Approved curricula and the role of UK & overseas exams

GMC position statement – May 2015

Purpose of this document

1. To clarify the position of exams within GMC approved curricula, in particular exams undertaken outside the UK\(^1\), both in other European countries and outside Europe and the subsequent eligibility for GP/Specialist Registration.

Who is covered by this position statement?

2. All doctors in training following a Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT) or Certificate of Eligibility for Specialist Registration (CESR) combined programme and those applying for a full CESR.

3. Colleges\(^2\) and Faculties
   
   a. when considering what exams form part of the assessment for their curricula, whether run-through or uncoupled
   
   b. when considering exemptions from parts of their exams
   
   c. when providing guidance to those undertaking recruitment into their specialty or to Educational Supervisors in relation to exams within curricula

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\(^1\) This does not include UK exams run by Colleges outside the UK that are the same as those taken in the UK that are approved by the GMC

\(^2\) Colleges refers to Medical Royal Colleges and Faculties
4. Those undertaking recruitment into specialty training, at the beginning of core or specialty training (CT/ST1), at the beginning of “higher” specialty training (ST3) or at any points further into the training programme.

5. Educational Supervisors

   d when providing advice to doctors in training on taking exams

   e when producing the structured report for the ARCP

6. This is not applicable for General Practice doctors in training due to the curriculum having one exam that is taken towards the end of training and therefore it is not expected doctors would enter the programme having already taken an exam and also that the qualification required for the award of the CCT is made up of the UK exam together with work place based assessments and as such it would not be possible to take an overseas exam as an alternative. In addition the exams run by the Royal College of GPs do not accept exemptions.

Background

7. The GMC took over responsibility for the approval of curricula and assessment systems, including exams with the merger of the GMC with the Postgraduate Medical and Education Training Board (PMETB) in April 2010. Between October 1995 and March 2010 PMETB was statutorily responsible for the approval of curricula and assessment systems and prior to 1995 this was undertaken by individual colleges.

8. PMETB produced standards and guidance as follows (web links provided):

   o Principles for an assessment system for postgraduate medical training (September 2004);

   o Standards for curricula (March 2005);

   o Standards for curricula and assessment systems (July 2008) (which replaced the above two documents and was rebranded to a GMC document in April 2010)

   o Developing and maintaining an assessment system – a PMETB guide to good practice (January 2007)

9. In 2006 PMETB wrote to Colleges with a timeline for the phased approach to the introduction of these standards and principles. Colleges produced curricula (dated 2007) which were assessed against the standards for curricula. In 2008 PMETB wrote to Colleges to outline the next steps which were to update their curricula to include assessment systems that fulfilled the new standards for curricula
and assessment systems July 2008 (in general these were finalised, approved and dated 2010).

10. A number of Colleges had exams from outside the UK within their curricula as part of the assessment system, the most common of these would be exams run by bodies in Ireland\textsuperscript{3}. With the evaluation of curricula and assessment systems in 2010 the majority of these exams from outside the UK were not able to demonstrate fulfilment of the required standards and as such were removed from the approved assessment system.

**What does this mean?**

Doctors who were appointed onto 2010 and any subsequent curricula **MUST** pass the relevant **UK** College\textsuperscript{4} exams in full (no non UK exemptions) that have been approved by PMETB or the GMC as part of the curriculum and assessment system in order to be eligible to be awarded a CCT. Doctors who have an exam that is not approved within the curriculum **ARE NOT** eligible for a CCT.

11. The GMC are aware that there has been confusion in relation to the above statutory requirement and this paper outlines the possible different scenarios:

- a Doctors entering UK training at ST1/CT1 not passing relevant UK end of core / early years training exam. **Not eligible for appointment to ST3 (or above) or to continue in run-through training.**

- b Doctors entering UK training at ST1/CT1 not passing relevant UK end of core / early years training exam. Taking an exam outside the UK and applying for entry into ST3 (or above), or continuing in run-through training. **Not eligible for a CCT, not eligible for CESR(CP), not eligible for appointment to ST3 (or above) or to continue in run-through training.**

- c Doctors entering UK training at ST3 or above from approved European training without a European exam. **Not eligible for a CCT, Not eligible for appointment to ST3 (or above).**

- d Doctors entering UK training at ST3 (or above) from approved European training with a European exam considered equivalent/similar\textsuperscript{5} to the UK exam. **Eligible for a CESR(CP)**

\textsuperscript{3} Republic of Ireland

\textsuperscript{4} Where a College offers the same exam outside the UK as within the UK, the GMC expects it to fulfil the same standards and therefore give the same rights as the UK delivered exam.

\textsuperscript{5} Equivalence/similarity to the UK exam is determined by the College – see FAQ2
e Doctors entering UK training at ST3 (or above) from approved European training with the UK exam (or who gain the UK exam at a later point but prior to end of training). **Eligible for a CCT**

f Doctors entering UK training at ST3 (or above) from training outside the UK with an outside UK exam considered equivalent/similar to the UK exam. **Eligible for a CESR(CP)**

g Doctors entering UK training at ST3 (or above) from training outside the UK with an outside UK exam not equivalent/similar to the UK exam. **Not eligible for appointment to ST3 – possible full CESR**

h Doctors entering UK training at ST3 (or above) from training outside Europe with the UK exam. **Eligible for a CESR(CP)**

12. We are aware that a number of overseas exams; in particular those from Ireland; were included within the pre 2010 curriculum and assessment system. We are also aware that a number of Colleges accept or have accepted exams from outside the UK for exemptions from parts of the UK exam. Under the GMCs position statement requiring all doctors to move to the current curriculum from no later than January 2016, there may be a small number of doctors in training who will be required to move from pre 2010 curricula into post 2010 curricula where they will not have the relevant approved exam ie the UK exam. As outlined in the above mentioned paper, it will be for each individual College to determine how they will manage this transfer, there are two FAQs from this statement that are relevant:

- **4Q:** If I am in a training programme and the examination has changed, will I need to retake it when I have already passed it?
  - **A:** No. However if the examination amendments have included examination in “new” areas of the curriculum then the College will define within its mapping whether additional evidence is required such as targeted workplace based assessments.

- **6Q:** I am in uncoupled training and have passed the old membership/fellowship examination but have not yet entered ST3 training. Will I need to take the new exam as well?
  - **A:** The examination is one part of the curriculum and assessment system for your specialty. The mapping produced by the College will outline what elements of the “current” curriculum you have already achieved and will indicate what assessments you need to complete. The Colleges will take into consideration the agreed position in relation to currency of examinations.

Looking at FAQ4: this means that where an exam from outside the UK was part of the pre 2010 curriculum and the doctor in training is being or has been transferred to the current curriculum, the College will indicate what (if any) additional assessments will be required to demonstrate equivalence to the exam in the current curriculum.

Looking at FAQ6: please refer to FAQs 4 & 8 below.
Next steps

13. Colleges review their exam regulations, if they include exemptions through exams from outside the UK, these must fulfil the GMC standards. To enable those who are given these exemptions to be eligible for a CCT, GMC approval will need to be sought.

14. Colleges work with Deaneries/LETBs to ensure that eligibility for recruitment and the route to registration is understood.

15. Colleges review their curricula and ensure that wording around exams is clear, for example usage of terminology "or equivalent".

16. Colleges review their transfer to the current curriculum plans – see FAQ3 of this paper.

17. Gold guide is amended to reflect this paper.

Implementation plan

18. The GMC recognise that there has been a lack of understanding over the position as outlined in paras 11 and 12 above. In order not to disadvantage doctors in training the following implementation plan has been agreed.

1 June 2015
- Exams from outside the UK taken\textsuperscript{6} from this date onwards are not acceptable (see circumstances in para 11 above for clarification of the position of those with these exams)
- Colleges review exam regulations and where exemptions exist, provide a plan to the GMC for approval as to the phasing out of the exemption or the request for approval

31 December 2015
- Requests for approval of exemptions to have been submitted to GMC
- Colleges provide clarification on transfer to the current curriculum for those with exams from outside the UK if necessary.

31 December 2016
- Exams taken outside of the UK prior to 1 June 2015 cease to be acceptable (see circumstances in para 11 above for clarification of the position of those with these exams) for entry or re-entry into training.

\textsuperscript{6} This date refers to the exam date and not the date the results are published.
Frequently Asked Questions

Colleges/ Recruiters

Q1: We would like to retain the existing exemptions but the exams do not fulfil the GMCs standards. What should we do?
A: It is important that the College is regularly satisfying itself that it continues to be appropriate for an exemption to remain. The GMC is not in a position to approve exemptions where the exams do not fulfil our standards. It will be necessary therefore if the College wishes to continue with accepting exemptions that you ensure candidates are aware of their position with respect to future employment in the UK within training and also that it is clear to those undertaking recruitment which doctors have been granted exemptions and therefore the limitations on their eligibility for appointment/ restrictions on routes of training.

Q2: Our curricula/person specifications for recruitment use the terminology “or equivalent”. What should we do?
A: Any exam that is accepted within a curriculum must be approved by the GMC, therefore the terminology “or equivalent” within a curriculum needs to be removed. In a person specification however it is for each College to consider what they consider is equivalent/similar and ensure this is clear to those undertaking recruitment. The requirements under the position statement above however must be followed in relation to eligibility for recruitment and the route to registration which will differ for each individual doctor in training.

Q3: When we produced our transfer to the current curriculum implementation plan we did not make a reference to exams from outside the UK – what should we do?
A: You will need to review which exams your pool of doctors in training hold, map the syllabus, entry requirements and assessment standards against your current curriculum and judge whether any further assessment is required. Colleges are encouraged to be flexible in their approach.

Q4: Our exam is not a stand-alone one but includes the demonstration of competences achieved through successful completion of training – what does this mean for us?
A: The position paper remains relevant, however when you are considering equivalence/similarity of a non UK examination you would also be considering the evidence of demonstration of competences achieved through training.

Doctors in training

Q5: I took an exam outside the UK in 2013 – will I be eligible for entry into ST3 or higher?
A: From 31 December 2016 you will not be eligible for entry or re-entry (except where training is deferred – see FAQ 11) into UK training unless you are a European or overseas doctor who passed the exam as part of your non UK European training programme where you may be eligible for entry following the CESR(CP) route to specialist registration (see para 11 above for eligibility).
Q6: Why are trainees who have undertaken training in non UK countries treated differently to those who have trained in the UK?
A: Training in the UK is defined in the relevant curriculum and assessment system. In order to demonstrate satisfactory completion of training the relevant assessments, such as the approved UK exam, must be passed. Therefore if you have not passed the exam approved within the curriculum and assessment system you will not have demonstrated satisfactory completion of training and therefore would not be eligible for further training in the UK.

Q7: Why am I not eligible for a CCT if my European training and exam is approved by the relevant competent authority?
A: European training where the doctor in training is able to provide evidence that it has been approved by the relevant competent authority may be considered towards the UK curriculum, however the assessments within the UK curriculum must be passed to confirm satisfactory completion of the curriculum and subsequently for a CCT to be awarded. Without this the evaluation is to determine equivalence and the possibility of award of a CESR(CP).

Q8: I have been transferred to the current curriculum and I don’t have the UK exam, will I be required to pass it?
A: Each College will have produced a plan for the transfer of doctors in training onto the current curriculum. This will detail the requirements with respect to exams. If there is no specific statement about those holding exams from outside the UK Colleges will be clarifying the position for you by 31 December 2015.

Q9: I have passed part 1 of the exam outside the UK prior to 1 June 2015 but not part 2, will I be eligible for entry into ST3 or above training if I pass part 2 either in the UK or not?
A: From 31 December 2016 you will not be eligible for entry or re-entry into UK training unless you are a European or overseas doctor who passed the complete exam outside the UK as part of your non UK training programme. If you fall into this group, you may be eligible for entry to UK training following the CESR(CP) route to specialist registration (see para 11 above for eligibility).

Q10: I am in UK training but have the exam from Ireland – what does this mean for me?
A: If you hold an NTN (ie you are in run through training or have entered from ST3 or above) then whatever programme you have had confirmed whether it is CESR(CP) or CCT will not be rescinded. If you are not in run through training and have not yet re-entered specialty training (including being in a Locum appointment for Training) then you have until 31 December 2016 to gain entry to substantive training and remain eligible for a CESR(CP). If you do not re-enter training by 31 December 2016 you will need to pass the UK college exam in its entirety to be eligible for appointment.

Q11: I have been appointed to UK training and have deferred my entry - what does this mean for me?

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7 Some exams are in a single part but the same principle applies
A: We will continue to accept the decision made in relation to your eligibility for entry to training but only for one additional year ie until 31 December 2017 where the deferment is for one of the reasons outlined in the Gold Guide and approved by the relevant Dean.

Q12: I have been told by my College that I have an exemption because I have passed a non UK exam. What does this mean for me?

Any exemptions due to non UK exams after 1 June 2015 will not be acceptable for the purposes of award of a CCT. If your College continues to accept exemptions then you may be eligible for appointment to UK training – see para 11 of the position statement. Colleges are required to inform candidates of the restrictions on their eligibility for appointment, ensure that those undertaking recruitment are aware of a doctor’s eligibility status and doctors must ensure they do not apply for posts they are not eligible for.

If you have been given an exemption by your College prior to 1 June 2015, then you have until 31 December 2016 in which to enter specialty training. If you do not do so by that date then you may not be eligible for appointment or continuing in training (see para 11 above).