



## EXCELENCIA EN EDUCACIÓN MÉDICA

# The ASPIRE initiative: Excellence in student engagement in the school



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### KEYWORDS

ASPIRE;  
Medical education;  
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Excellence in  
teaching;  
Quality assurance

**Abstract** ‘Student engagement in the school’ is offered as one dimension of the ASPIRE-to-Excellence initiative launched in 2012 by AMEE (International Association for Medical Education) to recognize/reward excellence in teaching.

For a school to be awarded in ‘student engagement’ there must be evidence that students contribute to the academic community, take an active role, are consulted, involved and participate in shaping the teaching-learning experience. Four spheres of ‘student engagement’ can be recognized as main criteria namely: school management, education program, academic community and local community.

So far fourteen schools were awarded. Looking at what makes ‘student engagement’ work we learned that ASPIRE is a global phenomenon with features common worldwide, not depending on school resources and not imposing a fixed model of excellence.

ASPIRE is there to prove that excellence in teaching can be assessed. It brought something new because although basic standards for medical education quality were already available the best practices relevant to the schools who wish to achieve excellence in teaching were only defined with ASPIRE in 2012.

ASPIRE is much more than to recognize and reward schools. Its ultimate goal is to have the schools achieving excellence in teaching, independently of having them applying to the award. © 2016 Elsevier España, S.L.U. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

### PALABRAS CLAVE

ASPIRE;  
Educación médica;  
Educación en ciencias  
de la salud;

**La iniciativa ASPIRE: excelencia en la participación de los estudiantes en la facultad**

**Resumen** La «participación y contribución de los estudiantes al currículo y a la facultad -Students Engagement-» es una dimensión de la iniciativa ASPIRE, lanzada en 2012 por la Asociación Internacional de Educación Médica (AMEE), para reconocer/premiar la excelencia educativa.

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Excelencia en la enseñanza;  
Garantía de la calidad

Para que una facultad sea premiada por la «participación de sus estudiantes» deben existir evidencias de que ellos contribuyen a la comunidad académica, participan activamente en la toma de decisiones, son consultados y se implican en dar forma a la experiencia enseñanza-aprendizaje. Cuatro esferas de «participación y contribución de los estudiantes» son reconocidas como criterios principales: gestión de la facultad, programa educativo, comunidad académica y comunidad local.

Hasta el momento, 14 facultades han sido galardonadas por la «participación de sus estudiantes» y hemos aprendido que ASPIRE es un fenómeno global con características comunes a nivel mundial, no depende de los recursos de la facultad y no impone un modelo fijo de excelencia.

ASPIRE existe para demostrar que la excelencia docente puede evaluarse. Esto es algo nuevo, ya que, aun estando disponibles estándares básicos para la calidad de la educación médica, únicamente ASPIRE ha conseguido definir las mejores prácticas, trascendentales para facultades que desean alcanzar la excelencia docente.

ASPIRE va mucho más allá de reconocer y premiar facultades. Su objetivo principal es hacer que las facultades alcancen la excelencia docente, independientemente de que estén solicitando el reconocimiento.

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## Background

This manuscript focuses on excellence in terms of 'student engagement in the school', one of the three initial dimensions of the ASPIRE initiative<sup>1</sup> launched by AMEE ([www.amee.org](http://www.amee.org)) at the 2012 Conference in Lyon to recognize and reward excellence in teaching, for the first time.

ASPIRE was introduced in a time where the medical education concern was to have in place a mechanism for quality improvement in medical education worldwide to be used by institutions, organizations and national authorities responsible for medical education.<sup>2</sup> This was the context when in March 2003 the Trilogy of the Global Standards<sup>2</sup> for quality development of Medical Education was published at the WFME (World Federation for Medical Education) Conference arranged in cooperation with WHO, UNESCO, WMA, the University of Copenhagen and Lund University. At that time the purpose was to agree on medical education standards to ensure that the competencies of medical doctors are globally applicable, transparent and transferable.<sup>2</sup>

Less than 10 years after the global standards were launched, medical education was confronted with a more demanding challenge namely the need to go beyond the standards to recognize excellence in teaching because so far excellence had been judged entirely on the basis of research. The problem was that over the past decade the move has been to pay increasing attention to university rankings based mainly on research criteria with no attention paid to teaching.

In 2013, after a pilot process the ASPIRE initiative was successfully implemented to recognize the importance of teaching alongside research as the mission of a medical school.<sup>3,4</sup> Since 2015 ASPIRE is also recognizing excellence in higher education from dental and veterinary schools.

If I feel privileged for having attended both conferences where such important initiatives were launched I must say the ASPIRE initiative made me realize that a giant step

had been taken to improve medical education. The launch of ASPIRE was indeed a turning point accompanying what was done worldwide in other areas namely in sports, arts, literature, etc. to recognize excellence.

ASPIRE has the potential to revolutionize medical education worldwide with the schools aiming to achieve excellence as part of their mission.

Defining 'student engagement' is not easy because 'several definitions are given and each of the approaches to student engagement has strengths and limitations'.<sup>1</sup> Kahu in 2013 presents a conceptual framework that seeks to combine all elements and present student engagement as a 'psycho-social process, influenced by institutional and personal factors, and embedded within a wider social context, integrates the social-cultural perspective with the psychological and behavioural'.<sup>5</sup>

For a school to be regarded as achieving excellence in student engagement in a medical, dental or veterinary school, there must be evidence that students contribute to the academic community and that they take an active role and are consulted, involved and participate in shaping the teaching and learning experience.<sup>1</sup>

## The importance of student engagement in the school

Much has been said on the importance of having students engaged in their schools. Two arguments deserve to be highlighted:

- *Today medical students, Doctors of the future*

'*Today Medical Students, Doctors of the Future*' was the highlight promoting the last 25th General Assembly of EMSA (European Medical Students' Association) held in Berlin in September 2015 under the topic of '*Doctors of the future*'.

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