

# RCSI White Coat Ceremony Review

*Keywords: Interprofessional , Inclusivity, Student Journey*

Gráinne Nic An Mhaistir

RCSI University of Health and Medical Sciences

## Introduction

The White Coat Ceremony was first introduced to the RCSI School of Medicine during the 1990s following a Student Union request for an informal occasion to acknowledge the introduction of students into the anatomy room. Since the early 2000s, with the introduction of new schools such as the School of Pharmacy and Physiotherapy, the ceremony evolved to provide a unique opportunity to support interprofessional socialisation and to promote principles of humanism and professionalism at the beginning of the student journey for all undergraduate programmes, later including postgraduate programmes such as the MSc in Physician Associate Studies.

With RCSI continuing to grow and diversify its programme offerings, and following feedback received from programme representatives to the Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs (DVCAA)'s Office, a decision was taken to review the appropriateness of the White Coat Ceremony's current declaration and procedures, to ensure that the event is inclusive and representative of all programmes that take part.

## Initiative

In March 2023, a short life White Coat Ceremony Review Working Group was assembled and convened by the DVCAA's office. The group was provided with all relevant documentation, a terms of reference, and an action plan and associated timeline. Among the goals of this group was to review and consider the appropriateness of the White Coat Ceremony's current declaration, and to retain a universal declaration that was inclusive and suitable to all appropriate programmes. A further goal was to review the procedures of the event, including the types of speeches and speakers, to ensure representation across all programmes. Membership of the Working Group included five student representatives, from the undergraduate programmes as well the MSc in Physician Associate Studies and the Student's Union. Other members of the group were cross-institutional representatives including members of faculty, such as programme directors and year leads, and importantly the RCSI Chair of Medical Professionalism.



**Figure 1.** Promotional image for the October 2023 White Coat Ceremony

The Group updated and amended the White Coat Ceremony declaration to ensure the ceremony is equally meaningful for all students and to preserve the important philosophy that all students are signing up to common professionalism principles by having a ceremony that works for all. They agreed on a series of recommendations regarding the procedures of future White Coat Ceremonies. Among the recommendations were the retention of a universal declaration to ensure interprofessionalism and inclusivity, to aim to have more student representative speakers from older cohorts representing each programme present, and to shorten speeches made by academic staff to allow time for additional student speakers. Subject to programme start dates and capacity, a further recommendation was to have the ceremony event within 2-3 weeks of term beginning for each cohort.

## Outcomes

Following completion of its review, the Group completed a report documenting the amendments made to the White Coat Ceremony declaration and their recommendations for the procedures of the ceremony. The report was shared with Heads of School where it was received positively noting the collaborative process undertaken by the Group. It was then circulated to Academic Council.

Planning for the 2023 RCSI White Coat Ceremony includes a host of changes based on the report of the Working Group. This includes the reciting of the updated wording of the White Coat Ceremony declaration. More student speakers representing each programme will be included in the ceremony. Academic speakers will be supported to shorten speeches and simplify the language used to make speeches more accessible for students for whom English is a second language. Due to capacity issues the Working Group's recommendation to have the ceremony within 2-3 weeks of term beginning, will not be possible, but it will take place shortly outside the timeframe. Noting the importance of supporting interprofessional socialisation across programmes, the first ceremony will include students from Foundation Year, Advanced Therapeutic Technologies and Physician Associate Studies; the second ceremony will include students from Physiotherapy, Pharmacy, Graduate Entry Medicine and Direct Entry Medicine.

A further implication, identified as part of the work completed by the Working Group, was that changes made to the White Coat Ceremony declaration needed to be replicated in the undergraduate and postgraduate declarations used at RCSI conferring ceremonies. These changes have been made and will be included in future conferring ceremonies.