Quality assurance of the delivery of PA and AA training courses: guidance for course providers

Before regulation begins

We would like you to participate in our quality assurance (QA) baselining exercise which will help introduce you to our QA processes and give us a good understanding of the extent to which PA and AA course providers already meet our standards.

_Promoting Excellence_, our standards for the management and delivery of medical education and training is the document we will be using to guide this process.

After regulation begins, we will use our proactive quality assurance process to check that you are meeting these standards. You can read more about that below.

QA baselining exercise timeline

- February to May 2021: PA and AA course providers complete a self-assessment questionnaire
- May to July 2021: GMC analyses self-assessment questionnaires and selects a sample of courses for follow-up activities.
- August to December 2021: GMC undertakes follow-up activities with selected courses
- September to December 2021: GMC gives feedback to course providers not selected for follow-up activity

The self-assessment questionnaire (SAQ)

The annual self-assessment questionnaire is how we hear from organisations that we regulate about how they can assure us that they meet our standards. They describe in their responses policies, processes and activities that demonstrate this. We then use those responses as the basis for further activity.
The MAPs QA baseline SAQ will have a dual purpose. It will offer you an introduction to the requirements in our standards, the QA process and what will happen in subsequent years, while offering us an opportunity to learn more about your processes. This is why in a few cases, rather than setting out our requirements, we are asking you exploratory questions. Your responses will enable us to understand your current practice.

You can find an example SAQ on our website.

**Completing the SAQ**

**GMC Connect**

GMC Connect is our online portal for exchanging information with organisations we regulate. You will complete the SAQ in GMC Connect through a pre-designed form. It has a number of helpful features including the ability to download and print the SAQ so you can share it around your organisation, and the ability for multiple users to complete different sections at the same time.

We will provide full instructions on how to use GMC Connect and complete the SAQ in a training manual.

**Timelines and support**

You will have 14 weeks to complete the SAQ from the day it is available. The deadline is likely to be in mid-May 2021.

You can contact our team for support throughout this period and we can help with technical issues and what we expect to see in your completed SAQ.

**SAQ analysis and feedback**

Once you have submitted your completed SAQ, we will review your response, triangulate this with other data and intelligence*, and provide feedback. We may select some areas of your SAQ that we want to see more information about. We will contact you if this is the case.

**Follow-up activities**

During the QA baselining exercise, we will select a small number of course providers to undertake follow-up activities with. For these selected course providers, we will arrange a

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* This may include, but will not be limited to: data from the PA national assessment, shared intelligence from other education and/or healthcare regulators, and our own data and intelligence about management and delivery of medical education and training in your region.
meeting to discuss your submission and explore any perceived areas of notable practice or concern. We will agree follow-up activities with you, which may include a visit.

We will aim to start carrying out these meeting 10 weeks after the submission date.

We may decide to set some recommendations for you to make improvements, based on our levels of assurance in particular areas. These will usually be based on triangulated information gathered over a number of activities, rather than on a single piece of information.

**All other course providers**

We will aim to provide written feedback on your submission 10 weeks after the submission date.

We will also offer you a meeting to discuss your submission, but this will be later in the year, after we have completed the follow-up activities with the course providers we’ve selected.

**Publishing the SAQ**

As part of our business-as-usual proactive quality assurance cycle, we publish all course providers’ SAQs, including our responses.

Our intention is to publish these QA baseline SAQs too, but we will not do this until regulation begins.

**What will we use this for?**

In this initial year we will be using the SAQ to identify areas for development or notable practice and share good practice amongst providers. We may provide recommendations for improvement in certain areas or request further information from you. This first cycle will also help inform our future QA process.

**After regulation begins**

**Our proactive quality assurance process**

Once regulation begins in late 2021 or early 2022, we will roll out to PA/AA course providers the same business-as-usual proactive quality assurance cycle that we use to undergraduate and postgraduate medical education providers.

Like the pre-regulation QA baselining exercise (described above), we will ask you to complete an annual SAQ, triangulate your response with other data and intelligence, provide feedback, and follow up some areas with quality activities.
The key differences are:

- We will ask you to sign a declaration every four years that signals your commitment to working towards meeting the standards of *Promoting Excellence*.

- You can choose when you complete your SAQ, within reason. This should where possible fit with your schedule, but once you’ve chosen an annual submission date, we would like you to stick with it, as this determines the rest of your cycle and we will plan our resources around it.

- Following our analysis of your SAQ a meeting will be organised (face to face or online) to discuss your submission, explore any perceived areas of good practice or concern and agree what follow-up quality activities we will undertake within that year.

- Your SAQ and our feedback will be published on our website.

- We may set requirements and recommendations based on what we find.

- We will provide an annual summary of the quality assurance activities for your organisation. You’ll have a chance to respond to this, and we’ll publish our summary and your response on our website.

### Quality activities

A quality activity is an exercise undertaken by the GMC to seek assurance that our standards are being met or to explore innovative or notable practice. It will usually follow on from a course providers’ response in their annual SAQ and be agreed between the GMC and the course provider in the SAQ feedback meeting.

We aim to choose the least disruptive, most proportionate method for gaining the assurance we need that you are meeting the standards. However, we will include some face-to-face activities from time-to-time, to ensure that we’re keeping in touch appropriately.

Activities can include:

- Requests for further information or supporting documents
- Shadowing or observing course providers’ activities (such as meetings or training)
- Speaking directly with learners and educators
- Visits (including virtual visits)
We will sometimes include GMC education associates in our quality activities. This will either be because we want the support of experts, or because we feel the exercise would benefit from an independent viewpoint.

We may agree to undertake an activity that isn’t listed above or to undertake multiple activities in the same area. We aim to be flexible and proportionate and the goal is always to gain the assurance we need.

After every activity, we will send you a feedback form summarising the content of the activity, why the activity was undertaken, and any next steps that have been agreed.

**Requirements and recommendations**

From time-to-time we may decide to set requirements or recommendations.

Requirements are directions that you must follow, whereas recommendations are directions that we feel you should follow but will not enforce. We will discuss requirements and recommendations with you before we set them, and we’ll record and monitor them through our quality monitoring system in GMC Connect. We may ask you for updates outside of the annual SAQ.

The evidence for setting requirements and recommendations will always be triangulated so we will therefore not set a requirement or recommendation from the information provided in your SAQ alone. Examples of triangulation include requesting supporting documentation, seeking clarification from the organisation on information provided in the SAQ, observing QA activities and speaking to learners and educators directly.

**Annual summary**

Each year at the end of your annual cycle, before we issue your next self-assessment questionnaire, we will issue an annual summary.

This will summarise the quality assurance we have undertaken for your course over the past 12 months, including your self-assessment, our annual meeting, quality activities and any requirements and recommendations.

You will have the option of responding to our draft summary, and we will publish the summary and your response on our website.