



**Comhairle na nDoctúirí Leighis**  
**Medical Council**

Professional Competence  
Reaching for Improvement



**INFORMATION FOR HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS  
AND EMPLOYERS OF DOCTORS**

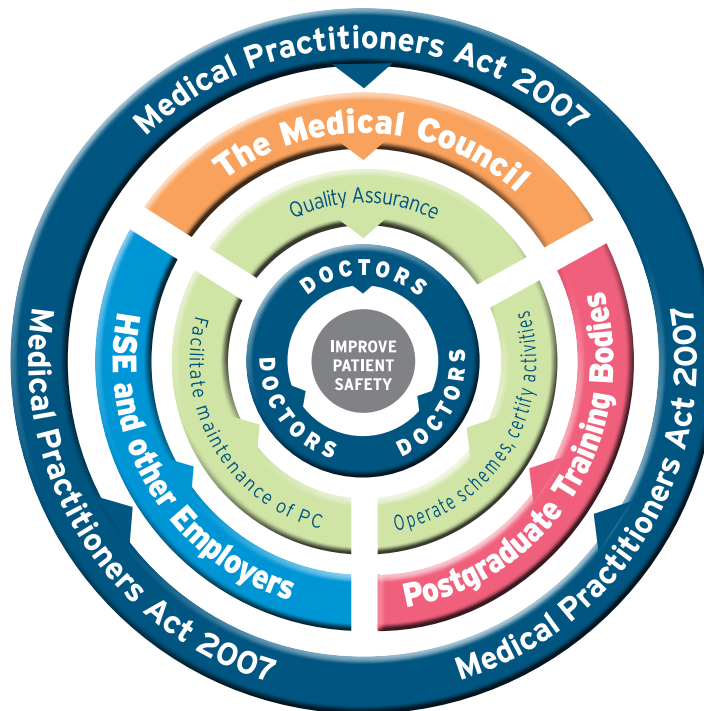
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**PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE**

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This information is published by the Medical Council. Content was agreed and approved by the Professional Competence Steering Committee - a multi-stakeholder forum to support the Medical Council's work on professional competence, which included representatives of the Medical Council, postgraduate training bodies, the Department of Health and Children, the Health Service Executive, and independent and voluntary healthcare providers. The content is information and does not constitute rules, standards or guidelines as defined under the Medical Practitioners Act 2007. For ease of reading, the term "doctor" is used with the same meaning as "registered medical practitioner" in the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 (MPA 2007).

# PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE AT A GLANCE

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## WHAT HEALTHCARE ORGANISATIONS AND EMPLOYERS OF DOCTORS NEED TO KNOW

- From May 2011, all practising doctors (except for those in a recognised training post and on the Trainee Specialist Division) are subject to a statutory obligation to maintain professional competence.
- Employers are legally obliged to facilitate doctors' pursuit of professional competence requirements.
- Employers already provide a range of supports to employed doctors to support maintenance of professional competence and the establishment of this new system may present an opportunity to review these arrangements.
- Health service managers should consider how this new system can best integrate with local clinical governance systems and clinical directorate arrangements. For example, an employer may request that a doctor provide evidence that they are pursuing a professional competence scheme as part of an annual clinical appraisal process or performance management process; maintenance of professional competence activities, such as clinical audit, may reflect local service needs as part of a clinical directorate business plan.



## **1. PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE SCHEMES**

### **1.1 WHAT ARE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE SCHEMES?**

Professional competence schemes are the formal structures established by the Medical Council under Part 11 of the MPA 2007 through arrangements with postgraduate training bodies. Doctors are legally obliged to enrol in professional competence schemes and engage in activities to maintain their professional competence.

As well as supporting personal professional development, the schemes aim to promote activities that maintain and develop the competencies which are essential for meeting the changing needs of patients and the healthcare delivery system. The process is self-directed and schemes will enable participants to plan, record and reflect on professional development needs, as part of their engagement in lifelong learning.

### **1.2 WHO IS REQUIRED TO ENROL IN A PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE SCHEME?**

All doctors are legally obliged to maintain their professional competence (unless they are in a recognised training post and in the Trainee Specialist Division) and to cooperate with requirements specified by the Medical Council in its Rules for the maintenance of professional competence. For more information visit: <http://www.medicalcouncil.ie/Professional-Development/Professional-Competence/PC-Rules.pdf>

### **1.3 WHAT ACTIVITIES WILL A DOCTOR ENGAGE IN THROUGH THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE SCHEME?**

Each doctor is expected to obtain a minimum of 50 credits per year through continuing professional development (CPD) activity (on average one hour of activity

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will accrue one credit). Activities will comprise of relevant external (maintenance of knowledge and skills) and internal (practice evaluation and development), personal learning and research/teaching categories. In addition, each doctor is expected to complete one clinical audit per year. For more information visit: <http://www.medicalcouncil.ie/Professional-Development/Professional-Competence/Info-for-Doctors/>

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## **2. THE ROLE OF EMPLOYERS**

### **2.1 AS AN EMPLOYER OF DOCTORS, WHAT AM I OBLIGED TO DO?**

Part 11 of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007 places a duty on the HSE and other employers to facilitate the maintenance of professional competence.

### **2.2 THERE IS A DOCTOR WORKING IN THE ORGANISATION I MANAGE BUT I AM NOT SURE IF I QUALIFY AS AN 'EMPLOYER'?**

While the Medical Practitioners Act does not define an "employer", the term is defined in other legislation concerning employment in Ireland, e.g. health and safety at work. The provisions of Part 11 apply to the Health Service Executive and other employers of doctors.

### **2.3 WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO TO FACILITATE DOCTORS' MAINTENANCE OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE?**

Many employers already facilitate the maintenance of professional competence on a voluntary basis in recognition of the important role this plays in the delivery of safe, high quality care. For example, employers may provide time and financial support to doctors to engage in professional development activities and may support a broad range of local quality assurance activities such as clinical audit. Employers may also, for example, provide access to library facilities and directly provide relevant professional development activities. Some of these arrangements are specified in contracts of employment with doctors. Some healthcare organisations which do not directly employ doctors may also have arrangements in place to facilitate maintenance of professional competence.

Healthcare organisations and employers of doctors recognise that these arrangements not only benefit doctors, they also help to assure and improve the safety and quality of care provided by the organisation.

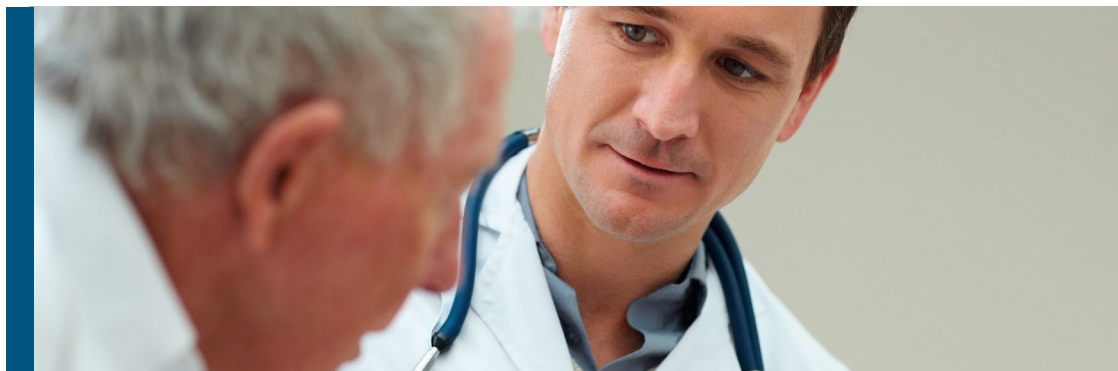
With the placing of a new legal duty to facilitate the maintenance of professional competence, there may be an opportunity for employers to review these standing arrangements to ensure they are robust and clear.

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Besides support by way of time and funding, facilitation of the maintenance of professional competence could include, for example, providing easy ways to record participation in local quality assurance activities such as Grand Rounds. There are also opportunities for employers and doctors to work together on maintenance of professional competence planning to ensure that local service priorities are addressed.

## **2.4 CAN EMPLOYERS ESTABLISH THAT DOCTORS ARE ENROLLED IN A PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE SCHEME, ARE COMPLYING WITH SAME, ARE MAINTAINING ENROLMENT AND ARE COMPLIANT WITH REQUIREMENTS?**

As part of local clinical governance, any healthcare organisation will have a range of systems and processes in place to satisfy itself that doctors they employ are fit for purpose on an ongoing basis, including the meeting of regulatory requirements. With the establishment of professional competence schemes, employers will wish to review these arrangements and consider how maintenance of professional competence can be integrated. This may include asking employed doctors to provide documentation to the employer periodically relating to maintenance of professional competence. Doctors enrolled in professional competence schemes operated by recognised postgraduate training bodies will be issued with annual statements regarding participation in maintenance of professional competence.



## **3. QUALITY ASSURANCE**

### **3.1 HOW WILL EMPLOYERS BE AWARE THAT DOCTORS THEY EMPLOY ARE MAINTAINING THEIR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE?**

Each year, the professional competence schemes will issue enrolled doctors with a statement of participation which is evidence that the doctor is maintaining their

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professional competence. As part of the organisation's human resource and clinical governance arrangements, employers may seek assurance from employed doctors that they are in good standing with the Medical Council on an ongoing basis and they may ask employed doctors to provide them with this and any other information the employer requires in relation to the doctors' continuing practice.

### **3.2 HOW ARE ACTIVITIES QUALITY ASSURED?**

Postgraduate training bodies operating professional competence schemes also accredit activities for maintenance of professional competence which generate credits for doctors. Approval is on the basis that the activity meets specified quality assurance criteria. These will include external activities such as regional and national scientific meetings, conferences and workshops and international conferences organised by equivalent bodies in other countries. Credits will also accrue for internal activities based in place of practice including multidisciplinary meetings, grand rounds and case conferences. Personal learning, teaching, postgraduate examining and research can also generate credits.

### **3.3 HOW WILL THE MEDICAL COUNCIL SATISFY ITSELF THAT DOCTORS ARE MAINTAINING THEIR PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE?**

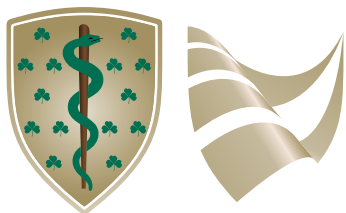
Each year, the Medical Council asks doctors to complete an annual declaration. From 2012, it will ask doctors to declare that they are maintaining their professional competence. Audit processes will be in place and some doctors will be asked to submit additional information to support the declaration made to the Medical Council. The Medical Council has enforcement powers which it can apply when it considers that a doctor has failed, ceased or refused to cooperate with requirements to maintain their professional competence in line with its requirements; ultimately, this may include withdrawing a doctor's registration.

### **3.4 WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS DO IF THEY BECOME AWARE OF A DOCTOR WHO IS FAILING TO MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE?**

If the employer becomes aware of a doctor who is failing to fulfil their statutory duty, the matter should be discussed with the doctor concerned. Any employer who is concerned that a doctor is in contravention of any provision of the Medical Practitioners Act 2007, including provisions of Part 11 of the Act – Maintenance of Professional Competence, may make a complaint to the Medical Council.

## MORE INFORMATION

For detailed information on doctors' requirements to maintain their professional competence, visit: [http:// www.medicalcouncil.ie/Professional-Development/Professional-Competence/](http://www.medicalcouncil.ie/Professional-Development/Professional-Competence/). Guidelines, outlining requirements and answering frequently asked questions about doctors' individual requirements (e.g. requirements for those on extended leave, retired doctors, those who work on a part-time or occasional basis) are available on the Medical Council's website.



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