WORLD FEDERATION FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION

THE WFME PROGRAMME FOR RECOGNITION OF ACCREDITING AGENCIES FOR MEDICAL EDUCATION

BASIC MEDICAL EDUCATION (BME)

Policies and procedures for the recognition of agencies accrediting medical schools

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Effective as of 1 January 2025

Introduction

The World Federation for Medical Education (WFME) was founded in 1972 and is the global organisation concerned with the education and training of medical doctors. WFME was founded on the initiative of the World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Medical Association (WMA).

WFME offers to evaluate agencies that accredit basic medical education. WFME will issue a designation of recognition of the agency if a sufficient level of quality in the accreditation system and procedures is demonstrated.

This document contains the Policies and Procedures used by WFME for the recognition of agencies accrediting basic medical education programmes. This document is publicly available on the WFME website.

I. Organisation of WFME

A. WFME Executive Council

The composition of the WFME Executive Council is set out in the constitution of WFME. The WFME Executive Council includes:

- WFME President
- WFME Vice-President
- WFME Immediate Past President
- Presidents of the six world-wide Regional Associations for medical education (defined as "members" by the Constitution)
- Representatives of the founding organisations, the World Health Organization and the World Medical Association ("founding members")
- Four elected members, representatives of the Association for Medical Education in Europe, International Federation of Medical Students' Associations, the Junior Doctors Network, and of the Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates ("executive members").

B. WFME BME Recognition Committee

The WFME BME Recognition Committee ("Recognition Committee"), consisting of six members – one from each region – makes final decisions about the recognition status of accrediting agencies. For votes on recognition, a quorum is four members. In the case of a tie, the Recognition Committee chair has the casting vote.

New members of the Recognition Committee must complete an induction programme prior to their first meeting. Future members of the committee shall be selected by the standing committee and approved by the Executive Council. The Recognition Committee follows their Terms of Reference.

C. Administrative Responsibilities

The WFME Secretariat supports the operation of the Recognition Committee and manages the recognition programme. Major responsibilities of the Secretariat include the following:

- Maintenance of records and documents related to the recognition of accrediting agencies
- Management of the recognition process, including scheduling of site visits, assignment of recognition teams, negotiation with the agency regarding practical arrangements (travel, accommodation, etc.) and review of recognition reports
- Management of the induction programme for Recognition Committee members and members of recognition teams
- Preparation and maintenance of documents, guidebooks, and other materials pertinent to the recognition process, including the WFME web site
- Preparation for and support of the Recognition Committee vote.
- Liaison with legal counsel on issues that may arise between regularly scheduled Recognition Committee meetings
- Provision of consultative services regarding the WFME recognition process

II. Policies on the BME Recognition of Accrediting Agencies

A. Recognition

The Recognition Committee recognises accrediting agencies that have the authority to accredit education programmes and schools that award the qualifying MD degree or its equivalent. The following types of agencies are eligible to apply for WFME recognition: a) a government or inter-governmental entity, or b) an independent professional body that is authorised or recognised by the relevant national or state/provincial government (Ministry of Health or Ministry of Education or both), or the legislator (parliament), or c) an independent professional body that is authorised or recognised by professional or scientific association with appropriate authority. The entity must have the authority in the country where the medical school is located to accredit education programmes and schools that award the qualifying MD degree or its equivalent. Recognition of an accrediting agency by the WFME Recognition Committee confers the understanding that an agency has been deemed to be credible in its policies and procedures to assure the quality of medical education in programmes and schools that it accredits.

B. Term of BME Recognition

Accrediting agencies generally are subject to review on a six-year cycle. However, the Recognition Committee has the discretion to require that the agency be subject to a full review in less than six years if there are questions about the sustainability of the quality of the accreditation process. An accrediting agency, once recognised, remains recognised as a credible accrediting agency until the agency voluntarily terminates its status or the Recognition Committee terminates the agency's recognition through a formal action. Recognition status does not change until a formal action is taken by the Recognition Committee. When recognition is withdrawn, a letter transmitting that decision specifies the date at which recognition ceases. See section III.C. for more details on WFME's ongoing monitoring of recognised accrediting agencies.

C. Fees for BME Recognition Application and Reviews

Fee for Recognition Application

Until it receives recognition, an agency is responsible for fees for the recognition process and expenses related to the recognition visit.

The structure of the fee is the following:

- Eligibility fee – USD 1,000. The eligibility fee is non-refundable, and it covers the initial eligibility review of the Preliminary Application.

- Part I fee – USD 29,000. This fee is payable no later than 2 months prior to a scheduled site visit.

- Part II fee – USD 30,000. This fee is payable no later than 1 month prior to a schedule site visit.

In addition, accrediting agencies are responsible for covering the travel expenses of the WFME Recognition team members as well as any other expenses directly related to the site visit, including, but not limited to visa fees, disease testing (if required), meals and local transportation (if not organised by the agency), etc.

All the above fees are invoiced by the WFME Office, with a 30-day payment period.

Fee for Re-applying after Recognition Status denied

Agencies that are denied recognition status may reapply as described below, must pay a reapplication fee in the same amount as above, and are again responsible for expenses related to recognition visits.

Fee for Annual Monitoring Report

Agencies that are recognised shall submit the Annual Monitoring Report (otherwise known as Status Report) annually as per Section III.C. of these Policies and procedures.

The submission of the Annual Monitoring Report is subject to a fee of USD 2,000 per agency and year. Unless otherwise agreed with the agency, the fee shall be invoiced at the moment the Annual Monitoring process opens and the payment shall be due by 31 March each year, coinciding with the deadline for submitting the Report.

Fee for Assessing Eligibility/Recognition Status for additional country/territory

After having received the WFME Recognition status for a certain country (certain countries) (as per WFME Criteria) recognised agencies may apply for the Recognition Status for new additional territories/countries, provided that their application is in line with the WFME Policy on cross-border accreditation. The fee for assessing this application is USD 6,000 and it is non-refundable. It is invoiced at the time this application is submitted.

Fee for Deferment

If an agency decides to defer the Recognition process, the fee for deferment consists of the following components:

- Base (standard) fee of USD 10,000, invoiced at the time the agency notifies WFME that they are ready for the follow-up review. This fee is non-refundable.

- Additional fee, amount of which is to be determined by the WFME Office, depending on the scope of the follow-up activities. This fee is payable if based on the original Recognition report draft the WFME Office decides that the subsequent review requires a follow-up site visit of at least 2 WFME assessors to review the compliance with WFME Criteria for Recognition.

If a site visit is mandated, the accrediting agency is also responsible for covering the travel expenses of the WFME Recognition team members as well as any other expenses directly related to the site visit.

The timeline of the process and the fees are also available on the WFME website and are subject to revision.

D. The BME Recognition Process

Accrediting agencies seeking WFME recognition are requested to contact the WFME Secretariat and inform WFME of their intention to apply. The agency will be asked to complete a preliminary application to prove its eligibility and readiness for the full process.

The WFME Office will decide regarding the eligibility of the agency (as defined in Section II. A.) based on the information provided in the preliminary application.

The Criteria for Recognition, the template of the Application for Recognition, including instructions for completion, and the Recognition Policies and Procedures documents are available on the WFME website.

The evaluation process for eligible accrediting agencies consists of:

- Comprehensive review of the accrediting agency's completed Application for Recognition
- On-site evaluation by the recognition team of a site-visit being conducted by the accrediting agency
- On-site or online evaluation by the recognition team of a meeting of the decision-making body of the agency
- Review of the report of the recognition team and any other relevant documentation by the Recognition Committee.

The WFME Secretariat in consultation with the agency will select dates for the on-site evaluations that coincide with regularly scheduled meetings of the accrediting agency. It is convenient if the on-site evaluation of a site-visit being conducted by the accrediting agency and the observation and review by the recognition team of a meeting of the decision-making body of the agency can be carried out during a single visit of the WFME recognition team.

It is a requirement for the site visit to be at a time when the medical school is fully operational, meaning with students and faculty present.

Approximately eight months prior to the anticipated date for the WFME on-site evaluation of the accrediting agency, or as soon as practically possible, the WFME Secretariat will confirm with the chief executive of the accrediting agency that the agency has received and downloaded the Criteria for Recognition, the template of the Application for Recognition, and the Recognition Policies and Procedures. All documents are regularly subject to review and revision. Simultaneously, the WFME Secretariat will set up the agency's account in the WFME Portal.

Approximately three months prior to the anticipated date for the WFME on-site evaluation of the accrediting agency, the WFME Secretariat will provide information to both the agency being reviewed and the recognition team members regarding the agency's recent recognition history (if applicable) and composition of the recognition team. If the chief executive of the agency that is being reviewed has reason to believe that a recognition team member has a conflict of interest, he or she should contact the WFME Secretariat immediately to determine if an alternate member can be appointed. Final decisions about recognition team membership will be made by the WFME President. Once the composition of the recognition team is established, the agency submits its application and any other relevant materials via the WFME Portal, including a recent example of an institutional self-study report submitted to the agency.

After the on-site evaluations, recognition team members compile a written report of their findings, based on the Criteria for Recognition. The recognition team documents facts regarding the agency's compliance with each of the Criteria for Recognition. A draft version of the report is sent to the WFME office for a preliminary review to verify that the report is complete and adequately documents the team's factual findings. The draft report is then circulated to the chief executive of the agency under review, who has the opportunity to comment on matters of fact. The agency also receives a letter with suggestions from the recognition team, based on their review of the documents and

observations during the site visit. These suggestions are meant as a basis for quality improvement; they are not shared with the Recognition Committee, and are not a part of the report.

After the chief executive of the agency has had the opportunity to correct any factual errors in the draft report, the report is then finalised by the recognition team secretary.

The finalised report and any other relevant documentation is reviewed by the Recognition Committee that determines the Recognition Status of the agency.

Deferment

Any time during the process the agency may choose to pause the assessment and defer for up to two years.

An interim report will be written by the team, and the process shall restart at the same stage once the agency is ready. If a site visit has already been carried out, the next assessment shall only focus on the areas that were identified as partially compliant or non-compliant. When the agency indicates they are ready for re-assessment, WFME Office will decide on the size of the recognition team. The decision whether a new site visit is needed will be made by the WFME Office based on their review of the interim report. The subsequent steps will follow the standard recognition programme process.

If the assessment is deferred for more than two years, the agency needs to undergo the full Recognition process again.

E. The WFME Portal

WFME Portal is an online tool used to manage the entire Recognition Programme, ensuring the transparency and documentation of the process.

The WFME Office sets up an account in the Portal for each individual agency and the agency receives its unique login information. The process is described in detail in the WFME Portal manual, shared with the agencies.

F. Recognition Teams

WFME is responsible for recruitment and training of a suitable group of recognition team members who are knowledgeable about medical education and accreditation. Recognition team members complete an induction course and regular development training. The recognition team must not include any member with a conflict of interest (as defined in Section IV A). One of the team members is designated as the chair of the team. The team chair functions as the official voice of the team and leads its on-site deliberations. Another member is designated as team secretary, responsible for visit preparations and logistics and the compilation of the recognition report. In most circumstances, recognition teams will consist of three to five members.

The WFME Secretariat maintains a list of qualified potential team members.

G. Recognition Reports

The recognition team's report provides the principal source of information used by the Recognition Committee in making decisions regarding an agency's recognition status. The report includes

background information about the agency and a detailed narrative about the agency and its compliance with the Criteria for Recognition.

Unless exceptional circumstances prevail, the draft report should be completed no later than eight weeks after the conclusion of the recognition team site visit, provided that the decision-making event took place during the on-site evaluation. Otherwise, the draft report should be completed no later than eight weeks after the decision-making meeting observation by the recognition team. See Section II D for details regarding creation of the recognition report. The Recognition Committee reviews the final report as per their Terms of Reference.

H. Evaluation of Recognition Process

The WFME staff will send the chief executive of the agency a form to provide feedback on the recognition process in general, to be used internally by WFME to review the recognition process.

The Recognition Programme Project Manager will send the members of the recognition team an assessors' feedback form to collect feedback on the performance of the individual team members. This is used to continuously improve the Recognition Programme.

III. Conduct of BME Recognition Committee Meetings

A. Attendance and Recusals

Recognition Committee members vote remotely using a set protocol. The members are expected to respond to all requests for review of reports, unless exceptional circumstances preclude their doing so. Additional discussions will be held by telephone or internet conference, as necessary. Members shall absent themselves from the discussion and voting during consideration of any agency with which there could be an actual or perceived conflict of interest (as defined in Section IV. A.). The member from the corresponding region where the accrediting agency is located participates in the discussion, but is excluded from the vote.

B. Recognition Actions

When considering the recognition status of an accrediting agency, the Recognition Committee may take any of the following actions:

- Recognition for a six-year term with no additional requirements, with Annual Monitoring Reports
- Recognition for a six-year term with one or more conditions monitored with the Annual Monitoring Reports
- Temporary suspension of the recognition status of an agency under conditions defined below
- Withdrawal of the recognition status
- Denial to award the recognition status

Denial or withdrawal of recognition are actions subject to appeal. Details of the appeal process are included in Appendix A. Denial or withdrawal is not considered final until either (a) the agency has indicated in writing its acceptance of the action, (b) the time for filing an appeal has lapsed, or (c) the appeal has been concluded and the agency has been notified in writing of the outcome of the appeal.

Withdrawal of recognition may occur when (a) there is documented evidence that an agency exhibits substantial deficiencies in compliance with the Criteria for Recognition, and (b) the deficiencies are sufficiently serious, in WFME's judgment, to raise concern about the credibility of accreditation decisions being made by the agency.

Temporary suspension may occur when (a) the agency does not comply with or respond to the conditions set by the Recognition Committee, (b) the agency misrepresents the scope and implications of their recognition status, (c) the agency fails to submit the annual report, (d) the agency fails to pay the respective fees, as defined above, (e) the agency does not respond to WFME when enquiries are made regarding a complaint that was made to WFME about the agency, (f) the agency makes substantial changes such that it no longer complies with the WFME Criteria for Recognition, as revealed by the annual monitoring process.

If, as part of the recognition process, an agency knowingly supplies false or misleading information to WFME or its recognition teams, the Recognition Committee will reconsider the agency's recognition status and determine any appropriate follow-up action. Similar action may result if an agency knowingly fails to provide material information to WFME or its recognition teams, makes misleading or incorrect public statements or disclosures regarding its recognition status, or fails to notify interested parties of an adverse recognition action.

C. Recognition Monitoring and Follow-up

The Recognition Committee may indicate timeline for the agency to correct any deficiencies in compliance. Failure to achieve compliance within such time constitutes grounds for denial or withdrawal of recognition unless the period for achieving compliance is extended, at the discretion of the Recognition Committee, for demonstrated good cause. In determining whether good cause exists for an extension, the Recognition Committee may consider a number of factors, including, but not limited to, progress toward achieving full compliance, the complexity of changes that must be made, financial considerations, logistical considerations, and other circumstances internal or external to the agency that might affect the time needed to come into full compliance.

Recognised agencies are monitored by WFME throughout the duration of the recognition term. By 31 March each year, recognised agencies are required to complete an Annual Monitoring Report, commencing between six to eighteen months after the agency is formally recognised[1]. The Annual Monitoring Report requests information on the agency's current activities and any changes in scope, standards, or processes that have taken place over the past year, and an updated list of accredited programmes. Where an agency has been awarded Recognition Status with conditions, these should each be addressed in the Annual Monitoring Report, until written confirmation from WFME that the conditions have been met. The WFME Secretariat reviews completed Annual Monitoring Reports, and in conjunction with the Recognition Committee and/or the recognition team that carried out the assessment of the agency, determine any potential follow up actions or requests for additional documentation.

Should the review of an agency's Annual Monitoring Report raise concerns in terms of the agency's processes and/or their changes, or whether the conditions set by the Recognition Committee in their Recognition Status decision are being met, the WFME Office will raise this issue to the Recognition Committee who will decide whether a follow-up (interim) site visit is to be requested.

[1] The first report of an agency will be requested not less than six months, and not more than eighteen months, after the date Recognition Status is granted.

If a follow-up site visit is mandated, the process and applicable fees will be as per the deferment action.

If an agency is recognised and it is undergoing the renewal of recognition or is up for the renewal of recognition within 6 months of the regular annual monitoring, it is exempt from the requirement to submit the annual monitoring for the respective year.

The accrediting agency must inform WFME of any substantive changes in the scope of activities of the agency, the procedures for accreditation, or standards for accreditation.

D. Reporting of WFME Recognition Actions

Within 30 days of any final Recognition Committee action on the report of a recognition team, the WFME President will send a Decision Letter conveying the WFME action and a copy of the final recognition team report, to the chief executive of the agency. The Decision Letter will include the WFME action and conditions, if any were required by the Recognition Committee, and any necessary follow-up. The Decision Letter and final team report are held confidential by WFME, but may be disclosed by the agency at its discretion.

The WFME Secretariat will notify the Secretariat of the *World Directory of Medical Schools* of all actions taken in a timely manner[2]. For actions subject to appeal (denial of recognition, withdrawal of recognition), notification to the government agency or agencies that authorise or recognise the accrediting agency and the Secretariat of the World Directory of Medical Schools will be made no later than 30 days after the decision is made final.

The current recognition status of all accrediting agencies will be posted publicly on the WFME web site and will be updated within 30 days after a decision becomes final. Recognition information made available to the public includes the current recognition status of an agency but does not include recognition reports, correspondence with an agency regarding its recognition status, or the basis for WFME actions regarding an agency's recognition status.

If an agency makes a public disclosure of its recognition status and/or the Recognition Certificate the agency must disclose these accurately and unedited, and provide the contact information of the WFME Secretariat. Any incorrect or misleading statements about recognition actions or recognition status must be corrected or clarified immediately by an official announcement or notification. Failure to make such a timely correction or clarification may result in reconsideration of the agency's recognition status.

IV. Other Policies and Procedures

A. Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest

To avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest, WFME Executive Council Members (both in determination of Policies and when acting as Appeals Committee), Recognition Committee

[2] This procedure is set to ease the inclusion of accreditation information in the *World Directory of Medical Schools*, which is planned in due course.

Members, Recognition Team Members, and WFME staff who are involved in WFME recognition activities ("WFME Representatives") must agree in writing to abide by the following polices:

Recognition Team Evaluations and Recognition Decisions. No WFME Representative will participate in a recognition process, or in discussions or voting at WFME meetings, if the accrediting agency being evaluated or discussed is:

1. One in which the Representative or an immediate family member (defined as a spouse, life partner, child, parent, or sibling) has been connected as an administrative officer, staff member, employee, or contracted agent within the past three years.

2. One in which the Representative or an immediate family member has interviewed for or been in employment within the past two years.

3. Part of an organisation where the Representative is employed.

4. Engaged in substantial cooperative or contractual arrangements with the employer of the Representative or an immediate family member.

5. One that has engaged the Representative or an immediate family member as a paid consultant within the past five years on matters such as evaluation, organisational structure or design, management, or finances. Provision of short- term services (such as giving guest lectures) is not considered consulting that poses a conflict of interest.

6. One in which the Representative or an immediate family member has any financial, political, professional, or other interest that may conflict with the interests of WFME.

7. One in which the Representative believes that there may be a conflict due to other circumstances, such as participation in review for other organisations, close personal relationships with individuals at the accrediting agency, etc.

8. One in which the accrediting agency has reason to believe, and can document to the satisfaction of the WFME Secretariat, that the participation of the Representative could be unfairly prejudicial.

Consultancy: No Representative will act as a paid or unpaid consultant on WFME recognition matters during their service with WFME, and for a period of three years after completion of their service to WFME, to any accrediting agencies subject to WFME recognition, unless such consultancy is explicitly mandated by the WFME Office as part of their WFME role.

WFME Discretion: Whenever in these guidelines a term is not expressly defined, the definition of such term and its potential for creating a conflict of interest shall be at the sole discretion of the WFME Office or, upon the Office's determination, at the sole discretion of WFME.

B. Data Collection, Research, and Confidentiality

All WFME recognition decisions will be publicised on the WFME website.

All materials provided by agencies in conjunction with recognition reports, including the comprehensive review and any other relevant documents, will be retained for the most recent recognition cycle. Recognition reports, Annual Monitoring Reports, records of WFME actions, correspondence with individual agencies, and minutes and agendas of all WFME meetings will be retained indefinitely.

All information compiled in preparation for recognition reports or collected on site, including the contents of the comprehensive review and correspondence regarding the agency's prior recognition history, is held in strict confidence by the WFME Secretariat. All information received by WFME that relates to an agency's recognition status (including Recognition Reports and Annual Monitoring Reports) is also treated as confidential data.

WFME staff may conduct research and publish based on confidential information contained in the comprehensive review, Recognition Reports and Annual Monitoring Reports. Neither the source documents used for such research, nor the results of such research may be shared or made available to other individuals or organisations (including staff of the WFME's sponsoring organisations) unless authorised by WFME.

C. Complaints

WFME will consider complaints about the quality of a recognised accrediting agency, that if substantiated would represent partial or substantial noncompliance with one or more of the Criteria for Recognition. It will not, however, intervene on behalf of a complainant to achieve redress of grievances. Complaints may come from any source. All complaints must be submitted in writing to the WFME office. Anonymous complaints will not be considered.

The WFME Office will conduct an initial evaluation of any complaint about agency quality to determine whether it represents potential noncompliance with one or more Criteria for Recognition. If the WFME Office determines that the complaint presents evidence of one or more areas of noncompliance, the agency's leadership will receive a copy of the complaint or comment and will be given an opportunity to respond in writing.

The issue(s) raised in the complaint and the agency's response will be reviewed by an *ad hoc* subcommittee of the Recognition Committee appointed by the WFME Office. Details of these procedures are included in Appendix B.

Complaints about WFME's recognition Policies and Procedures, or operations are reviewed by the Executive Council. Such complaints must be submitted in writing to the WFME office.

D. Procedures for Revising the Criteria for Recognition

Requests for new or revised Criteria for Recognition may arise from any source. Any requests for new criteria or modification of existing criteria should be sent to the WFME Secretariat for initial review. If a proposed criterion or criterion change is deemed to have merit, it is referred to the WFME Executive Council for further action. Any new or revised criteria adopted by WFME will be published on its web site, along with the effective date for the criteria. The latest revision of the Criteria for Recognition and the related documents (the Application form and the Recognition Report) were revised in 2024 to become effective on 1 January 2025. The new Criteria for Recognition will be reviewed in 2029, subject to any essential minor revisions that may arise in the interim.

E. Cross-Border Accreditation Process

For an agency's operation in any country to be considered for WFME recognition, WFME needs to assess its legal standing and recognition by the local authorities. During the basic eligibility assessment of an agency, WFME reviews this process for the accreditation activity in the original country (or countries) of operation and not for any other country.

If an agency aims to venture outside of the originally evaluated remit, WFME needs to verify that the agency is recognised by the appropriate authorities in the new intended country of operation, that the decision made by the agency have impact in the country, and that the agency has considered the appropriateness of the policies, procedures, and standards in the context of another country.

This is addressed by Criteria for Recognition 4, 5 and 6.

The procedure for assessing the eligibility for additional territories is set forth in a separate "Cross-Border Accreditation Policy".

APPENDIX A

Appeal Procedure for Actions Affecting Recognition

Actions of WFME that are Subject to Appeal

The following actions by WFME affecting recognition are subject to appeal:

a) Deny recognition

b) Withdraw recognition

c) Temporary suspension of recognition

The appeal shall be limited to the time and circumstances that triggered the WFME action (e.g., a site visit, Annual Monitoring Report, etc.) and shall be based solely on the information contained in the relevant documentation (final recognition report, evidence submitted to the Recognition Committee in support of withdrawal of recognition). Descriptions of changes made since that time will not be considered.

Notice of WFME Action

Upon finding that an accrediting agency is not in substantial compliance with WFME's published Criteria for Recognition, and imposing an adverse action that is subject to appeal, the WFME President shall promptly notify the agency in writing of the decision and of the specific areas of noncompliance that support the imposition of the decision. The President shall also inform the agency of its right to appeal.

Notice of Appeal

If it wishes to appeal against WFME's decision, the agency must notify the WFME office within 30 calendar days from the date of receipt of the notice of the WFME decision. The agency's Notice of Appeal must be addressed to the WFME President and must contain a concise statement of why the agency believes that WFME's decision should be reversed. If no written request for an appeal is received by WFME within 30 days, WFME's initial decision shall constitute final action by WFME.

Review by an Independent Review Committee

The first step of the reconsideration process is review by an ad hoc Independent Review Committee, which will be advisory to WFME Executive Council. The Independent Review Committee shall be appointed by the WFME Office and shall consist of three individuals who have expertise in the Recognition Programme. No person shall be included on an Independent Review Committee for a given program if he or she has participated in a survey visit that triggered the WFME Recognition Committee decision or has a conflict of interest as determined under the Conflict of Interest of the WFME Code of Conduct and section IV.A. above.

The WFME Office shall forward to each of the members of the Independent Review Committee : a complete file of all documents concerning the agency that were available to the Recognition Committee to make their decision, which shall constitute the Review Record.

The Independent Review Committee will make recommendations to sustain or modify the Recognition Committee decision related to the compliance towards the Criteria for Recognition and recommend that the WFME Executive Council either affirm or modify the initial decision.

If the Independent Review Committee determines that there is no reason to alter the initial Recognition Program Committee decision, it shall recommend that the decision be affirmed. If the Independent Review Committee determines that the Recognition Committee decision is not supported by the evidence, it shall recommend that the WFME Executive Council modify the decision. The Independent Review Committee shall forward a written report of its recommendation, and the reasons therefor, to the WFME Office.

The agency shall not receive a copy of the report or recommendation of the Independent Review Committee.

The Appeal Process Hearing before the WFME Appeals Committee

The WFME President shall schedule the appeal hearing for a regularly scheduled WFME Executive Council meeting. The members of the Appeals Committee are the members of the WFME Executive Council who do not have a conflict of interest. The WFME staff shall notify the agency in writing of the date, time, and place of the hearing. The notice shall be provided at least 45 calendar days prior to the hearing. The notice shall advise the agency that it:

1. may send representatives to appear before WFME
2. may be represented by legal counsel
3. may submit a written response to WFME's cited areas of noncompliance. Such response must be based solely on the information contained in the final recognition report.

The agency's written intent to send representatives to appear before the WFME Appeals Committee, the names of the representatives and, if any, the legal counsel who will attend the hearing, must be received by the WFME staff no later than 21 calendar days before the scheduled date of the hearing.

The WFME President shall send to each member of the Appeals Committee who will participate in the hearing complete copies of all documentation concerning the agency that was available to WFME at the time the decision that is the subject of appeal was made, and the report from the Independent Review Committee. This documentation shall constitute the Appeal Record.

Conduct of the Hearing before the WFME Appeals Committee

The hearing will be limited to a consideration of the time and circumstances that triggered the initial Recognition Committee decision. Descriptions of changes made since that time will not be considered.

No person shall be present at or participate in a hearing if he or she has a conflict of interest as determined under WFME guidelines on Avoidance of Conflicts of Interest (Section IV. A.).

The hearing shall follow the following general format:

a) Introductory statement by the President

b) Oral presentation by the agency (maximum one hour)

c) Questions by Appeals Committee members and staff

d) Appeals Committee private session

e) Additional questions by Appeals Committee members and staff

f) Closing statement by the agency (maximum 15 minutes)

g) Adjournment

If the agency, without good cause, fails to appear at the hearing or fails to advise WFME staff in writing more than five calendar days before the scheduled date of the hearing that it will not appear, WFME may elect to notify the agency that no further opportunity for a personal appearance will be provided.

Decision of the Appeals Committee

At the conclusion of the hearing, the Appeals Committee shall meet in executive session to review the proceedings and to reach a decision. The Appeals Committee shall consider the Appeal Record and the information presented during the hearing. The Appeals Committee shall determine whether each of the cited areas of noncompliance with the Criteria for Recognition is supported by substantial credible evidence.

The Appeals Committee shall determine by majority of those members present whether substantial evidence supports the existence of the cited areas of noncompliance, and whether the initial Recognition Committee action should be affirmed, modified, or reversed. Such determination shall constitute final decision by WFME.

The WFME President shall notify the agency in writing of the WFME decision, including the reasons therefore, within 30 calendar days after the hearing.

WFME Review without a Hearing

An agency may inform WFME in writing that it does not wish to appear before the WFME Appeals Committee. In such an event, the Appeals Committee will consider the recognition status of the agency at the next regularly scheduled WFME Executive Council meeting. The Appeals Committee shall rely on the Appeal Record for information, and shall determine by majority of those members present whether to affirm, modify, or reverse WFME Recognition Committee's initial decision. The WFME President shall notify the agency in writing of WFME's decision, including the reasons, within 30 calendar days after the Appeals Committee meeting. The decision of WFME Appeals Committee, with or without a hearing, shall constitute final decision by WFME.

Responsibility for the Cost of Appeals

The agency appealing against a WFME decision shall be responsible for all costs associated with the appeal, including, but not limited to, costs involved in the development and presentation of its appeal, travel and other expenses of its representatives present at any hearing, and legal expenses.

APPENDIX B

Procedures for Handling Complaints about Agency Quality

Any person concerned about the quality of an accrediting agency recognised by WFME may contact the WFME Secretariat to discuss lodging a complaint. Only complaints that, if substantiated, may constitute noncompliance with the Criteria for Recognition will be investigated. WFME will not intervene on behalf of an individual medical school regarding an accreditation decision.

Submitting a Complaint

Complaints must be made in writing, and may come from any source. Anonymous submissions will not be considered.

The written complaint should contain as much information and detail as possible about the circumstances that form the basis of the complaint. Hearsay cannot be accepted as evidence. If possible, the complainant should cite the relevant Criteria for Recognition relating to the complaint. If the complaint indicates circumstances that, if substantiated, would indicate areas of noncompliance with Criteria for Recognition, the WFME Secretariat will contact the complainant (1) to obtain additional documentation or corroboration, if needed, and (2) to request a signed release form. If the complainant does not comply with either request, the file will be closed, and no further action will be taken.

WFME shall attempt to maintain the confidentiality of complainants and any corroborating material; however:

- Any information about an accrediting agency may be released to the leadership of the agency, the WFME Office, members of the Recognition Committee, their respective legal representatives, and other persons required by law or necessity, at the discretion of WFME, to fully investigate the complaint.
- The complainant and any corroborators will be required to sign an authorisation to release the written complaint and corroborating materials to the accrediting agency, the WFME Office, members of the Recognition Committee, their respective legal representatives, and appropriate outside parties.
- The complainant and any corroborators will also be required to authorise the agency to release any information deemed necessary by WFME.

Investigating the Complaint

The WFME Secretariat staff will make an initial determination of whether the complaint contains issues relating to the agency's compliance with the Criteria for Recognition. If the Secretariat determines that the complaint does raise such issues, the Secretariat will contact the leadership of the agency, including the anonymised written complaint and corroborating information, and cite the information that the agency should provide in response. A response from the leadership of the agency will ordinarily be requested within 30 days.

Assessment of the Complaint

Complaints (including any corroborating materials) will be assessed by the WFME Office. The WFME Office will make a final determination, including the nature and timing of any required follow-up, and will direct the Secretariat to notify the agency of its decision. If the WFME Office considers it is

necessary to escalate the matter to the Recognition Committee, they may seek the Recognition Committee advice as per the Recognition Committee Terms of Reference.