Review of Quality Assurance: Terms of Reference

Background

1. The Quality Improvement Framework (QIF) consolidates previous work by the GMC on the quality assurance of basic medical education (QABME) and the Foundation Programme (QAFP), and arrangements inherited from PMETB.

2. The GMC is now looking to enhance the QIF by piloting different approaches to ‘inspecting’ medical schools and postgraduate deaneries, by developing a better evidence base to inform those visits and by having established a Quality Scrutiny Group to provide more consistent analysis of the outcomes of quality assurance activities.

3. These initiatives will help to refine existing operational processes. However, the recent expansion of our regulatory remit, combined with proposed changes to NHS structures (described in Developing the Healthcare Workforce: from Delivery to Design) and some high profile failures within NHS hospitals which deliver training, have prompted us to undertake a more fundamental review of the way we carry out our quality assurance role.

Purpose

4. To examine the GMC’s arrangements for assuring the quality of undergraduate and postgraduate medical education and training and make recommendations regarding:

- Their fitness for purpose in ensuring that the management and delivery of education and training equips doctors leaving training with the knowledge, skills and attributes needed for their specialty and professionalism consistent with the application of Good Medical Practice.

- Their ability to monitor compliance with GMC standards for education and training and respond appropriately to concerns, particularly where patient safety may be at risk.

- Their ability to support and drive improvement in local systems for the management and delivery of education and training.
• Compatibility with best practice in quality assurance in the light of commissioned research.

**Underlying principles of the review**

5. In addressing the key tasks set out below the review must have regard to the following principles:

- The need for fairness, equality and consistency in the provision of education and training
- Proportionality: The system must balance rigour and effectiveness with recognition of the need to minimise regulatory burdens and acknowledgement of risk.
- Flexibility: The model must be capable of being applied regardless of changes to the way that education and training are delivered locally.
- Working with others: The model must seek to make the best possible use of information and activities undertaken by others.
- Adding value: Activities undertaken for the purposes of quality assurance must demonstrably add value in relation to the overall purpose described in paragraph 4 above.

**Key Tasks**

6. Building on the issues contained in the report to Council of 8 June 2011 the review should examine the following themes:

*Theme 1: Approval against standards: Consistency and divergence in the GMC’s quality framework*

7. The different approaches to the GMC’s quality assurance of undergraduate and postgraduate training are largely shaped by the underpinning legislation. The review should consider the case for greater overall coherence and consistency across the continuum and the most appropriate approach. This should include consideration of our approach to the setting of standards across all stages of education and training, and the actual and potential outcomes of the quality assurance process for the entities being assured.

*Theme 2: The case for approving the educational environment*

8. Education and training are more likely to be effective when delivered in environments where they are valued. The review should consider the case for and against a quality assurance model based on recognition of the quality of the educational environment as a whole, as opposed to the programmes of
training provided within those environments. This should include consideration of the characteristics of a safe and excellent training environment, the potential unit of approval, the implications of such a model for our relationship with system regulation and for the institutions within which training takes place.

**Theme 3: Reporting the outcomes of quality assurance activities**

9. The review should consider how the outcomes of quality assurance activities are reported, having regard to the purpose to be served by the reporting methods, their accessibility and transparency for the intended audiences and the need both to encourage improvement and highlight failings.

**Theme 4: Quality measures: measuring systems and measuring outcomes**

10. The review will examine whether the current processes provide sufficient assurance of the quality of outcomes and of individual trainees and their progress through training.

   This should include considering options for indicators of quality in training.

**Theme 5: The QIF**

11. The QIF has been designed to provide a proportionate and practical quality assurance methodology which recognises the limits on the regulator’s ability to undertake comprehensive monitoring of the delivery of all education and training. At the same time, it is a system which places the regulator at several removes from trainees and it is heavily dependent on the activities of intermediaries to deliver the required levels of assurance.

12. The review should consider whether the existing framework provides the appropriate focus and levels of accountability and whether the risks associated with dependency on others are adequately mitigated.

**Theme 6: The use of evidence to support decisions on quality**

13. The review should consider the source, nature and extent of the evidence used to inform quality judgements having regard to issues of proportionality, efficacy, the regulatory burden involved in its collection and the potential for better use of shared evidence between organisations and across the GMC.

**Theme 7: The purpose and nature of ‘visits’**

14. The review will consider the purpose, function, form, pattern and nomenclature of visiting, and the composition of teams.
15. It should also examine the implications of the new Regional Liaison Officer role for our visits regime.

**Theme 8 Responding to concerns**

16. The review will consider whether the mechanisms for responding to concerns are effective in facilitating early identification of, and response to, appropriate issues.

**Theme 9: The role of the medical Royal Colleges**

17. The medical Royal Colleges have an important role providing external perspective and specialty expertise. The review should examine how that expertise can be best used within the regulatory framework for quality assurance operated by the GMC.

**Theme 10: Legislative reform**

18. The current quality assurance arrangements are shaped, in part, by the legislative framework. In the light of its conclusions regarding the themes described above, the review should consider the adequacy of the legislative framework and identify any changes needed to existing legislation. This should take into account the current Law Commission review on the GMC’s legislative framework.

**Working methods and phasing of the review**

19. The review will be led from within the GMC’s Education Directorate, but separate from the Directorate’s Quality Team.

20. The review will be informed by the results of externally commissioned research into quality assurance models, both in the UK and overseas, surveys, workshops and seminars with GMC and external stakeholders.

21. The review must also take account of the learning that will emerge during 2012 from GMC initiatives such as the piloting of regional quality assurance visits covering both undergraduate and postgraduate education and training, greater use of risk profiling to plan visits and developments in the response to concerns process. Other key developments affecting the review will include the implications for standards in education and training of the new edition of *Good Medical Practice* (to be published in autumn 2012), the work to develop generic outcomes for postgraduate training, and the results of the Mid-Staffordshire Inquiry. In the light of these developments, the review will be undertaken in two phases.
Review Phase 1: 2012

22. Phase 1 of the review will involve an examination of current quality assurance methodology and recommendations to Council on our future approach.

Review Phase 2: 2013

23. Phase 2 of the review will develop the GMC’s standards in education and training in the light of the new edition of *Good Medical Practice* and work to develop generic outcomes for training, and their implications for quality assurance.

Outputs

24. A written report from each phase of the review setting out conclusions in respect of each of the key areas described in themes 1-10. The Phase 2 report will include a revised draft set of standards for consultation with key interests.

Accountability

25. The review will report to the Education and Training Committee of the GMC.

Timescale

Phase 1

26. The findings and recommendations from Phase 1 of the review will be reported to the Council of the GMC in December 2012.

Phase 2

27. The findings and recommendations from Phase 2 of the review will be reported to the Council of the GMC by or before December 2013.