

Recognition of the importance of teaching alongside research as the mission of a medical school is on today's agenda. ASPIRE is a programme that recognises international excellence in education in a medical school.

Recognising excellence in a medical school

Over the past decade, the move to recognise excellence in universities has been reflected in increasing attention being paid to university league tables. Rankings, however, have concentrated on research and have paid lip service to education. This bias in the information base of existing excellence rankings towards research outcomes could detract from efforts to improve educational performance¹.

Excellence in education

While excellence in teaching has not featured prominently in world ranking tables, the concept of teaching excellence has attracted attention from academics, governments and the public, and is now part of the everyday language and practice of higher education.

There is currently no mechanism at a global level for a professional peer review of excellence in teaching. There is a need for a form of quality assurance that goes beyond accreditation, which recognises excellence that rightly falls outside the formal accreditation process and is the remit of professional educational bodies. The ASPIRE Programme has been established to go beyond the traditional accreditation process and to recognise that the education programme in a medical school can be subjected to peer review against a set of criteria that identifies world-class excellence in education.

AMEE, in collaboration with leading international authorities in medical education and educational bodies with a commitment to excellence in the area, offers a means whereby world-class excellence in education in medical schools can be recognised against an agreed set of standards or benchmarks.

The approach is based upon a 'differential effectiveness' that recognises that the characteristics of excellence will vary according to local contexts.

Advantages of ASPIRE recognition

The ASPIRE initiative encourages and promotes outstanding performance and excellence in education. An ASPIRE award allows medical schools to be recognised internationally for their excellence in education. ASPIRE recognition provides the entrepreneurial university with an enhanced capability for monitoring, demonstrating and promoting its exceptional excellence in teaching and learning.

Areas to be assessed

Eventually a holistic assessment of excellence in education in a medical school may be made. In the first instance, specific aspects will serve as a focus for the assessment. Three areas have been selected for the first round of awards. These are:

- Student assessment
- Student engagement in the curriculum and in the medical school
- Social responsibility and accountability as a mission of the medical school.

Schools can opt to be assessed for excellence in one, two or all three of the areas.

A Board and three panels, including international leaders in medical education and experts in the field, practicing teachers and students, have defined the criteria for excellence in each area. The criteria produced represent a de facto set of standards for 'best practice' in medical education and effectively outline what 'best practice' in these three areas would look like.

The criteria will be refined following a series of pilot studies and a consultation process. The criteria adopted will be subject to continuing scrutiny and will be part of a dynamic process that responds to the experience gained and the changing demands placed on medical education.

The ASPIRE initiative will be launched formally at AMEE 2012 in Lyon in August. Submissions will be invited later in the year.

¹ Harden R M and Wilkinson D 2011. Excellence in teaching and learning in medical schools. *Medical Teacher* 33:95-96

Submissions must be in English. At a later stage submissions in another language may be considered.

Institutions applying to be recognised for an ASPIRE Excellence Award must be an accredited school in their own country.

Cost

The standard charge for assessment in one of the three areas is £2,500 reduced to £2,000 per submission for two or more areas over a twelve month period. The charge for emerging economies is £1,500 per submission and £1,250 per submission for two or more submissions over the same twelve month period.

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Further information

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