

# PAAs and AAs: Assessing overseas qualifications for PAs

## Introduction

1. This document sets out our policy for assessing overseas qualifications to determine if an individual holds a relevant qualification, in order to be eligible to apply for registration as a Physician Associate (PA) in the UK.

## What is an acceptable overseas qualification?

2. An acceptable overseas qualification (AOQ) is an international qualification which has been accepted by us as a relevant qualification.
3. A relevant qualification is defined in the General Medical Council (Registration) (Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates) Rules ('the registration rules') as, 'an approved qualification or a qualification which is accepted by the Regulator for the purposes of registration as an associate'. Individuals are only eligible to apply for registration where they hold a relevant qualification<sup>1</sup>.
4. We assess whether to accept an international qualification for the purposes of registration as an associate under Article 4 (2)(c) of the Anaesthesia Associates and Physician Associates Order. Because only those holding a relevant qualification can apply for registration, the assessment of an international qualification has to be done before an application for registration can be made.
5. In line with good practice the policy will be regularly reviewed to ensure that it remains up to date, fair, proportionate, and effective.

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<sup>1</sup> Under rule 4(1) of the registration rules

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## Why do we accept overseas qualifications for registration?

6. We will assess an individual's overseas qualification on request<sup>2</sup>. If it satisfies our criteria then that individual is considered to hold a 'relevant qualification', and is eligible to apply for registration. Acceptance as a relevant qualification means that it also fulfils the education and training standards for registration.
7. A decision that an overseas qualification is acceptable does not necessarily mean the individual will be granted registration. To be granted registration, applicants must satisfy us that they meet all nine of the registration standards, and the information and procedural requirements, as outlined in the registration evidence framework.

## How will we assess overseas qualifications?

8. To determine whether an individual's overseas qualification is acceptable as a relevant qualification, it will be assessed against the approved PA AOQ criteria in place at the time of assessment. The criteria are subject to change. This means a qualification may satisfy the current criteria, but may not continue to satisfy the criteria if amended in the future.
9. Our decision on whether the qualification satisfies the criteria, and is accepted as a relevant qualification, will be made on the basis of robust, objective and independently verifiable evidence. As part of the assessment we may, where we consider it relevant to our decision, make enquiries (for example of the awarding institution, a regulator/ relevant government body), or request information from the person holding the qualification<sup>3</sup>.
10. Where the person holding the qualification does not provide information we request, we may make a decision in the absence of that information<sup>4</sup>.
11. The PA AOQ criteria has been developed to broadly reflect the core components of a UK PA qualification. This provides assurance that those with a relevant qualification meet the standards of education and training accepted to practise as an associate in the UK.
12. We use the terms 'must' and 'should' in the criteria.
  - Where 'must' is used, the qualification has to fulfil the requirement.
  - 'Should' indicates that we can use our discretion. This is primarily in relation to the amount of time we consider sufficient to satisfy us that the criterion is met. The criteria

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<sup>2</sup> Under rule 4(2), when the individual holding the qualification submits a qualification assessment form, and has paid the required fee.

<sup>3</sup> Rule 4(3)

<sup>4</sup> Rule 4(4)

provide a clear indication of what is likely to satisfy us that the qualification may be acceptable.

13. Where we do not consider that a PA qualification satisfies all the criteria, it cannot be accepted as a relevant qualification.

### PA AOQ criteria

Criteria	Rationale	'Must' or 'Should'
<p>1. Your qualification must permit you to practise as a Physician Associate, Physician Assistant, or other comparable title in the country where the qualification was awarded.</p>	<p>To ensure we maintain integrity of the profession – accepting qualifications where the education and training has been designed to prepare individuals to practise as a physician associate, or role with a comparable title.</p>	<p>Must</p>
<p>2. Your qualification must have been awarded in a country where the profession is regulated by law and must have been accepted for registration as a PA (or other comparable title) in that country,</p> <p style="text-align: center;">OR</p> <p>your qualification must have been accepted to hold registration as a PA in another country where the profession is regulated by law.</p>	<p>The qualification must fulfil one of the parts of this criterion.</p> <p>Part one gives assurance that an individual is subject to professional regulation in the country they qualified in and that their qualification has been accepted for registration in that country.</p> <p>Part two allows flexibility for individuals where their qualification is comparable to a UK qualification, but the profession is not regulated by law in the country where it was awarded. Assurance is provided if the qualification has been accepted for registration in another country where the profession is regulated and the individual has used their qualification to hold registration there.</p> <p>This criterion is disapplied for PA qualifications from the Republic of Ireland, to account for the unique political factors and long-standing</p>	<p>Must</p>

	agreements that exist between the United Kingdom and Ireland, including the Common Travel Agreement and the Belfast Agreement (the Good Friday Agreement). This criterion is also disappplied for applicants with qualifications obtained from EFTA countries and Switzerland due to the specific legislative requirements that apply.	
3. Your qualification must have been awarded from an institution which is accredited by a recognised organisation <sup>5</sup> in the country where it was awarded.	To provide assurance about the qualification and education/training framework delivered by the institution.	Must
4. Your qualification, and education and training must be based in scientific, evidence-based medicine and must include knowledge of biomedical science.	To reflect content of UK PA courses and the requirement that individuals have knowledge of biomedical science.	Must
5. Your programme of study that led to your qualification should have taken a minimum of two academic years to complete.	To reflect length of UK PA course, and to ensure that the qualification is of a duration that would allow the individual to have gained sufficient experience to practise in the profession.	Should
6. Your programme of study should have contained approximately 3,150 hours of time in education and training.	To reflect requirement of UK PA course.	Should
7. If you have studied at more than one institution and the study contributed to the award of your PA qualification, it must be clear that:	To provide assurance that an individual has not moved institutions to avoid being excluded due to concerns about their conduct or performance and to make sure they completed a full course of study.	Must

<sup>5</sup> For example a regulatory body, Ministry of Health or Education or other appropriate government body.  
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● the institution is part of a recognised twinning programme or a recognised campus of another institution, or</li> <li>● it was not possible to complete your qualification at one institution for justifiable reasons, and</li> <li>● the course credits that contributed to the award of your qualification must not have included credits transferred from another institution where you failed or were excluded (or where you left to avoid exclusion).</li> </ul>		
<p>8. Your programme of study must have involved in-person clinical experience which was overseen and approved by the institution you attended.</p> <p>As a minimum this should have comprised of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● 1,400 hours OR</li> <li>● 40% of the total course hours.</li> </ul>	<p>To reflect requirement of UK PA course. Clinical experience <b>must</b> be in-person so we can be assured of the individual’s ability to interact with patients, and <b>must</b> be approved/overseen by the awarding institution, to ensure it was appropriately supervised and delivered the intended learning outcomes.</p> <p>The hours/ % time clinical experience comprised is a ‘<b>should</b>’, because this reflects the current average length and duration of UK PA courses, but introduces flexibility where the length of an overseas course may be shorter but may still be considered acceptable in terms of content and education outcomes.</p>	<p>Must and Should</p>
<p>9. The in-person clinical experience completed as part of your programme of study must have</p>	<p>To reflect content of UK PA curriculum and the fact that qualified PAs can work in any of these areas.</p>	<p>Must</p>

<p>included experience in each of the following areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● General practice</li> <li>● Acute and emergency medicine</li> <li>● General medical specialties</li> <li>● Paediatrics</li> <li>● Surgery</li> <li>● Gynaecology</li> <li>● Mental health.</li> </ul>	<p>Knowledge of these areas is also required because these are covered in the Physician Associate Registration Assessment (PARA). Individuals without experience in these areas are unlikely to be successful in the required registration assessment.</p>	
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## What decisions can we make?

14. Our assessment is of the education and training the individual undertook, which led to the award of their PA qualification. As such, our assessment is limited to the individual's specific qualification and is not a decision on the qualification conferred by an overseas institution in all cases.
15. An assessment of an overseas qualification may result in one of the following outcomes:
  - a The individual's qualification is accepted to be a relevant qualification.
  - b The individual's qualification is not accepted as a relevant qualification.

### Qualification is accepted

16. Where we decide an individual's qualification is acceptable, they will then be eligible to apply for registration as a PA.
17. On applying for registration, the individual's qualification will be accepted as evidence that the applicant meets the standards of education and training. In limited circumstances we may change our decision about whether we will accept a qualification, as explained below.

### Qualification is not acceptable

18. If the qualification is not accepted, the individual is not eligible to apply for registration with us.

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19. Individuals cannot appeal against our decision that an overseas qualification is not acceptable. It is at our discretion to determine which overseas qualifications are acceptable for the purposes of applying for registration as a PA in the UK.

## In what circumstances might we change our decision?

20. Where a decision has been made not to accept an individual's qualification, it will remain unacceptable, unless:

- the individual is able to provide new and/or additional evidence about their qualification as part of a new request for assessment, which addresses the reasons given for our previous determination that the qualification was not acceptable (for example, showing that it now satisfies our criteria), **or**
- we make amendments to our criteria, and these changes mean that the qualification may now satisfy the criteria.

21. If an individual believes that their qualification may now satisfy the criteria, they can request a new assessment of their qualification by submitting a new qualification assessment form and paying the required fee.

22. If, in the period between us accepting an individual's qualification and them applying for registration, we have received information which calls into question the information used to determine whether the qualification satisfies the criteria and is acceptable, then the individual's qualification may no longer be considered a relevant qualification. In this case we may need to undertake a further qualification assessment to determine whether the individual remains eligible to apply for registration.

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