

NORTHERN IRELAND AGREES WAY FORWARD ON MODERNISING JUNIOR DOCTORS TRAINING

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) and the British Medical Association in Northern Ireland [BMA(NI)] have agreed a way forward on the recruitment process for junior doctors.

The Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety and the BMA(NI), in response to growing concerns have been discussing how best to ensure that the process was fair to all those doctors who had applied to posts locally. A key consideration during these discussions was that the needs of the health service are met in terms of the quality and numbers of doctors available.

In a joint statement today, the BMA(NI) and DHSSPS said that all eligible junior doctors who have applied to work in Northern Ireland will be offered interviews for specialist training posts. To date, around 2000 applications have been received from junior doctors and almost 1000 applicants have been interviewed. The remaining eligible doctors will be offered interviews in the coming weeks.

Chief Medical Officer, Dr Michael McBride, DHSSPS said:

“There have been growing concerns expressed over the past number of weeks about the newly introduced recruitment process for junior doctors. Many doctors felt that the short-listing process had unfairly disadvantaged many applicants to specialist training programmes.

“We have both now agreed that all eligible candidates will be offered an interview for all those posts that they applied to in Northern Ireland.”

Dr Brian Patterson, Chairman of the BMA's NI Council, said: “I very much welcome everyone's efforts in finding a solution to this difficult problem.

“If the new system of training doctors is to succeed, then it was important that a resolution was found as quickly as possible.”

Dr Stephen Austin, BMA(NI) Consultants’ Chairman, said: “The current situation caused by the MTAS fiasco has left the profession in Northern Ireland little choice but to find an alternative solution. The latest proposals to extend the interview process will build on the work already done by consultants in the interviews carried out to date and allow us to recruit and train the best doctors for care of patients in Northern Ireland.

“We understand that all Trust Chief Executives will free up consultant time to carry out these interviews and we would urge consultants to contribute fully to this process as it is in the interests of both doctors and patients.”

Dr Rajesh Rajendran, Chairman of the BMA’s Junior Doctors’ Committee in Northern Ireland (NIJDC) said: “We are pleased to have found a solution to the very serious problems involving the process of recruiting junior doctors. Chaos has surrounded this system and the end result has been a huge reduction in the morale of this particular group of doctors. It has led to lack of career security with their families potentially being forced apart and a fear of being left jobless and financially crippled.

“NIJDC has worked hard with the Chief Medical Officer and the Post Graduate Dean to help find a solution. We welcome the initiative taken by the DHSSPS whereby all eligible applicants who have applied to Northern Ireland will be offered an interview for each application they have made.

“This is a sensible solution which I believe junior doctors in Northern Ireland can support.”

NOTES TO EDITORS:

1. From August 2007, specialist medical training is being reformed in the next stage of the Modernising Medical Careers initiative. The initiative

is designed to improve the quality and safety of patient care through better education and training for doctors. It seeks to ensure more health services are delivered by fully-trained specialist doctors.

- 2.** Recruitment for the new specialist training programmes began in January 2007. Concerns began to emerge when applicants were notified of the results of the short listing process in late February. Concerns reached such a level, that the Secretary for State for Health, Patricia Hewitt, announced an independent review of the process, following representations from the BMA and Academy of Medical Royal Colleges.
- 3.** The Review announced its findings yesterday. Today's announcement is Northern Ireland's approach to the review's findings and mirrors those adopted in Scotland and Wales.