

Agenda item: 6

Report title: Update on National Licensing Examination

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Action: To consider

Executive Summary

Council gave approval in principle to explore the possibility of a national licensing examination/assessment in September 2014. We are now completing a 'business case' for Council to consider at its meeting in June 2015. If Council agrees, we will move to develop and ultimately implement a national licensing examination. This paper summarises the current state of play and is intended to support a discussion on any further matters Council wishes to address. If approval is given, for the next phase we intend to work with a range of expert advisers to develop the format of the assessment, the governance arrangements and work towards piloting the examination.

Recommendation

To note the work to date and consider whether there are any additional matters to be addressed before proceeding to the next phase of work to develop a national licensing examination.

Issue

- 1 To update Council on work to date and explore the possibility of introducing a licensing examination for all doctors applying to hold a licence to practise in the UK.

Background

- 2 In September 2014 Council gave approval in principle for the work to look at the feasibility of introducing a [UK licensing examination](#).
- 3 Council agreed that this could address concerns about variation in standards, create a level playing field for all those seeking a licence to practise and enable the GMC to set a clear and unified standard for any doctor wishing to practise medicine in the UK.
- 4 Council agreed it would consider the issue again in June 2015 before committing to the development and ultimate implementation of a national licensing exam.

Our activities and engagement to date

- 5 We will report in detail on this in June, but work to date has focused on the following:
 - A business case, including a very preliminary outline of financial models.
 - Possible governance models.
 - Possible formats of the assessment.
 - Possible timing of the assessment.
 - Legal considerations.
- 6 We have considered other national examinations including UK postgraduate medical exams, medical licensing examinations in other jurisdictions and other professional examinations in the UK other than medicine.
- 7 We have received the results of research from Plymouth University considering the impact of licensing examinations for doctors in countries comparable to the UK.
- 8 We have also discussed the prospect of a UK licensing examination in a number of fora including the GMC's UK Advisory Forums in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and at the Education and Training Advisory Board. We have sought the opinion from a number of key groups including the British Medical Association, Academy of medical Royal Colleges, and the Medical Schools Council. The national licensing examination was also discussed at the meetings arranged by Health

Education England and the devolved administrations to discuss the prospect of moving the point of full registration.

Preliminary thoughts

- 9 There will be opportunity for further discussion in June, but some key points are emerging:
 - There is widespread acceptance that a national licensing examination should replace the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board test. There is also strong support that the GMC should strive to ensure that the assessment is taken by all doctors wishing to practise medicine in the UK.
 - There is a shared ambition that the assessment would ideally be a multi-part examination, and it is felt by many that not all doctors would need to take all parts.
 - There is strong support to include elements specific to practice in the UK as well as testing clinical skills and communication. These might include familiarity with and ability to work with the culture and function of the NHS, the law as applied to medical practice in the UK, the nature of multidisciplinary team-work, the impact of differing health systems across the UK and the interface between acute and primary healthcare and social care.
 - This will take time – the timescale envisaged will need to allow those starting a course to know what they will face as well as considered development and piloting (including with current PLAB test candidates). Full implementation would be unlikely before 2021/22.
 - There is considerable worldwide interest in what the GMC is planning, and it will be important to harness this interest through engaging international expertise as we move to the next phase.

Next steps

- 10 We will be returning to Council in June to seek formal approval to move to Phase 2 of the project.
- 11 We ask Council to consider whether there are any questions to be addressed at this stage, and before it considers the issue for approval at its next meeting.