

Joint AoMRC and COPMED/COGPED Training Advisory Group Guidance

EXTERNAL ADVICE FROM MEDICAL SPECIALISTS

Models for specialty including General Practice training

March 2010

Role of External Adviser – Regulator

The role of the external adviser is to provide impartial advice and scrutiny of all processes of delivery, assessment and evaluation of specialty including General Practice (GP) training, according to the Quality Framework (QF). The QF states that “*deaneries must be able to demonstrate that all external advisers are independent of the programme, school or deanery, have the relevant expertise, and have no conflicts of interest*”. It also notes that medical external advisers “*will normally be drawn from the colleges, faculties, or specialty associations*”; there is a standard set for deaneries including specific requirements (See appendix 1 for the statutory regulatory requirements agreed and published in 2007). For the purpose of this paper, the Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties will be referred to as “MRC”.

External advice may be provided via medical or lay input. Both are legitimate sources of external advice, depending on the area for advice and/or scrutiny, and neither are optional. Lay advisers may consider processes in detail. The MRCs and, in some cases regarding sub-specialties – the specialty associations, are the key source of external advice for specialty training.

Role of the MRCs in relation to external advice

The annual report by the Head of School should include a summary of the external advice received for that year and the responses/actions taken to that advice. The MRCs provide an Annual Specialty Report (ASR) on each of their relevant specialties to PMETB. It is expected that this report will be formulated from intelligence including reports from MRC organised external advisers as well as the reports from Heads of School. Heads of School (or equivalent role) will produce reports for their local deanery quality management processes, and these must be shared with the colleges and faculties in order to allow effective reporting.

What external advice is:

- Written reports must be produced by all external advisers – lay and specialist – to share with the Postgraduate Dean. Reports should also be copied to the training lead at the relevant MRC.
- It may be useful if one individual has external adviser responsibility for a specific deanery or geographical area in order to develop a body of knowledge. However this must:

- i)) be balanced against the time commitment necessary to fully engage with deanery mechanisms and
 - ii) involve appropriate distance between the adviser and the local systems.
- The programme must provide the external adviser with any background information relevant to the activity being undertaken.
 - All deaneries need to facilitate and support the external advisers so that they can meet the requirements of their role.
 - All MRCs and Deaneries/host programmes must have consistent processes in place for sharing information across external advisers to ensure the individual acting in that capacity is adequately informed.
 - MRCs may wish to consider the use of teams of external advisers, who share information and encourage dissemination of good practice.
 - Each college and faculty will have its own systems for organising their external advisers, and deaneries should work with the appropriate mechanisms for identifying these individuals.
 - External advisers must be used for core programmes as well as higher specialty programmes, and will have the same role in the processes as described below for all postgraduate training.
 - MRCs are responsible for the advice given by external advisers working on their behalf. External advisers should direct written reports to both the Dean and the College. However, the report will be marked as “draft” until it is fully endorsed/supported by the appropriate MRC training body- which may also wish to expand on areas which are considered national issues.
 - External advice may be given to individual trainees, for example as part of the penultimate year assessment, but reports on this advice should be provided to the Dean.
 - Deans should feed back to the MRCs with concerns or positive feedback relating to the external advice they receive. Similarly the MRCs need to communicate effectively with the deaneries and schools.
 - Deans may wish to seek external advice regarding an appeal or a complaint.
 - External advisers must declare any conflict of interest during any activity.

What it is NOT

- External advisers as defined in this paper should not act as ‘assessors’ of training.
- External advisers should not use their position to negatively influence or undermine deanery processes in an open forum and should aim to avoid providing conflicting advice to deanery committees without first consulting the dean.

- External advisers will not normally be Heads of Schools unless they have a dual role within the college or faculty.
- Specialty training committees (STCs) are not normally expected to have external advisers present.
- External advice is not automatically accepted by the recipients.

External Advisers Activity

There are two main areas where external advisers should participate in quality management activity:

- i) ARCPs
- ii) Deanery visits to LEPs

ARCP

External advisers should participate in the ARCP process, as outlined within the Gold Guide but they are not expected to attend every ARCP. However, there should be sufficient face-to-face meetings in order to ensure the external adviser/s can form a view on the quality of evidence presented. All levels of training should receive the benefit of external advice, not just penultimate year assessments (PYAs) or HST.

The role of the external adviser for ARCP is two fold:

i) The ARCP process – The external adviser must ensure that the ARCP process is consistent and appropriate for the specialty. There should be a sampling of ARCP processes, and the external adviser is expected to liaise on this with lay members appointed by the deanery. The external adviser may provide advice on decision outcomes if invited to do so.

ii) Experience of training (Specialty) adviser – The external adviser advises the panel on individual experiences of training, answer specialty-based queries and identifies issues which arise from the ARCP or training processes. Although external advisers should not be reporting to their college/faculty on individual trainees, they should be able to provide advice and direction on concerns about individual experiences of training as they arise.

Deanery visits to LEPs

External adviser involvement to visits to deaneries can be complex as there is no common model of visiting across deaneries. However, there are normally three types of deanery-led visiting:

1. routine monitoring visits to LEPs or programmes
2. visits undertaken to identify if there is a serious issue
3. visits undertaken where there is an *established* serious issue impacting on training

It is expected that deaneries will not normally use external advice in types 1 and 2, but may wish to at the discretion of the Dean. Deaneries should ALWAYS utilise external input for type 3.

Deaneries should also include external advisers in a sampling of their routine visits in order that they can provide input into processes in the context of the specialty, as well as provide specific specialty advice.

Managing Serious Concerns

If an external adviser identifies a serious issue (for example pertaining to patient safety), this should promptly be referred to the postgraduate dean outside of the normal reporting mechanisms. If the issue has been inadequately addressed at the local level and cannot be taken up via the postgraduate dean for whatever reason, the issue may be reported by the MRC to the regulator via the published Response to Concerns process. All MRCs must have a process in place for identifying serious issues when they arise and when/how they should be referred to the deanery and to the regulator.

However, colleges and faculties must not formally independently action issues they identify; PMETB and the deanery will do this as appropriate and as per their processes. The colleges and faculties are, however, key to dealing with issues, as they will reflect the context of the specialty and provide a meaningful specialty perspective.

Resources

There must be clear recognition by all stakeholders of the role of the external adviser, who must be able to undertake required activity.

Appendix 1

From PMETB *Standards for deaneries (approved in September 2007)*:

“Standard 4: The postgraduate deanery must have a system for use of external advisers

Mandatory requirements

4.1 There must be external input at key stages of the postgraduate medical and education training involving “independent and impartial advisers”. The number of such externals required will depend on the size of the deanery and where relevant, the number of specialty programmes.

4.2 External advisers may be medical or lay, depending on the area for advice and/or scrutiny. Medical advisers will have expertise appropriate for the programme, course or school being considered and will normally be drawn from the Royal Colleges, Faculties, or specialty associations.

4.3 The external advisers will verify that standards are being attained by trainees and so help deaneries maintain the quality of the provision.

4.4 The external advisers scrutinising the assessment processes should be able to confirm that they are sound and fairly operated.

4.5 External advisers should record notable practice that they have identified. This should promote comparability of the trainee experience between deaneries, in the same specialty.

4.6 There must be clear identification of roles, powers and responsibilities assigned to external advisers by the deanery.

4.7 Deaneries should incorporate their responses to the external advisers’ comments and considerations into the annual report to PMETB.”

From PMETB *Quality Framework (approved in September 2007)*:

“26. Deaneries *must* ensure active external scrutiny in the QM processes. This can be addressed in two ways. First, at specialty level, there must be external advice on all the processes of delivery, assessment and evaluation of specialty training. **PMETB would expect that such specialist advice will normally come from the Medical Royal Colleges, Colleges and Faculties.** Secondly, deaneries should consider external review by others in relation to the management of PGME, for example, through the engagement of employers; NES, SHAs or equivalent organisations; or other health professions or other deaneries.

External advisers

27. External advisers must have appropriate expertise and be independent of the deanery.

26. Medical external advisers will have expertise appropriate for the programme, course or school being considered and will normally be drawn from the colleges, faculties, or specialty associations.

29. Deaneries must be able to demonstrate that all external advisers are independent of the programme, school or deanery, have the relevant expertise, and have no conflicts of interest.”