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A practical guide to using the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) standards. WFME 1: mission and objectives

Geraldine MacCarrick
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland

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2 **A practical guide to using the World Federation for Medical**
3 **Education (WFME) standards. WFME 1: mission and objectives**

4 **G. MacCarrick**

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7 **Abstract** Preparing a medical school for institutional
8 review can be a challenging undertaking for any institution
9 requiring an understanding of the international standards
10 being used and adequate preparation and planning
11 (MacCarrick et al. in *Med Teach* 32(5):e227–e232, 2010).
12 This series examines each of the nine standards developed
13 by the World Federation for Medical Education (WFME,
14 2003) with practical advice on their use in both self-review
15 and independent accreditation processes. The WFME
16 standards and their purpose are described and the use of
17 these standards to ‘drive’ the quality improvement agenda
18 in undergraduate medical education is also discussed.

19
20 **Keywords** Undergraduate medical education · Quality
21 assurance · World Federation for Medical Education
22 standards

23 **The WFME standards**

24 The Executive Council of the World Federation for Medical
25 Education (WFME) first published a position paper on
26 the topic of international standards in medical education in
27 1998. Subsequently, an international Task Force was
28 established by WFME with the purpose of defining inter-
29 national standards for basic (undergraduate) medical edu-
30 cational programmes. The main purpose of the Task Force
31 was to develop undergraduate medical education standards
32 that could be applied internationally. Key considerations in
33 developing the WFME standards were that the standards

should serve as an impetus for institutional self-evaluation, 34
that the standards should take full account of the many 35
different approaches to medical education in different 36
countries; that the standards should *not* dictate content or 37
inhibit educational innovation and that the standards *not* be 38
used to rank schools. It was acknowledged, however, that 39
the standards might be used as part of a system for national 40
or international accreditation of medical education pro- 41
grammes [2]. The standards have been informed by and 42
further refined based on feedback from international 43
advisors and from a number of conferences around the 44
world. The Standards and Guidelines contained in the 45
WFME’s document *Basic Medical Education: Global 46*
Standards for Quality. A number of jurisdictions including 47
Ireland and Australia have adapted the standards as part of 48
the medical school accreditation process. 49

The WFME standards are structured under nine headings: 50

1. Mission and objectives 51
2. Educational programme 52
3. Assessment of students 53
4. Students 54
5. Academic staff/faculty 55
6. Educational resources 56
7. Programme evaluation 57
8. Governance and administration 58
9. Continuous renewal. 59

In each category, the WFME sets out a Basic Standard 60
and a more testing Quality Standard. 61

62 **Getting underway**

Commitment to any self-review process requires top-level 63
support from within the medical school. Once the decision 64

A1 G. MacCarrick (✉)
A2 Institute of Leadership, Reservoir House,
A3 Ballymoss Rd, Sandyford, Dublin 14, Ireland
A4 e-mail: geraldinemaccarrick@rcsi.ie

Timeline and Milestones

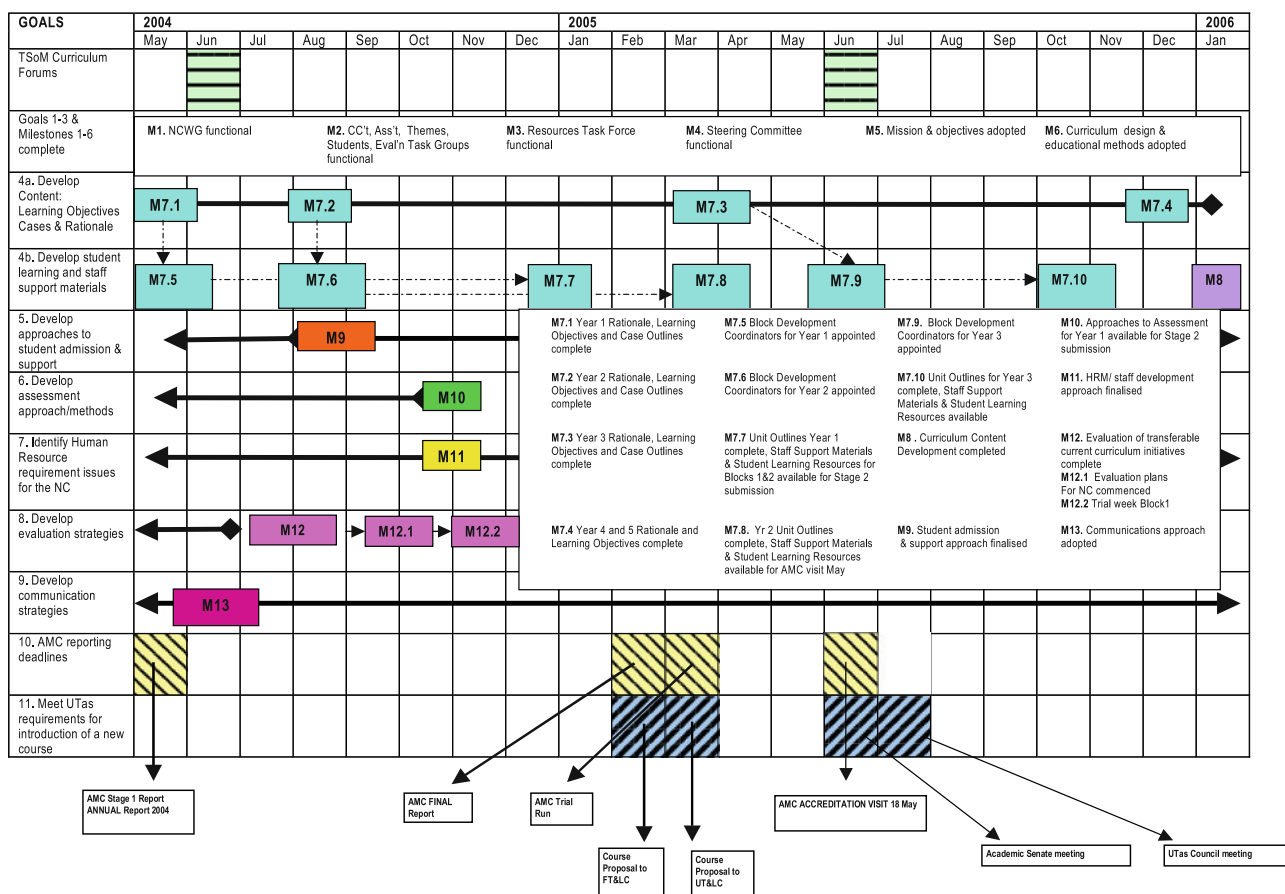


Fig. 1 Typical Gantt Chart identifying key milestones of the medical school quality assurance process

65 is taken to conduct a review of the curriculum, either as
 66 part on a continuous cycle of self-review or in preparation
 67 for accreditation, dedicated resources need to be identified
 68 to support the activity, which is ideally managed using a
 69 project management approach. A comprehensive commu-
 70 nication strategy will facilitate engagement of faculty and
 71 students and key external stakeholders including regulatory
 72 bodies and teaching hospitals. A dedicated newsletter and
 73 website provide useful adjuncts to such a strategy, provid-
 74 ing regular reports on progress made against each of the
 75 WFME standards (Fig. 1).

76 WFME 1: mission and objectives

77 The first standard articulated by the WFME is the need for
 78 each medical school to define its mission and objectives
 79 and make them known to its constituency. The basic stan-
 80 dard would be deemed to have been met if the school has a
 81 clearly defined and description of the outcomes and the
 82 educational process leading to a competent doctor fit to

practice at a basic level, i.e. internship. The quality stan-
 dard would be deemed to have been met if the school has a
 robust set of institutional objectives, which address aspects
 such as social responsibility, research skills and community
 engagement and if these have been defined in consultation
 with relevant stakeholders.

Statements of the medical school mission are an
 important way to express a medical schools' educational
 philosophy and focus and a means to help the school dif-
 ferentiate itself from other programmes. The mission of the
 medical school encapsulates what it is that the medical
 school wants to achieve now but also defining the school's
 aspirations for the future, i.e. where the school sees itself in
 10–15 years from now. Making the medical school mission
 as succinct as possible such that it is capable of being
 shared and understood by faculty and making it distinctive
 and unique to the particular medical school are all impor-
 tant considerations. Most accreditation teams will enquire
 at some stage during their visit about the mission of the
 school and what it means to individual members of staff.
 Mission statements for medical education programmes

104 typically describe excellence in teaching (such as innova-
 105 tion) and/or research (such as key research programmes).
 106 Some schools point to course delivery methods such as
 107 problem based or case based learning and others to the
 108 specific context in which student learning will take place
 109 (such as rural and remote settings):

110 Building on our heritage in surgery, we will enhance
 111 human health through endeavour, innovation and
 112 collaboration in education, research and service [3].

113 As one of the Asia Pacific region’s most highly rated
 114 education and research institutions, Sydney Medical
 115 School offers unparalleled opportunities to study
 116 medicine in Australia. ...Our world class research
 117 includes programmes in diseases, which affect
 118 millions of lives, such as cancer, obesity, chronic
 119 disease [4].

120 The Faculty places a high priority on maintaining and
 121 strengthening its current areas of excellence and high
 122 quality in teaching and research, and its strong
 123 emphasis on rural and remote health, in doing so
 124 making the most of our unique island state [5].

125 The medical school’s underlying pedagogy can also be
 126 incorporated into the schools mission statement. Out-
 127 comes-based education has influenced many modern day
 128 medical curricula as a means of making explicit to students
 129 what specific knowledge, attitudes and skills they will
 130 acquire by the end of training and by the end of each unit of
 131 study. Using an ‘outcomes focussed’ approach ensures the
 132 learning journey is signposted for students and staff.
 133 Students can more readily make links between the desired
 134 knowledge skills and attitudes and the teaching, learning
 135 and assessment strategies used. The term used is “con-
 136 structive alignment” [6-9]. Accreditation team will often
 137 seek evidence of this alignment between the stated mission
 138 and objectives and course delivery and assessment:

139 In aligned teaching, there is maximum consistency
 140 throughout the system. The curriculum is stated in the
 141 form of clear objectives, which state the level of
 142 understanding required rather than simply a list of
 143 topics to be covered. The teaching methods are
 144 chosen that are likely to realise these objectives...the
 145 assessment tasks address the objectives... students
 146 are “entrapped” in this web of consistency.

147 In defining new curriculum objectives or revising
 148 existing objectives it is critical that these are derived in
 149 consultation with relevant stakeholders [10] and that they
 150 are cognizant of the various health care settings in which
 151 the school’s graduates will work. These objectives help
 152 define the end point of the learning process which is a
 153 critical part of the quality improvement process. Some

154 medical schools use this exercise to re-evaluate the medical
 155 school’s educational philosophy and prevailing pedagogy.

156 Key to the success of this endeavour is a dedicated task
 157 force with sufficient authority to examine the medical
 158 school curriculum outcomes and determine how the
 159 curriculum is being delivered and assessed. In addition,
 160 such a review will identify the presence of necessary
 161 linkage between outcomes and assessment and help iden-
 162 tify possible duplication of teaching effort. There are many
 163 published international competency frameworks to inform
 164 this process such as CanMEDS [11]; “Tomorrows
 165 Doctors” [12] and “The Scottish Doctor” [13] upon which
 166 to base a review of the completeness of the stated outcomes
 167 of the medical schools’ curriculum.

168 Many schools group the listed educational outcomes or
 169 the ‘profile’ of the ideal medical graduate under “themes”
 170 or “domains” which provide a framework to organise the
 171 content and delivery of the curriculum as well as student
 172 assessment. The use of *themes* to group related curriculum
 173 objectives can also be used to reflect a shift away from the
 174 traditional discipline based course to a more integrated
 175 approach to medical undergraduate teaching. Key cham-
 176 pions of reform can be selected from faculty to advocate
 177 for particular themes and ensure balance is maintained
 178 across the curriculum. In addition, the weighting of
 179 assessment across themes can be similarly monitored by
 180 theme champions. For example the themes of the medical
 181 programme at the Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland
 182 (RCSI) are shown diagrammatically here as five interwo-
 183 ven themes: Biomedical Science and Research; Clinical
 184 Medicine, Clinical Competence, Population and Interna-
 185 tional Health and Personal and Professional Development
 186 (Fig. 2).

187 Similarly, the four themes, which are the foundation of
 188 the University of Sydney Medical Program are Basic and

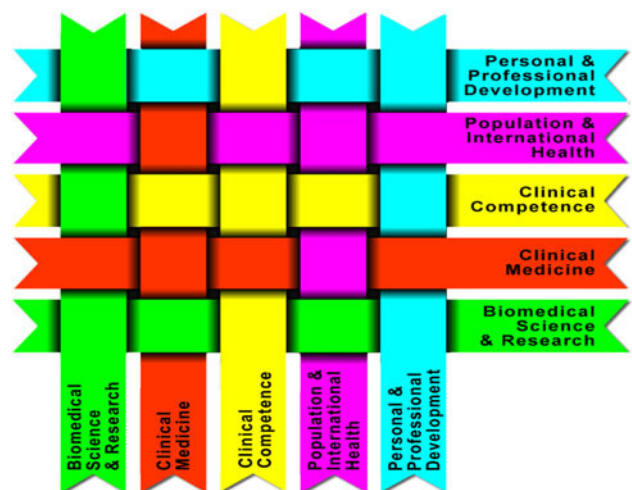


Fig. 2 The five themes of the RCSI medical program 2010

189 Clinical Science (BCS), Patient and Doctor (PD), Com-
190 munity and Doctor (CD) and Personal and Professional
191 Development (PPD). The use of themes provides a
192 framework for the entire programme including assessment.
193 Typically students must demonstrate satisfactory perfor-
194 mance in all theme areas to graduate.

195 Once formulated, revised educational outcomes can be
196 circulated for comment to principal stakeholders. The
197 feedback process should ideally include current students
198 through class representatives, faculty, alumni including in
199 particular recent graduates, patient advocacy groups and
200 employers of medical school graduates. School accredita-
201 tion teams are particularly seeking evidence of a compre-
202 hensive consultation process as it attests to the extent to
203 which the school values and is prepared to respond to
204 stakeholder concerns.

205 Recent graduates and older alumni are a rich source of
206 valuable feedback about the adequacy of the curriculum in
207 preparing graduates for internship and beyond [14, 15].

208 Formulating curriculum outcomes and matching these to
209 individual module outcomes encourages staff to step back
210 from the existing programme and carefully consider what
211 specific knowledge, attitudes and skills are needed by their
212 graduates at the end of their training to practice safely and
213 importantly to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

214 Finally, a root and branch analysis of a medical curricu-
215 lum beginning with a review of the school's mission and
216 objectives is ideally supported by a curriculum database.
217 Electronic curriculum databases are typically organised by
218 theme and also searchable by topics and keywords.
219 Documenting the curriculum in such a format will assist
220 curriculum planners, faculty and students. Such a tool is
221 often requested by accreditation teams to determine the
222 extent to which material has been covered in previous
223 modules and examine the depth, breadth and integration of
224 specific themes/domains.

225 The next paper will examine the second WFME Stan-
226 dard *Educational programme*.

227 Appendix

228 Practice points

- 229 • The WFME standards provide a useful framework to
230 consider all quality assurance activities in undergrad-
231 uate medical education.
- 232 • Statements of the medical school mission are an
233 important way to express a medical schools' educa-
234 tional philosophy and focus and a means to help the
235 school differentiate itself from other programmes.
- 236 • Defining the end point of the learning process is a critical
237 first step in the quality improvement process. The

238 medical school's mission and objectives will inform all
239 subsequent aspects of the quality assurance process.

- 240 • The medical school objectives should be derived in
241 close consultation with all stakeholders and need to
242 be cognizant of the various health care settings in
243 which the medical school's graduates will work. There
244 are several published international competency frame-
245 works, which can inform the process of defining
246 curriculum objectives.
- 247 • A careful examination of the school's curriculum using
248 an electronic database can yield important information
249 about the necessary linkages between stated objectives,
250 delivery methods and assessment as well as helping to
251 identify possible duplication of teaching effort.

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