

Victorian report - Nationally consistent assessment process for international medical graduates

Updated 30 June 2009

Background

A national process to assess international medical graduates (IMGs) is being phased in from July 2007. This follows the announcement at the July 2006 meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

This process has been developed by a national implementation committee, involving representatives from state and territory medical boards, health departments, specialist medical colleges, the Australian Medical Council (AMC), the Australian Medical Association, postgraduate medical councils and consumer representatives.

Principles

The assessment process is founded on these principles:

1. All doctors registered in Australia should meet agreed minimum standards of practice.
2. In addition to the existing AMC pathway, the new assessment model provides a variety of pathways to registration, depending on the doctor's previous training and assessment, knowledge base, clinical skills and the suitability of their skills and experience for the position for which they are applying.

National process

The national assessment process consists of three main pathways.

1. The competent authority pathway

International medical graduates who have completed training and assessment through AMC-designated and approved competent authorities are eligible to apply for 'advanced standing' toward the AMC certificate. If the AMC grants advanced standing status to the individual, he or she is not required to sit the AMC Multiple Choice Questionnaire (MCQ) or AMC clinical examinations, but must undertake a workplace based assessment whilst working under supervision before being eligible for general registration.

The AMC has so far approved five competent authorities:

- UNITED KINGDOM – General Medical Council (GMC)
- CANADA – Medical Council of Canada (MCC)
- UNITED STATES - Education Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates (ECFMG)
- NEW ZEALAND – Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ)
- IRELAND – Medical Council of Ireland (MCI)

Further details are available from the AMC website: www.amc.org.au.

The Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria (the board) is accepting applications from international medical graduates who are eligible for registration via the competent authority pathway. Further information is available from the board's website: www.medicalboardvic.org.au

The Postgraduate Medical Council of Victoria (PMCV) has been approved by the AMC as an accredited body in relation to the assessment process for international medical graduates following the competent authority pathway. The PMCV, through funding from the Department of Human Services, is providing training and support to health services regarding the provision of appropriate supervision for international medical graduates, in order to ensure that a doctor from a competent authority who has completed the required period of supervised practice (usually 12 months) will be eligible for general registration.

2. The standard pathway

The standard pathway is designed for international medical graduates who are not eligible for registration under the competent authority or specialist pathways, and includes international medical graduates seeking employment in hospital non-specialist and some general practice (GP) positions. Such doctors are subject to rigorous assessment as a requirement of specific registration. The components of the standard pathway are described in the 'Elements' section below.

There is a continuing requirement for international medical graduates to pass both the AMC MCQ and the AMC clinical examinations before they become eligible for general registration.

3. The specialist pathway

This is for international medical graduates applying for specialist positions, which includes overseas trained specialists who are eligible for fellowship, international trainees and international medical graduates applying for 'area of need' specialist positions. The specialist pathway also includes GPs seeking college fellowship.

Further details are available from the AMC website: www.amc.org.au.

Elements

All three of the pathways have a number of common elements. Once fully implemented, these will include the following:

Pre-employment

- **Primary source verification.** All international medical graduates must have their medical qualifications independently verified. Further details are available from www.amc.org.au.
- **English language proficiency standards.** All international medical graduates are required to satisfy the national English language proficiency standards for registration in Australia. Further details are available from www.medicalboardvic.org.au.
- **Screening examination (*standard pathway only*).** A pre-registration screening examination (based on the AMC MCQ examination) is required of all international medical graduates in the standard pathway from 1 July 2008.

Information regarding the AMC examination timetable and examination centres, including off-shore centres, is available from www.amc.org.au. Note that international medical graduates who are currently registered are not required (except under specific state legislation or individual conditions of registration) to sit the AMC MCQ examination before seeking re-registration.

- **Pre-employment structured clinical interview.** In less supported working environments there may be a requirement for an AMC-accredited provider to carry out a structured clinical interview prior to employment. The structured clinical interview will establish whether an applicant has the knowledge and experience to practise safely and effectively in the position for which they are seeking registration. In well supervised and supported environments, an organisation's existing recruitment processes will usually suffice.

The medical board is planning Victorian arrangements for the structured clinical interview, including a process for determining in which circumstances an independent assessment will be required.

During employment

- **Orientation.** All international medical graduates are expected to undertake orientation to the health system, workplace and culture in order to work successfully in the Australian health environment. It is the responsibility of the employer to provide or source a suitable orientation program, which may be delivered by a number of methods including paper-based resources, web-based programs and/or face-to-face delivery. Orientation must occur within the first three months of employment.

An orientation plan is a mandatory component of the position description submitted with the initial registration application to the board. The content of the orientation program and the manner in which it will be delivered must be documented. Evidence of completion of a satisfactory orientation program will need to be submitted to the board along with a supervisory report.

- **Supervision.** The purpose of supervision is to ensure that the practitioner is performing at an acceptable standard in the position for which they were registered. The nature and availability of supervision must be set out in the position description and supervision plan.

Supervision requirements are set out in the board's guidelines for medical registration, available from www.medicalboardvic.org.au.

- **Workplace Based Assessment.** It is expected that workplace based assessment will form part of the national assessment process for some international medical graduates to ensure that clinical performance is at the required level for the appointed position.

Workplace based assessment using the mini clinical examination (mini-CEX) has been trialled in a number of states for the purposes of the competent authority pathway. In Victoria there are a number of projects underway within hospitals and colleges to examine the feasibility and effectiveness of workplace based assessment for both formative and summative purposes. The AMC is also interested in pursuing workplace based assessment as an alternative to the existing clinical examination for the purposes of granting general registration. However, this is not expected to be available for some time, and not all health services will be in a position to offer this option.

- **Continuing Professional Development.** All international medical graduates are expected to undertake appropriate continuing professional development to maintain registration.

The national assessment process, regardless of the assessment pathways followed, is intended to enable international medical graduates to proceed to general registration, or, in the case of overseas trained specialists, to the relevant category of registration as a specialist in Australia.

Resources and support

Funds of \$1.64 million in 2007-08 and \$1.75 million in 2008–09 have been provided by the Victorian government to support implementation of the national assessment process. These have been directed to a range of projects in hospitals and other organisations to support the assessment, orientation, upskilling and support of international medical graduates.

Funds of \$2.64 million are available in 2009–10 to support the assessment, orientation, upskilling and support of international medical graduates. \$1.56 million of these funds have been allocated to health services calculated on the relative numbers of international medical graduates within each organisation. There are also funds available for innovative projects to be completed during 2009–10. A call for project submissions will be advertised during July 2009. Details are available from: www.health.vic.gov.au/workforce/medical#otd.

Further information

www.amc.org.au

www.medicalboardvic.org.au

www.health.vic.gov.au/workforce/medical

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Note: The information in this report is current as at 30 June 2009. The report is provided for general information purposes only and the detail may change. Before making any decisions based on this information, you should contact the responsible agency directly. Administrative details regarding practitioner registration under the national assessment process can be found on the website of the Medical Practitioners Board of Victoria:

www.medicalboardvic.org.au/pdf/IMG_Registration_April_2008.pdf