

Policy on Accreditation Standards of the Accreditation Unit, SLMC

The following policies of the Accreditation Unit (AU) of the Sri Lanka Medical Council (SLMC) shall guide all AU activities related the accreditation of medical schools, including developing, implementing, reviewing, monitoring and updating Accreditation Standards.

1. What are Accreditation Standards?

The Accreditation Standards refer to a set of standards developed by a group of experts of the AU of the SLMC for the purposes of accreditation of the undergraduate medical education programmes, i.e., for the purposes of recognizing, certifying, and authorizing medical schools to continue producing MBBS graduates. These standards are designed to reflect the healthcare needs of the country, the best practices of medical education, and the global requirements of a medical graduate. Hence, they are benchmarked with the requirements of international and national higher education and professional accreditation agencies.

2. What is the scope of Accreditation Standards?

The scope of the Accreditation Standards shall be based on the healthcare needs of the country. The Accreditation Standards for Medical Education in Sri Lanka are thus developed to evaluate whether medical schools conduct undergraduate medical education programmes in a manner appropriate to produce fit-for-purpose intern medical officers for the Sri Lankan healthcare system. These intern medical officers should be capable of working in tertiary care hospitals in the country to provide patient care under the supervision of a consultant in the fields of medicine, surgery, obstetrics and gynaecology, and paediatrics. The standards shall further evaluate whether the undergraduate medical education programmes in medical schools are capable of producing a graduate who would be fit to practise medicine independently as a basic doctor upon successful completion of internship. This includes a basic competence in certain other specialties, apart from those stated above, such as forensic medicine, community medicine and family medicine. The specific requirements in the above specialities are stated in the Gazette notification of Minimum Standards of Medical Education (2018/2021) issued by the Government of Sri Lanka.

A judgement (i.e., accreditation or no accreditation) based on the Accreditation Standards shall be valid for 5 years. After the lapse of 5 years, the Accreditation Standards applicable at that time shall be reapplied to reaccredit or withdraw accreditation.

3. What shall be the content of Accreditation Standards?

Given the above scope, the content of Accreditation Standards should evaluate all aspects in a medical school that facilitate the development of a successful of graduate capable of being an intern medical officer and functioning as an independent practitioner upon successful completion of internship. These aspects should not be limited merely to the curriculum, but should entail how the curriculum is planned, delivered, monitored and evaluated, and updated. The curriculum in this context is interpreted in its broadest sense to include all activities necessary to produce the said medical graduate, e.g., the rules and regulations

(including admission criteria and governance and management practices), physical and human resource facilities, student support systems, teacher (and other human resources) development, and quality assurance processes. Though the content of Accreditation Standards should be based on local needs and local regulations (e.g., Maintenance of Minimum Standards of Medical Education Regulations, Subject Benchmark Statements of the University Grants Commission of Sri Lanka, and Quality Assurance Standards of the Quality Assurance Council of Sri Lanka), they should also be in conformity with the global best practices.

4. At which level of stringency should Accreditation Standards be set?

The level of stringency should be guided by the Minimum Standards for Undergraduate Medical Education defined by the Sri Lanka Medical Council and ratified by the Government of Sri Lanka. These define the minimum level required to produce an intern medical officer who could take part in patient care under supervision and go on to deliver healthcare independently as a basic medical doctor upon successful completion of internship. Hence, the minimum standards provide the basic minimum level of academic activity at which a medical school should function.

However, beyond this basic minimum, the Accreditation Standards should be sufficiently flexible to recognize and reward excellence. For this purpose, excellence in any given standard shall be broadly evaluated using three parameters, i.e., the extent to which a medical school produces evidence for (a) having an approved policy appropriate to meet a given standard, (b) how well the said policy is being implemented, and (c) how well the policy is monitored and evaluated. The latter includes how well the monitoring and evaluation have been used to change practice.

5. Who should conform to the Accreditation Standards?

All undergraduate medical education programmes which produce graduates competent to work as Intern Medical Officers in the Sri Lankan healthcare system should adhere to the accreditation standards. A medical school that conducts a medical education programme not conforming to the Accreditation Standards shall not receive accreditation by the AU, SLMC. It is illegal to operate a medical school without the accreditation of the AU, SLMC.

6. What are the consequences of not conforming to the Accreditation Standards?

A medical graduate, graduated from a medical school, not accredited by the AU, SLMC, shall not be eligible to receive provisional registration by the SLMC. Without provisional registration with the SLMC, these graduates will not be appointed as Intern Medical Officers by the Ministry of Health, Sri Lanka. Without a valid internship these graduates shall not be eligible to receive full registration with the SLMC to practise medicine independently within the country.

7. Who develops the Accreditation Standards?

The responsibility of developing Accreditation Standards is entirely with the AU of the SLMC. The AU members shall primarily develop the Accreditation Standards. However, the AU may invite external experts to assist the AU members in developing the standards. Such experts

shall comprise senior academics with relevant experience and training in quality assurance and accreditation representing diverse academic fields. The developed standards will be submitted to the Accreditation Committee for approval.

8. What is the procedure followed when developing Accreditation Standards?

Based on the information that it collects on the accreditation process, on an on-going basis, using feedback from medical schools, reviewer feedback, complaints, requirements of the country, global trends in medical education, etc., the AU shall consider the necessity for developing new standards, from time to time. The AU will then appoint a specific committee to draft new standards. This committee shall comprise all or some of the AU members and if necessary one or more invited members. The standards thus developed will be considered at a special AU meeting before sharing with the trained pool of reviewers of the AU and the medical schools in the country. After making further changes to these standards based on the suggestions and comments of the medical schools and reviewers, the new or modified standards shall be piloted. Based on the pilot, the standards may undergo further fine tuning, if necessary. The finalised standards shall then be tabled at the AU Committee for ratification. Once finalised, the necessary changes to the other documents that need to be changed to reflect the new standards (e.g., Guidance for Self-evaluation Report writing, Reviewer Form, Guidance for Reviewers) shall be carried out. The final version of the Accreditation Standards shall be shared with all medical schools eligible for accreditation, the reviewer pool and the public through the AU website.

9. How should the Accreditation Standards be implemented?

The Accreditation Standards shall determine the format of the Self-evaluation Report (SER) and the Reviewer Form. Since the latter is the instrument with which the reviewers rate the SER, the reviewers will be able to assess accurately the extent of achievement of each Accreditation Standard. Hence, Accreditation Standards will be enforced through the SER and the Reviewer Form by the applicant medical schools and the reviewers, respectively. Each medical school shall be evaluated using the Accreditation Standards every five years for either re-accreditation or rescinding the accreditation. The same standards shall be used to withdraw the accreditation before the stipulated 5-year period, in the event of negative reports received by the AU.

10. What are the checks and balances followed to ensure fair and valid implementation of the Accreditation Standards?

The following checks and balances shall be followed by the AU when implementing the Accreditation Standards.

- A group of academics, well versed in quality assurance and accreditation, will draft or revise the Accreditation Standards.
- A multi-stakeholder consultation process, as described above, shall be followed when finalizing the Accreditation Standards.
- The finalized standards will be shared with all medical schools eligible for accreditation.
- The current version of the Accreditation Standards shall be available for public on the website of the AU.

- To carry out the accreditation process, a qualified group of reviewers will be recruited and trained under strict criteria to carry out a two-stage evaluation, i.e., the desk review and site visit.
- The review team for the accreditation of a medical school shall be well-balanced representing all phases of the undergraduate medical curriculum and other ethno-demographic parameters.
- Before the accreditation process for a given medical school commences, the reviewers shall be given an opportunity to declare conflicts of interest. Based on such declarations, only the reviewers with no conflicts of interest will be appointed to review a given medical school. Similarly, the AU members who have a declared conflict of interest shall recuse themselves from the accreditation process for that medical school.
- The reviewers will follow a two-stage process to determine the extent to which each Accreditation Standard has been achieved by an applicant medical school. These two stages of judgement involve first, independent judgement by each reviewer and then, judgement as a group. The reviewers shall recommend accreditation or otherwise only after this rigorous process, based on a level of achievement of all standards.
- Predetermined marking criteria, approved by the AU Committee, shall be used to determine the said recommendation.
- In the entire review process, the reviewers shall be guided by a Reviewer Guide to interpret the standards and to arrive at a judgement on the compliance of each standard by the applicant medical school.
- The medical school after receiving the result (accreditation or no accreditation) shall have the option of appealing against final judgement to the AU. The appeals shall be considered by the AU and the reviewers for appropriate action. The latter shall then be communicated to the medical school concerned.
- Irrespective of the accreditation result, a clear set of recommendations given by the reviewers/AU shall be sent to the applicant medical school for further action. The medical school should show evidence for the compliance with these recommendations in any further SER they submit to the AU. The compliance with these recommendations shall be investigated by the reviewers during the next accreditation cycle.

11. How should the Accreditation Standards be evaluated and monitored?

Every time the Accreditation Standards are in use for accreditation purposes formal feedback from both the reviewers and the applicant medical school should be collected. Also, every five years (i.e., before the commencement of each accreditation cycle), the AU shall evaluate the appropriateness of the current Accreditation Standards against the changing healthcare and human resource requirements of the country and against the international best practices. Based on the evidence collected from these sources, the AU should deliberate whether it warrants any change to the standards. However, standards may be evaluated earlier (i.e., within the period of an accreditation cycle), especially if negative comments pertaining to certain standards are received by the AU from the medical schools or reviewers.

12. What are the procedures for updating/revising Accreditation Standards?

Based on the monitoring and evaluations described above, if the AU considers that revising/updating the Accreditation Standards is necessary, then the AU shall write the first draft of the revised standards. In addition, the AU could obtain the services of other experts to assist in the process of drafting the standards. The revised standards will be shared with the pool of reviewers of the AU and the medical schools eligible for accreditation. The version incorporating the suggestions of all the above stakeholders will be then subjected to piloting. Following any changes made based on the pilot, the final version of the Accreditation Standards shall be tabled at the Accreditation Unit for ratification. The final version shall then be shared with all medical schools eligible for accreditation, the reviewer pool and the public through the AU website. The other documents such as Guidance for Preparation of the SER, Reviewer Form and Reviewer Guide shall be revised to reflect the revised Accreditation Standards. From this point onwards, any medical school applying for accreditation shall have to follow the revised Accreditation Standards.

13. What is the policy on dealing with appeals and complaints?

The AU of the SLMC makes itself open to any appeal or complaint against it or its activities. Absolute transparency will be maintained at all times when dealing with such appeals and complaints.

Any accreditation judgement passed by the AU of the SLMC is subject to an appeals process. Either the aggrieved medical school or any member of the public can appeal against an accreditation decision of the AU or lodge a complaint against the conduct of the AU. Such appeals and complaints will be investigated by the Appeals Board of the AU, consisting of a panel of senior professionals. During the investigation the panel may call for evidence from all parties concerned, before passing a decision of either upholding or rejecting an appeal or complaint. Depending on the judgement the panel may recommend certain remedial action to the AU.

14. How can a medical school report a deviation from the already accredited standards?

The medical school which has been already accredited shall be issued with a template to report any deviation from the standards due to a change in the existing curriculum or related procedures. This template will be sent at the time the final accreditation decision is communicated to the medical school.

15. How are the data handled and records maintained?

The data collected during an accreditation process is treated with absolute confidentiality. The AU stores all data related to accreditation under lock and key if they exist as hard copies. If they exist as soft copies, such data shall be stored as password protected documents in password protected computers of the AU. Other stakeholders who come into contact with such data on behalf of the AU (e.g., reviewers) shall also be instructed to maintain the confidentiality of the data that they handle.