To consider

**Establishing an Assessment Advisory Board**

**Issue**

1. In light of our work developing an assessment to support the revalidation of doctors who do not have a prescribed connection, we have reviewed how we manage and oversee our assessment activity across the organisation. As a result, we are seeking to align assessment oversight arrangements with the current corporate governance structure.

**Recommendations**

2. The Strategy and Policy Board is asked to:

   a. Agree to the establishment of an Assessment Advisory Board.

   b. Note the proposed next steps.
Establishing an Assessment Advisory Board

Issue
3  We are developing an objective assessment to support the revalidation of doctors without a prescribed connection or a connection to a Suitable person. As part of that project, we have considered the need to establish a mechanism for managing and overseeing this work going forward.

4  When we implemented the current corporate governance framework in 2013, we did not review the governance arrangements for the Professional and Linguistic Assessments Board (PLAB) test. This therefore presents an opportunity to consider how we might align assessment oversight more closely with our current governance structure.

Background to the PLAB test
5  The PLAB test is used to assess the knowledge and skills of international medical graduates applying for registration with the GMC. The test is divided into two examinations, Part 1 (a multiple choice test) and Part 2 (an objective structured clinical examination). In addition to the knowledge and skills test, we require international medical graduates to demonstrate their knowledge of the English language through reaching the required standard in the academic version of the International English Language Testing System (IELTS).

6  Currently, development and delivery of the knowledge and skills test is overseen by the PLA Board, which reports its work to the Strategy and Policy Board. The membership comprises ten members selected to reflect the broad scope of medical practice. Its terms of reference include responsibility for the conduct of the test and appointment of examiners, and handling individual cases of cheating/misconduct of candidates, in addition to reviewing methods of assessment and developing the examinations.

7  The PLA Board has oversight of a Part 1 Panel and a Part 2 Panel, which in turn have responsibility for assuring/developing their respective examinations. The Panels undertake a range of duties including maintaining and developing question banks, monitoring performance, and recruiting examiners. Each uses the services of an independent psychometrician to evaluate examination performance.

8  The operation of PLAB is reviewed on a periodic basis by an independent panel comprised of recognised authorities in assessment methodology.

The proposals for change
9  The current arrangements have served us well for many years. However, they were not reviewed at the time we carried out a wider governance review, which resulted in
the changes implemented in 2013. This review highlighted the strategic focus of Council, established two new executive boards (the Strategy and Policy Board and the Performance and Resources Board), and has a mechanism for formal engagement with external experts and key interests through the use of Advisory Boards and fora.

10 In addition, our involvement in assessment activity has undergone recent change. While we have for many years conducted assessments of doctors’ professional performance as part of a fitness to practise investigation, earlier this year we increased our powers to test for knowledge of English language as part of our licensing and fitness to practise procedures. We are in the process of developing an objective assessment of fitness to practise to be undertaken by certain licensed doctors as part of revalidation. The development work is underway and this is due to be implemented in the coming 12 to 18 months. Further, as a longer term goal, we may wish to implement a national licensing examination.

11 In addition, we have committed to a programme of work to understand the experiences of doctors in training from different backgrounds, and to take forward Professor Aneez Esmail’s independent review of the Membership of the Royal College of General Practitioners (MRCGP) examination and the Clinical Skills Assessment, so as to ensure that we deal in a way that is, and is seen to be, fair and free from discrimination.

12 Therefore, we established a cross-directorate project team to consider governance options for our assessment work across the organisation. We concluded that we will continue to require a range of external expert advice on our new and existing assessment activity, both in developing new assessments and reviewing existing assessments to ensure that these continue to be fit for purpose (including, in the short term, implementing the report of the PLAB Review Working Group, which includes recommendations to review the scope of the test, the reliability of the Part 2 examination, and standard setting and scoring methodologies).

13 We determined the most appropriate way to access expertise would be through the creation of an Assessment Advisory Board. Membership would include experts in medical assessment to advise on best practice in design, standard setting, running and evaluation of assessments and provide a forum for us to engage widely and effectively with key interest groups across all countries of the UK. This would replace the PLA Board and report to the Strategy and Policy Board.

14 In summary, the establishment of an Assessment Advisory Board would allow us to:

- Review and develop assessments through a governance structure which is streamlined and effective, facilitates the holistic oversight of all of the assessments conducted by the GMC, and is flexible to change in our assessment programme over time.
b Access external expertise in line with Council’s current governance model and in a way that places operational delivery in the hands of the executive.

c Provide a streamlined and effective mechanism for ongoing review of GMC assessments to ensure that these remain fit for purpose, follow the latest developments in assessment methodology and command the confidence of Council and our key interests.

d Provide a mechanism to access expertise to ensure that we are meeting our equality and diversity obligations, through monitoring of performance and promotion of best practice.

15 We anticipate that the Assessment Advisory Board would use groups of experts in specific areas of medicine to create questions and scenarios, set papers, define pass marks and review the performance of each examination. These groups would report to the Assessment Advisory Board. We will continue to require trained examiners to attend Objective Structure Clinical Examinations (OSCE) and mark candidates’ performance. As now, recruitment will be undertaken by GMC staff with expert advice from suitable members of these groups.

Next steps

16 Subject to agreement by the Strategy and Policy Board, we will proceed with appointment of an Assessment Advisory Board Chair in autumn/winter 2014. We expect the Chair to be fully engaged with the establishment of the Board.

17 We propose to finalise the terms of reference and composition of the Assessment Advisory Board following the Chair’s appointment, and then bring the terms of reference to the Strategy and Policy Board for approval. However we would expect these to be in line with the terms of reference of the other Advisory Boards. We anticipate that the Assessment Advisory Board will be established within the first half of 2015.

18 Any costs associated with the appointment of the Assessment Advisory Board’s Chair would be met from the PLAB budget for 2014.

19 We will develop a plan to ensure continuity of support for oversight of the PLAB test during any transitional phase.
Supporting information

How this issue relates to the corporate strategy and business plan

20 Strategic aim 1: to make the best use of intelligence about doctors and the healthcare environment to ensure good standards and identify risks to patients requires us to monitor and review the performance of our assessments in order to improve standards.

21 Strategic aim 2: to help raise standards in medical education and practice incorporates our commitment to ensure that doctors holding registration and a licence meet the required standards for safe and effective practice and that assessments designed to provide assurance that this is the case are up to date and fit for purpose.

How the issues support the principles of better regulation

22 The proposed governance arrangements will allow us to access expertise in a way that ensures that oversight of our assessment programme is consistent across a range of assessments; targeted by ensuring that the Assessment Advisory Board focuses on an advisory role; and, through the use of clear reporting mechanisms to the Strategy and Policy Board, transparent and accountable.

How the action will be evaluated

23 Annual reporting from the Assessment Advisory Board to the Strategy and Policy Board will provide a basis for evaluation of the Board’s performance.

What equality and diversity considerations relate to this issue

24 The new proposals have been devised to ensure that consideration of equality and diversity is central to the development and running of GMC assessments. The Assessment Advisory Board will have a key role in evaluating and monitoring the equality and diversity performance of individual assessments. We will complete an Equality and Diversity impact assessment for the creation of the new Board once the final terms of reference are approved.

If you have any questions about this paper please contact: Juliet Oliver, Assistant Director - Policy and Regulatory Development, Registration and Revalidation, JOliver@gmc-uk.org, 020 7189 5459.