

## POLICY DOCUMENT

### CLASSIFICATION OF MEDICAL PROGRAMS

#### Background

The Australian Medical Students' Association (AMSA) is the peak representative body for Australia's medical students. Currently, students from Australian medical schools graduate with a primary medical qualification of either a Bachelor of Medicine (BMed) or a Bachelor of Medicine, Bachelor of Surgery (MBBS or BMBS).

Recently, there has been a move from some universities to change their medical degrees to become masters-level degrees named "Doctor of Medicine" (MD). AMSA believes that this change will have significant implications for both medical education and the medical profession in Australia.

#### Position Statement

AMSA believes that there should be consistency of nomenclature across all primary medical qualifications in Australia. The advent of two tiers of primary medical qualification in Australia threatens to create misunderstanding amongst prospective students, clinicians and the general public around the qualifications of doctors in Australia.

#### Policy

AMSA believes that:

1. All medical degrees in Australia must meet the same standard as set by the Australian Medical Council. As such, medical degrees should use consistent nomenclature that represents the technical status of the degree.
  - 1.1. This would ensure medical graduates in Australia are all considered equally qualified by their peers, supervisors, patients and the community.
2. The research MD already exists in Australia, and is regarded as at doctorate-level, and equivalent to, or higher than, a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD).
  - 2.1. The introduction of a masters-level MD threatens to devalue the current doctorate-level MD in Australia for current and future holders of this research qualification.
3. By changing the level of their medical degree from a bachelor-level to a postgraduate masters-level, medical schools are able to circumvent the ban on undergraduate Domestic Full-Fee places at Australian public universities.
  - 3.1. This move is in contradiction of the recommendations from the Bradley Review into Higher Education<sup>3</sup> which highlighted the need for medical education to be made more accessible to those from low socioeconomic backgrounds.
  - 3.2. AMSA opposes Domestic Full-Fee places as outlined in the AMSA official policy statement 6.5, titled – *Domestic Undergraduate Full-Fee Places*.
4. The creation of MD programs raises the potential for confusion and unequal treatment of students and professionals in the clinical and academic environment.

- 4.1. Regardless of their primary medical qualification, all medical students and graduates should be considered to have an equivalent medical qualification in their preparation for internship.
- 4.2. AMSA respects the accreditation process of the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and will continue to connect, inform and represent students at Australian medical schools, regardless of their degree qualification.

In response to the above issues, AMSA proposes the following actions<sup>3</sup>:

1. The level of qualifications for medical graduates must be consistent to prevent future fragmentation of the profession.
2. Government legislation is needed to ensure medical degrees remain accessible to all Australians, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds. This may include further restrictions on universities offering full-fee medical degrees.
3. Universities and the medical profession must effectively communicate the medical degree nomenclature to the public and those within the health sector in order to minimize the potential for misunderstanding or unequal treatment on the basis of qualification titles.

*Policy adopted March 2011  
For review First Council 2014*

## References

1. Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Media Release: Government Delivers on Promise to Phase Out Full Fee Degrees. *Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia 2008.*  
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2. Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, Review of Australian Higher Education. *Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia, 2008.*  
[http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Documents/PDF/Higher%20Education%20Review\\_one%20document\\_02.pdf](http://www.deewr.gov.au/HigherEducation/Review/Documents/PDF/Higher%20Education%20Review_one%20document_02.pdf) (accessed Feb 2010).
3. Roberts-Thomson, R. L., S. D. Kirchner, et al. (2010). "MD: the new MB BS?" *Med J Aust* **193**(11-12): 660-661.  
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