

# Consultation paper: AMC review of accreditation standards for specialist medical education programs and professional development programs – March 2015

---

This consultation paper seeks feedback on the draft revised *Standards for Assessment and Accreditation of Specialist Medical Education Programs and Professional Development Programs* by the Australian Medical Council.

## 1 What are accreditation standards and how are they used?

Accreditation functions for regulated health professions are defined under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). **Accreditation standard**, for a health profession, means a standard used to assess whether a program of study, and the education provider that provides the program of study, provide persons who complete the program with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes necessary to practise the profession in Australia. (Section 5 of the National Law).

The Australian Medical Council is the accreditation authority for the medical profession and it develops accreditation standards for medical programs and their education providers. In doing so, it must undertake wide-ranging consultation about the content of the standards (Section 46 (2)). The Medical Board of Australia is responsible for approval of accreditation standards developed for the medical profession by the AMC. (Section 47 (1)).

In reviewing the standards the AMC takes account of the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency *Procedures for Development of Accreditation Standards*, and of the objectives and guiding principles in the National Law.

The AMC uses accreditation standards to assess medical programs for the purposes of accreditation. Under the *National Law*, the AMC may grant accreditation if it is reasonably satisfied that a program of study and the education provider meet an approved accreditation standard. It may also grant accreditation if it is reasonably satisfied that the provider and the program of study substantially meet an approved accreditation standard, and the imposition of conditions will ensure the program meets the standard within a reasonable time. Having made a decision, the AMC reports its accreditation decision to the Medical Board of Australia to enable the Board to make a decision on the approval of the program of study for registration purposes. The AMC also uses the accreditation standards for monitoring accredited programs and providers to ensure that they continue to meet the standards.

The AMC develops standards for all phases of medical training and education. The standards follow similar structure and formatting, but are customised to the requirements of the stage of training and education.

Most of the providers of specialist medical programs offer training and education in both Australia and New Zealand. The Medical Council of New Zealand works with the AMC to accredit specialist medical programs in New Zealand and to develop standards that apply in both countries.

## 2 Why is the AMC reviewing the accreditation standards?

This consultation document relates to the *Standards for Assessment and Accreditation of Specialist Medical Education Programs and Professional Development Programs*. The AMC revised these standards when the National Law took effect in 2010 by bringing them into line with the National Law and Medical Board of Australia's registration standards and guidelines.

The AMC reviews the accreditation standards at least every five years, in keeping with good practice. It reviews relevant developments nationally and internationally, consults about the proposed scope of the review, draft proposals for any change, and then once it has feedback on the changes, consults again on the final draft set of revised accreditation standards.

This review of the standards for specialist medical programs and continuing professional development programs is one of those regular reviews. It builds on the AMC's recent review of the *Standards for Assessment and Accreditation of Primary Medical Programs by the Australian Medical Council* (2012) and the development of *Intern training – National standards for programs* (2013).

### 3 AMC options in setting the scope of the review

The AMC has considered a number of options in this review:

**Option 1 – Continue with the existing accreditation standards.** These accreditation standards have been in place since 2009, with minor revisions made in 2010 to reflect changes resulting from the implementation of the National Law.

The AMC has, however, identified a range of issues with the current accreditation standards, including the need to respond to evolution in education and training and healthcare delivery, as well as the opportunity to clarify the language and internal ordering to make the standards easier to understand. The AMC's preliminary consultation with key stakeholders supported the idea that some changes are required but not major revisions to the structure and content.

**Option 2 – Complete restructuring and review of the accreditation standards.** After consultation, the AMC has confirmed its view that a major restructuring of the accreditation standards is not required. It considers that the current standards are generally appropriate.

**Option 3 – Revisions to current standards.** Option 3 would involve the AMC submitting revised accreditation standards to the Medical Board of Australia for approval. The revisions proposed would make no change to the overall structure of the accreditation standards or the aim of the process. The standards would continue to be set a high level, that is not prescribing specific processes or methods, and be able to be met in different ways.

The benefits of the proposal to revise the current standards (Option 3) are that the revisions will:

- result in clearer and simpler standards;
- better reflect contemporary educational terminology and thinking;
- reduce duplication between standards;
- strike a balance between the impact on education providers and ensuring that standards remain appropriate for assessing whether specialist medical programs and their providers provide graduates with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes necessary to practise in Australia;
- align the standards across the stages of medical training and education; and
- result in standards appropriate for the breadth of health care services used for specialist medical training.

The implications of revisions to the standards are:

- Education providers will need to become familiar with and report against the revised standards. The AMC will consult education providers particularly to ensure the revisions are clear. It will provide revised templates to assist preparation for accreditation assessments and map existing standards to new standards. By simplifying standards which had been identified as unclear, reporting should be easier. In the first year of implementation, the AMC will ask education providers to demonstrate planning towards

meeting any new standards, rather expecting that they will meet the new standards. The AMC will review the experience with the standards in the first year of operation and if necessary provide additional guidance.

- AMC accreditation assessment teams will need to become familiar with the new standards to ensure they assess programs fairly and consistently against the standards. The AMC will provide specific guidance and training for teams to assist their preparation for assessing against the revised standards.
- The AMC reports to the Medical Board of Australia and the Medical Council of New Zealand on its assessments of individual programs and providers. The AMC will need to revise its accreditation reports to include the new standards, and in the early stages of implementing revised standards, provide guidance to the Medical Board and the Medical Council of New Zealand on the changes.

#### 4 Review process and opportunities for stakeholder input

In August 2013 the AMC published a consultation document outlining the proposed scope of the standards review.

The AMC Directors established a Standards Review Working Party, chaired by Associate Professor Jill Sewell AM, the Chair of the AMC Specialist Education Accreditation Committee, to oversee the review of the standards. The Working Party includes AMC accreditation assessors, educationalists, doctors in training, health consumers, and members drawn from the education providers and jurisdictions.

The AMC received 30 responses to the initial consultation on the scope of the review. This feedback generally supported the AMC's view that a minor review was required. The feedback supported a focus on updating standards, addressing national policy developments and changes in the training and education environment, and aligning these standards with recent revisions to the approved accreditation standards for primary medical education and to Medical Board of Australia registration requirements.

The Working Party commenced the detailed review in August 2014.

The AMC is now inviting general comments on its draft proposals for change. There is an overview attached that explains the proposed revisions. There are also specific questions below about the accreditation standards which you may wish to address in your response. The AMC is also arranging meetings with key stakeholder groups.

A summary of the proposed revisions to the standards is provided in **ATTACHMENT 1**.

The AMC is inviting feedback on the following questions:

1. Is the content and structure of the draft revised accreditation standards helpful, clear, relevant and more workable than the current standards?
2. Are any of the revised standards not achievable by education providers?
3. Is there any content that needs to be changed or deleted in the revised draft accreditation standards?
4. Is there anything missing that needs to be added to the revised draft accreditation standards?
5. It is proposed that the draft revised accreditation standards be reviewed every five years or earlier if required. Is this reasonable?
6. Do you have any other comments on the draft revised accreditation standards?

7. The AMC is seeking feedback on whether there should be a separate standard which draws together all the elements relevant to the specialist international medical graduate assessment processes. Currently these elements are integrated throughout the standards.

## 5 Next steps

The AMC will consider the feedback on the draft proposals for change to the standards and develop a final set of revised accreditation standards. It will make this second draft available for consultation before finalising the standards.

When finalised, the accreditation standards will be submitted to the Medical Board of Australia for approval.

The stakeholder submissions received will be considered by the AMC Standards Review Working Party and through the relevant committee processes. The AMC is planning to conduct a second consultation on the revised standards around May 2015.

The planned completion date of the review is mid-2015, with implementation of the revised standards from 2016.

Please send any questions about the process or the draft standards to [standardsreview@amc.org.au](mailto:standardsreview@amc.org.au).

## Attachments

Attachment 1: Summary of key changes including comparison table

Attachment 2: Draft revised standards

The AMC welcomes feedback on the standards either by email to [standardsreview@amc.org.au](mailto:standardsreview@amc.org.au) or by mail to AMC Accreditation Section (Standards Review) at the Australian Medical Council Ltd PO Box 4810 KINGSTON ACT 2604 by **4 May 2015**.