ULSTER UNIVERSITY

MEDICAL SCHOOL DEVELOPMENT: UPDATE

1. INTRODUCTION

The Medical School Development Project has progressed well in terms of achieving the key early objective of securing endorsement. We achieved All-party support for the proposal in the Northern Ireland (NI) Assembly in November 2016. Additional support, both internal and external, has continued to be strong and high-level strategic engagement with medical, business, academic, community and political stakeholders continues to be a priority.

The proposal, at this stage, is for a four-year graduate entry programme (GEMS), with an annual cohort of 80 students and a planned first intake in September 2019. It is envisaged that the provision will have primary care, rural health, population health, gerontology and chronic disease management foci, along with an element of cross-border collaboration. Productive meetings have taken place with senior staff in UL and NUIG and potential partnerships would include, providing students with placement experience in two different jurisdictions Post Brexit, sharing of expensive kit, collaborative research, joint videoconferencing of lectures and master classes, and cadaveric experience of the GEMS students.

2. ST GEORGE’S UNIVERSITY OF LONDON (SGUL)

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and Confidentiality Agreement have been signed with St George’s University of London. These relate to the purchase of their curriculum and to their role as contingency partner, up to the point of Ulster securing full accreditation from the General Medical Council (GMC). The contract is currently being considered and due diligence reviews have been initiated by both parties. The Academic Council responsible for SGULs Medical School has approved the partnership. A SGUL/Ulster Steering Board has been established to govern the collaboration and ensure that it is progressing as it should. Membership will comprise key staff from each institution and the first meeting was on the 16 May 2017.

3. GENERAL MEDICAL COUNCIL

Correspondence from the GMC, advised that a detailed review of Ulster’s Stage 1 submission had been completed and that some additional information would be required. A subsequent teleconference with senior GMC staff was very positive and they are happy that we proceed to submit Stage 2 and, within that, address the issues raised in Stage 1. Stage 2 of the GMC accreditation process requires the submission of an independent audit report on the University’s Business Plan.

Work on Stage 3 of the process is underway in parallel with Stage 2, with a projected submission date of November 2017. Stage 3 will entail a detailed scrutiny of Ulster’s proposal and more detailed issues of capacity. This scrutiny will cover the development of all key areas, including curriculum and assessment, quality management, placements, support systems, and staffing.
4. EXTERNAL SUPPORT

Following submission of Ulster’s Strategic Outline Case, Government Departments tasked the Strategic Investment Board with drafting an Outline Business Case (OBC) for the project. The OBC is approximately two thirds complete. It will provide a detail cost of capital and recurrent funding.

Signed Memoranda of Understanding have been secured from all five of NI’s Health and Social Care Trusts and, to date, from eight GP Federations leads. Each of the Trust’s Medical Directors have shown their support as has Northern Ireland Medical and Dental Training Agency. In addition, a MoU has been signed by a senior Director of the HSE in the South. The British Medical Association General Practitioners Committee unanimously supported the development of a Medical School at Ulster as did the Council of the Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh. This is of particular importance as many physicians in NI are members of the RCPEd.

We have presented the curriculum to the Trusts’ Clinical Leaders (Consultants) meetings to discuss. To date this has been undertaken in the Northern, Western and South Eastern Health and Social Care Trusts. Meetings with the other Trust consultants and with GP Federation Leads will take place in the next few weeks.

The Medical Council of Ireland has been kept updated on our plans and we have had several meetings with them. They are keen to support the initiative. Following meetings with their senior teams the Irish College of General Practitioners and the Irish College of Psychiatrists also support our proposal.

5. INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS AND SUPPORT

The recruitment pack for the post of Foundation Dean and Professor of the Medical School has been finalised and the advertisement has been submitted to the relevant media. Interviews will take place on the 18th June. In addition, the University is arranging external secondments of medical educationalists with expertise in the SGUL curriculum and the GMC accreditation process (Prof Richard Hays from Australia commences on the 1st June, Professor Bob McKinley from Keele commences later in the Summer; a secondment from SGUL is also being arranged).

A Medical School Steering Group was established comprised of internal and external members for Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. It has met on ten occasions since Oct 2016. It has a number of Task and Finish Groups dealing with the issues of curriculum, staffing, cross border collaboration, finance, placements, and building infrastructure. A detailed project plan and risk register have also been produced.

Eight Visiting Professor nominations (Northern Ireland and Republic of Ireland) have been approved. They have been providing support and advice and are keen to become involved in identifying clinical placements and become active in teaching and research within the proposed GEMS.

Professor Hugh McKenna
June 15 2017