

Nationally consistent assessment of international medical graduates

GUIDELINES ON THE SPECIALIST ASSESSMENT PATHWAYS **(including area of need and training positions)**

Purpose

To clarify the roles of key stakeholders and describe agreed processes in the assessment of:

- Overseas-trained specialists for comparability to an Australian trained specialist;
- Overseas-trained specialists applying for area of need specialist positions (positions in areas of workforce shortage);
- Overseas-trained specialists or overseas specialists-in-training¹ who apply to fill short term training positions.

Background

As determined by the COAG meeting of July 2006, a model for a national process for the assessment of international medical graduates (IMGs) was developed and submitted to Health Ministers in December 2006, and COAG has agreed that all pathways will be implemented by 1 July 2008.

This work has been progressed through an Implementation Committee and subsequently a Technical Committee, resulting in a number of new pathways for non-specialist doctors and modifications to the pre-existing specialist pathway, the latter with input from the Joint Standing Committee on Overseas Trained Specialists (JSCOTS) of the Australian Medical Council (AMC). Discussions were also held and input sought from each specialist college.

There will be three main pathways available to IMGs who wish to practise in Australia. These are:

1. The new Competent Authority Pathway comprising the granting of advanced standing and workplace-based assessment of adjustment to the Australian health system (intended for non-specialists from Competent Authority countries, but also available to specialists including general practitioners);
- 2a. The existing AMC Standard Pathway comprising AMC MCQ and Clinical Examinations (for non-specialists);
- 2b. The AMC Standard Pathway comprising AMC MCQ Examination and accredited workplace-based performance assessment currently being finalised, (for non-specialists);
3. The Specialist Pathway (for overseas-trained specialists and overseas specialists-in-training, whether applying for full recognition, to fill an area of need specialist position or to undertake a short period of training in Australia, and general practitioners in the RACGP five year program, currently Categories 1 & 2)

¹ All references to specialists-in-training means a specialist-in-training in any other country than Australia, whether it is their country of birth or not.

All assessment pathways will have the following common requirements:

- a) English language proficiency;
- b) Primary source verification of qualifications;
- c) Assessment against a position description (excluding those who are not applying for a specific position);
- d) A period of practice under supervision (unless otherwise determined by the relevant college);
- e) Orientation relevant to qualifications and position to be occupied, linked to supervision requirements;
- f) Access to continuing professional development.

Specialist pathways

The AMC specialist pathway for the assessment of overseas trained specialists (OTSs) has been in existence since 1993, and the Area of Need specialist assessment process since 2002. Variations between the colleges in assessment processes have continued in a number of areas including:

- Documentary requirements and need for a face-to-face interview;
- Timeliness of completion of process;
- Terminology in the advice provided;
- Whether a separate process is required in relation to suitability for fellowship (as opposed to assessment for area of need positions);
- The need for formal examination prior to granting fellowship for an otherwise substantially comparable candidate.

Following the consideration of specialist assessment through the COAG-initiated process the Technical Committee has endorsed guidelines around roles and processes.

Specialist pathway assessment categories

It is acknowledged that the specialist pathway applicants will include those who seek registration for a range of purposes. An assessment category matrix has been developed to clarify the assessment requirements for each type of applicant seeking registration to practise in Australia.

CATEGORY	ASSESSMENT
Specialist applying for assessment for comparability <i>(includes applicants in the RACGP 5-year program, Categories 1 and 2 and some Category 3²).</i>	Specialist college pathway assessed against College standards <i>(or applicants in the RACGP 5-year program).</i>
Specialist applying for an area of need (service position)	Specialist college pathway assessed against position description (will be combined with an assessment of comparability to the standard of an Australian trained specialist in that specialty).
Non-specialist³ (service position) <i>(Includes applicants in the RACGP 5-year program, Category 3 who do not pass the RACGP AKT, Categories 4 and 5 and other IMGs without formal general practice training or experience).</i>	Standard pathway (AMC examination or workplace-based performance assessment).
Specialist or specialist-in-training wishing to undertake a short period of training.	Specialist college to endorse the applicant as suitable for a genuine training position according to specific criteria for a specialist in training.

² The General Practice 5 Year Program was established in 1999 and provides for the assessment and registration of IMGs with postgraduate training and experience in general practice. IMGs are assessed into one of five categories based on formal training and experience as follows:

1. General practice training, postgraduate qualifications and experience equivalent to fellowship of the college (the FRACGP).
2. GP training, postgraduate qualifications and experience, which are recognised, but not considered equivalent to FRACGP. These IMGs would be eligible for FRACGP immediately on successful completion of the RACGP examination, without further requirements.
3. GP training and postgraduate qualifications not recognised, but have more than five years of full-time GP experience in another country. NOTE: It is anticipated that in future Category 3 will be required to pass the RACGP Applied Knowledge Test (AKT), leading to entry to Fellowship training.
4. No GP training or postgraduate qualifications, but have GP more than five years of full-time GP experience in another country.
5. No GP training or postgraduate qualifications and less than five years of equivalent full-time GP experience in another country

³ All references to the non-specialist pathway have been set out in this paper to clearly identify the alternative pathway open to an international medical graduate if they do not meet the criteria to be assessed under the specialist pathway, or as an overseas trained specialist wishing to undertake a short period of training in Australia.

Applicants who do not meet the requirements for specialist assessment will be required to undergo assessment through one of the non-specialist pathways. Applicants must have completed all training requirements and be recognised as a specialist in their country of training before applying under the specialist pathway for assessment of comparability or for an Area of Need assessment.

When assessing applicants for suitability for area of need positions, colleges will determine at the same time (or soon thereafter) what is required to meet standards for fellowship.

Colleges will allow OTSs who are considered substantially comparable to Australian trained specialists to gain fellowship without requiring an examination.

Uniform classification of OTSs

It has been agreed to use the terminology of ‘substantially comparable’, ‘partially comparable’ and ‘not comparable’ when classifying OTSs based on their training, assessment and practice, and to use the agreed definitions⁴ and guidelines in relation to registration and recommended scope of practice.

Alignment with non-specialist pathway (Competent Authority pathway) – advanced standing towards substantial comparability.

It is desirable to align the specialist pathway with the non-specialist pathway in one important respect. In the Competent Authority pathway those applicants who hold qualifications from certain countries with similar health systems and training and registration bodies can be granted advanced standing towards the AMC certificate. This allows the applicant to undertake a period of practice under peer review or oversight prior to gaining full registration.

⁴ **Substantially comparable** applicants should be permitted conditional registration to undertake the intended scope of practice independently and unsupervised. In order to be considered substantially comparable an applicant must have satisfied the college requirements for this category in relation to previous training, assessment and recent practice. The applicant is eligible for conditional specialist registration and fellowship without further examination but may be required to undertake a period of up to 12 months oversight or practice under peer review by a reviewer appointed through the college assessment unit, to ensure that the level of performance is similar to that of an Australian trained specialist, and to assist with their transition to the Australian health system, provide professional support and help them to access continuing professional development. The length of peer review is up to the individual college to determine on a case-by-case basis.

Partially comparable applicants should be permitted conditional registration to undertake a defined scope of practice in a supervised capacity. In order to be considered partially comparable an applicant must have satisfied the college requirements for this category in relation to previous training, assessment and recent practice. In order for a partially comparable applicant to be considered substantially comparable the applicant will be required to undertake a period of up to 24 months top up training under a supervisor appointed through the college assessment unit, to ensure that the level of performance reaches that of an Australian trained specialist, and to assist with their transition to the Australian health system, provide professional support and help them to access continuing professional development. Other prescribed requirements including formal assessment may be imposed.

Non-comparable applicants should not be permitted to register to practise as a specialist, but may be eligible to seek registration to practise in another capacity (e.g. as hospital medical officers) to enable them to gain the AMC certificate, and subsequently undertake formal college training and assessment, if able to gain a training post subject to other college requirements.

Given that most colleges similarly require such a period of practice prior to confirming substantial comparability and allowing admission to fellowship there is broad agreement to grant certain OTSs 'advanced standing towards substantial comparability' on the basis of initial assessment (possibly including an interview). No further examination is required before registration or fellowship. A period of practice under oversight or peer review for up to 12 months may be required by some colleges, determined on a case-by-case basis.

As occurs with the Competent Authority model for non-specialists, colleges have agreed to progress towards providing a list of overseas qualifications that, together with an appropriate assessment (possibly including an interview) will allow the granting of such advanced standing.

Overseas-trained specialists or overseas specialists-in-training who wish to undertake short term training in Australia (including those applying for Occupational Training Visas)

Applicants who wish to enter a genuine short-term specialist training position in Australia will require assessment by the relevant specialist medical college for the purpose of registration.

It is proposed that the college will determine whether the position is a genuine training position and whether the training program is appropriate for the applicant according to the following specific criteria:

- The applicant is a recognised specialist or specialist-in-training in their country of training, the latter category comprising those who have passed specialist examinations and/or are no more than two years from completing specialist training in their country of training.
- The applicant will be undertaking training or obtaining experience in Australia not available in their country of training, for a short period – normally up to one year but can in exceptional circumstances be extended to two years, and includes opportunities such as exchange fellowships.
- The applicant has stated their intention to return to their country of training at the end of training in Australia.
- There is comprehensive documentation concerning the training program and the nominated supervisor and evidence that the training program is appropriate for the applicant, taking into consideration their prior training and experience.

The above criteria have been proposed to allow some flexibility to determine suitability of an applicant for a genuine training position according to the individual circumstances of each applicant. It is not the college's role or responsibility to determine if a proposed visa category is appropriate but only to provide a recommendation as to whether the appropriate criteria are satisfied.

It will be the responsibility of the employer to submit the necessary documentation directly to the relevant college to allow the college to make a determination as to whether the position is a genuine training position and also the individual applicant's suitability for the training program. The role of making the final determination about the most suitable applicant for a position rests solely with the employer.

An application form has been developed for the purposes of application and assessment for registration purposes (Attachment 1).

Applicants who are able to satisfy the criteria as determined by the individual college will be eligible to seek conditional registration by the relevant medical board. Applicants who do not satisfy the criteria will need to progress through one of the AMC non-specialist IMG assessment pathways that lead to the awarding of the AMC Certificate. The following flow chart describes the process:

