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## 34 – How the UK Discovered Europe

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### Background

In the United Kingdom over the last 15 years arrangements for the provision of specialty training for general practice and its supervision have undergone several reorganisations, and one of the major changes has been the development of a general practice curriculum. Specialty training for general practice lasted for three years, in six month training posts, two years in hospital and one year in an approved general practice placement.

It may surprise you to know that until 2005 there was no comprehensive GP curriculum in the UK. Although there was high quality practice-based teaching, the governance and supervision arrangements were fragmented and inconsistent. The approval of hospital posts for GP training was vested in Royal College of the specialty concerned rather than the general practice college. The Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (JCPTGP), a statutory committee of the RCGP and the GP Committee of the British Medical Association (BMA) was responsible for approving general practice trainers, training placements and the issue of certificates of satisfactory completion of the training programme.

The Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (JCPTGP), a statutory committee of the RCGP and the GP Committee of the British Medical Association; this committee was responsible for approving general practice trainers, training placements and the issue of certificates of satisfactory completion of training, given by an approved trainer. To add to this chaotic mix, the supervision of hospital training for GPs rested with the specialty college concerned. All medical colleges except general practice were supervised by a different national body, the Specialty Training Authority (STA). All these bodies were responsible to the overarching supervisory body in the UK, the General Medical Council (GMC). The GMC was also separately responsible for the undergraduate curriculum and performance matters of working doctors.

As a result of some major governance issues in the UK involving patient harm (for example Harold Shipman) the government decided that the whole governance process was in need of reform, to avoid duplication and possible confusion of roles and responsibilities, not helped by the number of acronyms! The STA and JCPTGP were to be abolished and replaced by a single body, the Postgraduate Medical Education and Training Board.

One of the strangest anomalies of the former system was that the RCGP had a very good final assessment exam but this was not approved for use as the national outcome assessment and a different system of assessment ran in parallel.

## My Input

In 2005 the RCGP was given the responsibility for developing a national curriculum for GP training, including assessment. It is at this point that I joined in the fun, having been invited to join the RCGP curriculum group, as I had some knowledge of work going on in Europe on curriculum development.

The curriculum group was running a symposium on curriculum development at a WONCA conference entitled:

*“Developing a National Curriculum for the Education and Training  
of General Practitioners in the United Kingdom”*

This symposium looked at the process the Royal College curriculum group were undertaking in designing a new GP curriculum. The RCGP prides itself on the quality of its work and set about its task with its customary academic rigour and energy; it had already started this process when I joined, having started a programme of focus groups, trainee and educator surveys, presentations and workshops at national and international meetings. It had commissioned a literature review and was starting a process of considering other general practice curriculum models that had been developed elsewhere – one from the Oxford region in the UK, and nine from other countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain and the USA.

The observant will have noticed that four of the countries are native English speakers and that the remainder are from the WONCA European region (Ireland fits both categories). Even so the RCGP group were having difficulties in finding a good match for a comprehensive training curriculum for GPs in the National Health Service.

As a newcomer to the group I was puzzled (I was often puzzled anyway). The Royal College of General Practitioners was an active member of WONCA Europe and its network organisations which had produced the 2005 European Definition (1) which contained a list of the core competences required to be a GP. EURACT had worked further and developed the European Definition into its Education Agenda (2). This document developed the list of competences into a full blown curriculum statement for European general practice ready for adaptation to the needs of individual countries. But the College did not appear to have considered the European Definition or the Educational Agenda. As we are part of the European Union and as a college have worked hard with our WONCA Europe colleagues, I suggested to the group that we should consider these models. This they did and discovered that with some modifications these documents would be a good basis for the new UK curriculum. With very little dissent, which was possibly related to the fact that the British only speak one language (and that rather badly) the WONCA definition, with its six core competences and three essential features became the basis for the UK curriculum in 2005, and remains so today. The EURACT Educational Agenda is the basis of the core curriculum statement “Being A GP”, and all of the RCGP curriculum statements use the six core competences and three essential features - see for yourself on the RCGP curriculum web site: <http://www.rcgp.org.uk/training-exams/gp-curriculum-overview.aspx>.

## Take Home messages

- Until 2005 there was no comprehensive national GP curriculum in the UK.
- Governance of GP training was by a number of bodies, with overlapping roles. GP and hospital training were supervised by different organisations.
- The national GP curriculum in the UK has now been developed, and is based on the WONCA Definition of General Practice and the EURACT Educational Agenda.

### Original Abstract

<http://www.woncaeurope.org/content/3553-developing-national-curriculum-education-and-training-general-practitioners-united>

## References

1. *The European Definition of General Practice/Family Medicine 2005 Edition*  
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2. *The Educational Agenda 2006* ed. J.Heyrman, Leuven,  
<http://www.euract.eu/official-documents/finish/3-official-documents/93-euract-educational-agenda> (accessed 19/12/14)