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Safe and Effective Staffing Bill Team

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Dear colleagues

## GMC response to the Safe and Effective Staffing Legislation in Northern Ireland consultation

### About the GMC

We work with doctors, patients, and other stakeholders to support good, safe patient care across the UK. We set the standards doctors and those who train them need to meet and help them achieve them. If there are concerns these standards may not be met or that public confidence in doctors may be at risk, we can investigate, and take action if needed.

Central to our regulatory role is overseeing the smooth flow of medical professionals on to the UK medical register, ensuring that they are equipped with the right skills and capabilities to meet patient needs, and taking action where necessary to prevent a doctor from putting the safety of patients, or the public's confidence in the profession, at risk. Patient safety and high quality care can only be delivered with the right workforce with the right skills working in compassionate, inclusive environments.

We welcome the opportunity to respond to this consultation and have restricted our comments to a small number of relevant themes.

### Workforce planning

We hold valuable data on the medical workforce, which can provide insight into planning for future needs. We carry out extensive analysis on workplace experiences of doctors from different backgrounds, including their wellbeing, motivation, ability to provide the best care to patients, and their career choices or decisions to leave the healthcare system. We oversee the processes through which doctors from outside the UK can join the UK medical register and work here. The data from that work allows us to track the trends in doctors joining the UK register from UK medical schools and from abroad.

We are supportive of proposals for the Minister to review pre-registration training places on an annual basis. We were pleased to support the Department's Review of Medical School Places published in 2019 and stand ready to support further reviews by sharing our data and insights.

We suggest that future reviews of pre-registration places consider the impact on training capacity within the Northern Health and Social Care systems. We hope it is helpful to highlight the findings in [The state of medical education and practice in the UK Workplace experiences 2024](#) that both trainers and doctors in training were more likely than average to be under pressure. A quarter of doctors in training (24%) were at high risk of burnout in 2023, a higher proportion than all other doctor groups. 44% of trainers were dissatisfied, compared with 37% of non-trainers.

In our [National Training Survey 2024](#) report we highlight that plans to boost the UK's medical workforce by increasing medical school places will fail if the needs of trainers are not also prioritised.

## Support for health and social care staff

We welcome the commitment that each HSC Trust will have a range of policies and frameworks in place to ensure staff feel supported and welcome the focus on wellbeing.

In 2018 we commissioned Professor Michael West and Dame Denise Coia to carry out a UK-wide review to help tackle the causes of poor wellbeing faced by medical students and doctors. Their report, [Caring for doctors, Caring for patients](#), concluded that in organisations where leadership was remote from staff, the standard response to safety failures was to blame individuals rather than develop systems to avoid recurrence. The report highlighted that effective and engaged leadership is the key to creating an environment free of unfair blame, where a culture of candour and learning can flourish.

Staff wellbeing is linked to improved experiences for people using services, increased productivity, as well as the willingness of staff to continue working in challenging and complex environments.

## Equality Diversity and Inclusion

It is essential that systems are in place ensure doctors from a range of backgrounds are welcomed into supportive teams. The integration and retention of doctors who first trained abroad must be improved as they continue to play a vital role in the workforce.

Our Northern Ireland outreach team work with health and social care organisations to help them create supportive and inclusive working and training environments. This includes:

- sharing data, insight and tools to help health services identify and resolve local issues.

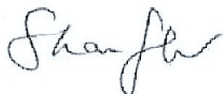
- giving advice to responsible officers about fitness to practise concerns to make sure those they raise with us are fair and accurate.
- running training sessions on our professional standards where doctors need extra support. These include our free Welcome to UK practice workshops for doctors new to the UK.

## List of Professional Disciplines

From December 2024, we will become a multi-professional regulator responsible for regulating doctors, physician associates (PAs) and anaesthesia associates (AAs). We recommend that PAs and AAs are added to the list of Professional Discipline set out at Annex 2 of the consultation document.

If you have any queries about our response please contact Jane Kennedy, Northern Ireland National Head [jane.kennedy@gmc-uk.org](mailto:jane.kennedy@gmc-uk.org).

Yours sincerely,



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General Medical Council