



European Medical Students' Association

Association Européenne des Étudiants en Médecine

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World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) Accreditation in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)

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The European Medical Students' Association (EMSA) represents medical students across Europe. We envision a healthy and solidary Europe in which medical students actively promote health. EMSA empowers medical students to advocate health in all policies, excellence in medical research, interprofessional healthcare education and the protection of human rights across Europe.

Problem Statement

Education in the field of medicine differs vastly from education in all other fields of study. As such, its quality assessment warrants the use of specific quality assurance standards, tailored to the needs and specificities of medical education. It should also be ensured that all accrediting agencies which evaluate medical higher education institutions and their programmes are specialised in the accreditation of medical education (Sjöström, 2019). In the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), the standards and guidelines used by quality assurance agencies that accredit medical (and all other) higher education institutions, are the ‘Standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area’ (ESG, 2015). The ESG standards, which were designed to be applicable across all fields of study, although elaborate and highly valuable, are not optimal for medical education if used in isolation. The World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) publishes quality assurance standards designed specifically for medical education at different study levels and forms, encompassing Basic Medical Education, Master’s Education, Postgraduate Education, Continuing Professional Development, and, as of recently, Distributed and Distance Learning (WFME, 2022a). Also, the WFME grants recognition status to national accrediting agencies that meet their rigorous standards of quality. In the EHEA, out of the 48 participating countries, only 17 have an accrediting agency that is recognised (or applying for recognition) by the WFME (WFME, 2022b). In addition, in some of those 17 countries, not all accrediting agencies which accredit medical higher education institutions are recognised nor seeking recognition.

To stimulate efforts of more national accrediting agencies getting recognised by the WFME, and to improve the quality of medical education worldwide, the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG®) established its 2024 (previously 2023) Medical School Accreditation Requirement. The ECFMG provides certification to international medical graduates (IMGs), which is the first step for those who wish to apply for the United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE®), and subsequently, who wish to obtain a position in a residency training program in the USA. Starting in 2024, applicants for ECFMG Certification will need to be students or graduates of a medical higher education institution which is accredited, at the time of their application, by an accrediting agency recognized by the World Federation for Medical Education (Shiffer, 2019).

Due to the lack of WFME recognised accrediting agencies in the EHEA, many European medical students and graduates, post-2024, will lose the opportunity for professional development in the USA, as they will not be able to apply for ECFMG Certification if they’re studying or have graduated from a country (or medical higher education institution) whose accrediting agency is not recognised by the WFME. Moreover, the lack of use of specific quality assurance standards tailored towards medical education like those published by the WFME could be leading to suboptimal and/or non-comprehensive quality assessment of medical higher education institutions during the processes of accreditation and reaccreditation.

Our View. Aim.

We, the European Medical Students’ Association (EMSA), are concerned with the omission of specific quality assurance standards, tailored towards medical education, during the processes of accreditation and reaccreditation of most medical higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area. As medical students, and future medical professionals, we see ourselves as equally responsible

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stakeholders in making sure that the quality assessment of the medical institutions at which we study are performed up to the highest and most rigorous standards of excellence in medical education.

We are cognizant and supportive of the requirements imposed by the Bologna Declaration, and we understand the need for comparable criteria and methodologies for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area. However, we believe that medical education, due to its many unique intricacies, requires additional and specific quality assurance standards, and that quality assessments of it should not solely be based on generic standards and guidelines designed to be applicable across all fields of study, as the ESGs are intended to be (ESG, 2015).

As accrediting agencies which are members of the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) are only required to comply with the ESG standards (ESG, 2015), our aim is to impress upon them the importance of getting recognised by the World Federation for Medical Education in order to assure, that the quality assessments of medical education are contemporary and in-line with the fast-paced developments in and specificities of medical education. Also, we are strongly opposed to medical students in Europe being deprived of the opportunity for professional development in the USA. This, they will undoubtedly be, unless accrediting agencies which accredit their medical higher education institution get recognised by the World Federation for Medical Education by the year 2024.

Recommendations

EMSA calls upon the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to:

- require of its members and affiliates, who participate in the (re)accreditation of medical higher education institutions, to specialise themselves in the accreditation of medical education;
- seek of its members and affiliates, who participate in the (re)accreditation of medical higher education institutions, to pursue recognition status by the World Federation for Medical Education, at the latest by the year 2024;
- ensure that European medical students and graduates do not lose their opportunity for professional development in the United States of America.

EMSA calls upon individual accrediting agencies which accredit medical higher education institutions in the EHEA to:

- apply and make efforts to gain recognition status by the World Federation for Medical Education by the year 2024;
- include the WFME Global Standards, alongside the ESG standards, while (re)accrediting medical higher education institutions.

EMSA calls upon medical higher education institutions in the EHEA to:

- strive to implement the WFME Global Standards into their own quality policies.

EMSA calls upon national medical student organisations in EHEA participating countries to:

- advocate within their respective medical higher education institutions for them to implement the WFME Global Standards into their own quality policies.

References

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