

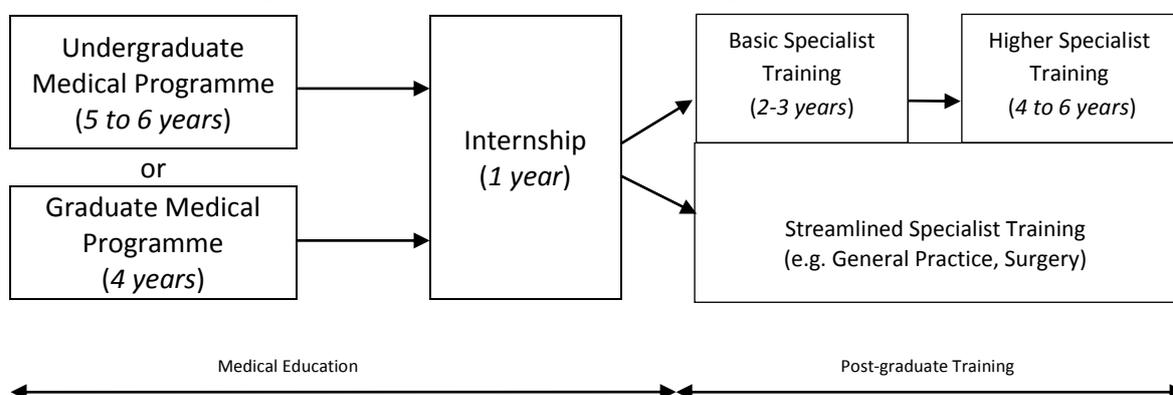


Trends in Medical Education and Training in Ireland

1. Brief Overview of Medical Education and Training Pathways

- Entry to medical education in Ireland can occur in two ways: students can access it directly from secondary school (in which case it takes them 5 to 6 years to complete the programme) or after receiving a first bachelor degree (in which case the programme can be completed in 4 years).
- Upon finishing medical school, a newly qualified graduate has to go through one year of internship. This internship year includes a minimum of 3 months training in General Medicine and another 3 months in General Surgery. During the remaining time, interns can choose to continue to focus on these two areas or pursue rotations in other specialties.
- Following the successful completion of the internship year, graduates are awarded a Certificate of Experience by the Medical Council and are allowed to register to practise medicine in Ireland. They can then proceed to post-graduate specialist training.
- As of 2013, there were 13 post-graduate training bodies, providing 52 specialist training programmes. Specialist Training is divided in two categories: 1) Basic specialist training (BST) and 2) Higher Specialist Training (HST). These two categories are in reality a continuous training procedure. Some other medical specialties (e.g., anaesthesia (2012), surgery (2013), psychiatry (2014), general practice) offer a run-through training process with a single selection point and a merging of the BST and the HST (Department of Health, 2014). This results in an overall shorter training period, whereas progress from one year to the next is assessed based on criteria set by the training body. Each trainee completing the specialist training is granted a certificate of *Satisfactory Completion of Specialist Training*. With this certification, doctors are entitled to register and practise as medical specialists (Medical Council, 2013).
- To become a specialist doctor in Ireland, a student can therefore expect 12 to 16 years in medical education and training (Royal College of Physicians of Ireland, 2014).

Figure 1. Medical Education and Training Pathway, Ireland



Source: Medical Council, 2013.

2. Trends in Admissions to Medical Schools

- Prior to 2010, access to medical education in Ireland was limited to one main route only, the undergraduate medical programme. In 2010, this changed when four graduate entry programmes (GEP) were approved by the Medical Council and the number of medical education programmes almost doubled. This allowed expanding medical education by providing opportunities to a more diverse group of students (Medical Council, 2013).
- As long as students have achieved a minimum of a 2.1 in any bachelor's degree, they are eligible to apply to a school which offers GEP programmes (Medical Council, 2014)¹. As for the undergraduate programme, though some schools offer a five-year term, most students undertake a six-year medical education programme.
- Table 1 provides an overview of all Irish third level institutions that, as of 2013, offered medical education degrees and the respective programmes available.

Table 1. Irish Third Level Institutions Offering Medical Programmes, 2013

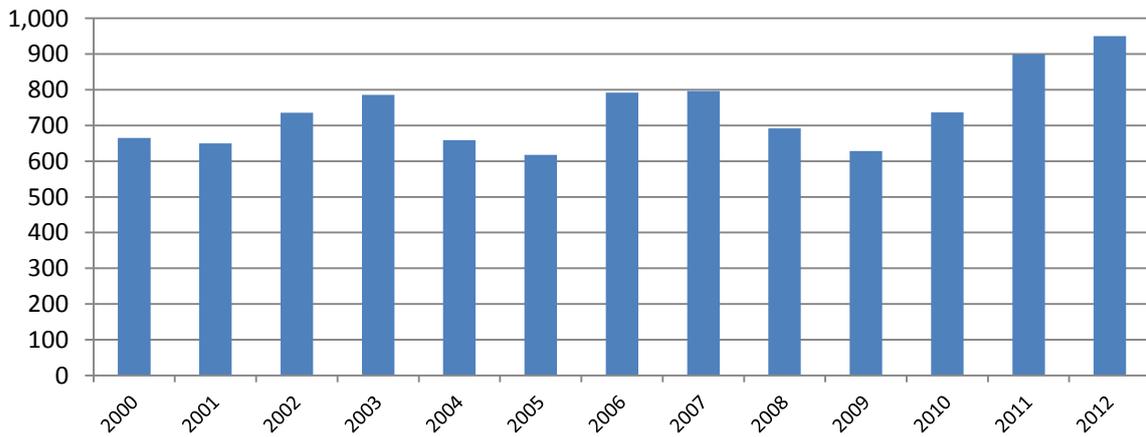
University/College	Type of Medical Programme(s) Offered
University College Cork	Direct entry programme (DEP) for students entering from secondary school, and graduate entry programme (GEP) for students entering from third-level education
University College Dublin	DEP and GEP
National University of Ireland, Galway	DEP
Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland	DEP and GEP
University of Dublin, Trinity College	DEP
University of Limerick	GEP

Source: Medical Council, *Medical Education, Training and Practice in Ireland 2008 – 2013 A Progress Report*, available at <http://www.medicalcouncil.ie/News-and-Publications/>.

- As of 1978, admission of Irish and other EU students to medical education in Ireland was set at a maximum of 305 students per year. This cap was in place for a couple of decades. While the supply of doctors remained more or less static over those years, the demand for health services rose significantly. In 2006, it was estimated that “an annual intake of between 700 and 740 EU students is required in order to achieve self-sufficiency and to address the proposed expansion of the consultant and primary care workforce envisaged in the Health Strategy and to achieve and sustain a consultant-delivered hospital service and an expanded primary and community care service” (Department of Health, 2006). The GEPs were established in 2010 in order to support the required annual increase in medical student admissions.
- Figure 2 shows students’ intake into Irish medical education programmes from 2000 until 2012. Admissions to medical education increased by 43% from 2000 to 2012, but with substantial year-to-year fluctuations. The numbers increased sharply in 2006 and 2007, before dropping sharply in 2008 and 2009 to return to their 2005 level. The increase in admission after 2009 (51% increase from 2009 to 2012) is linked to the introduction of the four new GEPs in 2010.

¹ In Ireland, a 2.1 would be considered *an upper second class honours*, equivalent to B+ or A-, or a 60 to 70 in a rank of 0 to 100.

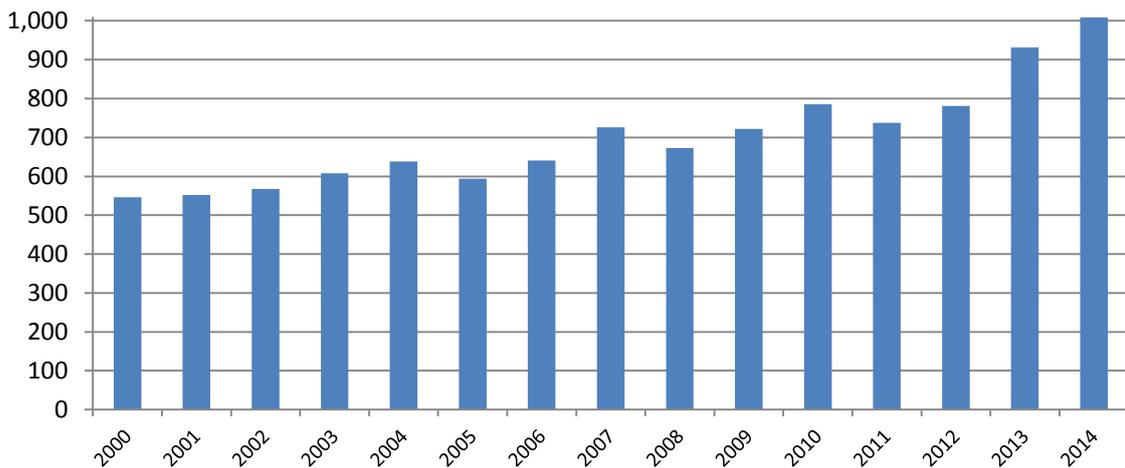
Figure 2. Students admitted to medical schools, Ireland, 2000-2012



Source: Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA).

- Figure 3 shows trends in the number of medical graduates in Ireland from 2000 to 2014. Consistent with the trend rise in admission rates, the number of graduates in Ireland has increased sharply during that period, rising from about 550 in 2000 to just over 1,000 in 2014. Most of the growth occurred in 2013 and 2014.

Figure 3. Medical graduates, Ireland, 2000-2014



Source: Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA).

REFERENCES

Department of Health (2006), *Medical Education in Ireland – A New Direction*, available at www.dohc.ie/publications.

Department of Health (2014), *Strategic Review of Medical Training and Career Structures Report on Medical Career Structures and Pathways following completion of Specialist Training*, available at http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/SRMTCS_CareerStructures_Report_FINAL.pdf.

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Read the report online:

<http://www.oecd.org/health/health-workforce-policies-in-oecd-countries-9789264239517-en.htm>

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