailed report on the assessment of the program has been presented to the Vice-Chancellor of the University and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Health Sciences). The University of Queensland has welcomed the AMC conditional accreditation which clears the way for admission of the first student intake to its new graduate medical course in January 1997.

Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Health Sciences), Professor Ken Adkins, said the University would continue the development of an excellent graduate medical course, with an innovative curriculum, which would serve the people of Queensland and the medical profession well.

“A tremendous amount of planning has gone into developing this course to make it relevant to the provision of quality health care through the next century” he said. “The curriculum focusses strongly on problem-based self-directed learning, to produce graduates with highly-developed analytical and problem-solving skills.

“The UQ Medical School benefits enormously by being part of such a strong and comprehensive University with world-class strengths in biological and clinical sciences.”

The University’s medical school is one of Australia’s largest and will offer 230 places in the first year of the course. Professor Adkins said the University had sent invitations to 300 eligible candidates who had met the threshold criteria to attend for interviews in September. Offers would be made in December, after the final Grade Point Averages for people completing their degree this year were known.

A small number of places will also be available for international full-fee paying students who meet the same academic criteria as Australian applicants.

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