



Guide to the Specialist Pathway

1 July 2016

Information for international medical graduates

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Introduction

International medical graduates (IMGs) whose medical qualifications are from a medical school outside of Australia or New Zealand and who are seeking registration to practise medicine in Australia must provide evidence of eligibility to undertake one of the following assessment pathways:

- Competent Authority Pathway
- Standard Pathway
- Specialist Pathway
- Short term training in a medical specialty pathway

The assessment process assesses the knowledge and clinical skills of IMGs seeking to qualify for general or specialist registration or assesses an applicant's suitability to practise in an area of need position or undertake short-term training in a medical specialty. The assessment pathways were an initiative of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 2006. Changes to the pathways were made, effective 1 July 2014, to streamline the process for the Specialist Pathway and the Competent Authority Pathway.

This guide provides information for IMGs applying for the Specialist Pathway.

Eligibility for the Specialist Pathway

The Specialist Pathway is for IMGs who are:

- overseas-trained specialists applying for assessment of comparability to the standard of a specialist trained in that specialty in Australia (specialist recognition)
- overseas-trained specialists applying for an area of need specialist level position in Australia (area of need). This assessment does not lead to specialist recognition.

IMGs who have a primary qualification in medicine and surgery from a training institution recognised by both the [Australian Medical Council](#) and the [World Directory of Medical Schools](#) and have satisfied all the training and examination requirements to practise in their field of specialty in their country of training, can apply for assessment under the Specialist Pathway (specialist recognition or area of need).

The list of specialties that has been approved by the Ministerial Council is available on the Medical Board of Australia's (the Board) website at [Specialties and Specialty Fields](#).

IMGs should note that overseas trained specialists may experience difficulties meeting the standards required for specialist practice in Australia, or may require significant periods of up skilling to meet the standards. Positions are limited in number and are subject to open competition with Australian applicants.

The role of the Australian Medical Council

The Australian Medical Council (AMC) process requests from IMGs for primary source verification (PSV) of their medical qualifications.

The AMC has no role in assessing IMGs in the Specialist Pathway. The AMC has no role in processing applications for medical registration or in granting registration, which is a function of the Medical Board of Australia.

Primary source verification

Before applying for the Specialist Pathway, IMGs must apply to have their medical qualifications verified through the [Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates \(ECFMG\) Electronic Portfolio of International Credentials \(EPIC\)](#) and establish an [AMC portfolio](#) to enable the AMC to receive the results of an IMG's PSV directly from EPIC.

PSV is mandatory under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law) for all IMGs seeking medical registration in Australia.

Information on the PSV process is available on the [AMC website](#).

ECFMG will notify the IMG by email as their qualification(s) are verified.

The portal

The AMC has a secure portal which is a repository for certified copies of an applicant's qualifications, their PSV documents and the outcome of their specialist medical college assessment. Only authorised users at the AMC, the college, AHPRA and the Board can access documents on the portal. The AMC manages the portal and grants access to authorised users. Applicants cannot access the portal.

The role of the specialist medical colleges

The specialist medical colleges accredited by the AMC assess IMGs on behalf of the Board.

The college receives an application for the Specialist Pathway directly from the IMG. The college assesses the IMG for specialist recognition and/or for an area of need position. The college assesses the training and experience of the applicant for comparability with the training and experience of Australian trained specialists, and the skills standard required to practise in that specialty in Australia.

The college informs the IMG and the Board of the outcome of the assessment. The college has no role in granting medical registration.

A list of the specialist medical colleges is available on the [Board website](#).

The role of the Medical Board of Australia

The Board receives applications for medical registration. The Board receives the outcome of the college's assessment of the IMG and decides whether to grant registration to the IMG. The Board may place conditions on registration.

How to apply for the Specialist Pathway

IMGs wishing to apply for the Specialist Pathway submit an application directly to the relevant specialist medical college. IMGs can apply for specialist recognition or area of need or both. Application forms are specific to the specialty and are available on each college website. IMGs who are applying for an area of need assessment must have secured an offer of employment in a designated area of need before applying to the college.

If an application to the college is incomplete, the applicant will be notified by the relevant college. An additional fee may be charged for incomplete applications.

Specialist Pathway - specialist recognition

The Specialist Pathway - specialist recognition is for IMGs who wish to gain specialist registration in Australia.

The IMG applies directly to the relevant specialist medical college. The college assesses the IMG's comparability against the criteria for an Australian-trained specialist in the same field of specialty practice.

The college undertakes a paper based review of the IMG's application. The college may interview the IMG. If an interview is required, the college will advise the IMG and a time will be scheduled.

The college undertakes an assessment to determine if the IMG's qualifications, training and experience are:

- not comparable, or
- partially comparable, or
- substantially comparable.

Comparability definitions

Substantially Comparable

Substantially comparable applicants have been assessed as suitable to undertake the intended scope of practice, taking full responsibility for individual patients with only oversight of their practice by a supervisor. In order to be considered substantially comparable an applicant must have satisfied the College requirements in relation to previous training, assessment, recent specialist practice and continuing professional development (CPD). The applicant may be required to undertake a period of up to 12 months full time equivalent of practice under peer review by a reviewer approved by the College, which may involve the satisfactory completion of a workplace-based assessment (WBA). This is 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 CPD. The length of peer review and nature of assessment is up to the individual College to determine on a case-by-case basis, but the peer review period must not exceed 12 months. Following satisfactory completion of this process, the applicant will be eligible for Fellowship of the relevant specialist College without formal examination, and may apply for registration as a specialist.

Substantially comparable applicants will not be eligible to apply for specialist registration during the period of peer review.

Partially Comparable

Partially comparable applicants have been assessed as suitable 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 in relation to previous training, assessment, recent specialist practice and continuing professional development (CPD) that will enable them to reach the standard of an Australian trained specialist within a maximum period of 24 months full time equivalent of practice. During this period, the applicant will undertake upskilling with associated assessment under a supervisor(s) approved by the College and may be required to undertake formal examination(s). This is to ensure that the level of performance reaches that of an Australian trained specialist. This period of supervised practice will assist the applicant with the transition to the Australian health system, will provide them with professional support and assist with access to CPD. The length of supervised practice and nature of assessment is up to the individual College to determine on a case-by-case basis, but the supervised practice period must not exceed 24 months full time equivalent of practice. Following satisfactory completion of this process, the applicant will be eligible for Fellowship of the relevant specialist College and may apply for registration as a specialist.

Partially comparable applicants will not be eligible to apply for specialist registration during the period of supervised practice.

Not comparable

Applicants who do not meet the requirements of the relevant specialist College in regard to previous training, assessment, recent specialist practice and continuing professional development (CPD) or who are assessed as unable to reach comparability within 24 months full time equivalent of practice will be assessed as not comparable. They may be eligible to seek registration to practise via another pathway that will enable them to gain general registration, and subsequently seek formal College training and assessment.

Outcome of assessment

The outcome of the college assessment is formally documented in 'Report 1'. Following the assessment, the college formally advises the IMG of the outcome of assessment by sending them a copy of the report. A copy of this report is also loaded on the secure portal for access by AHPRA and the Board.

The college will advise the IMG of any college requirements.

If an IMG is assessed as substantially comparable, the IMG may be required to undertake a period of peer review (oversight), which may involve the completion of workplace based assessment(s).

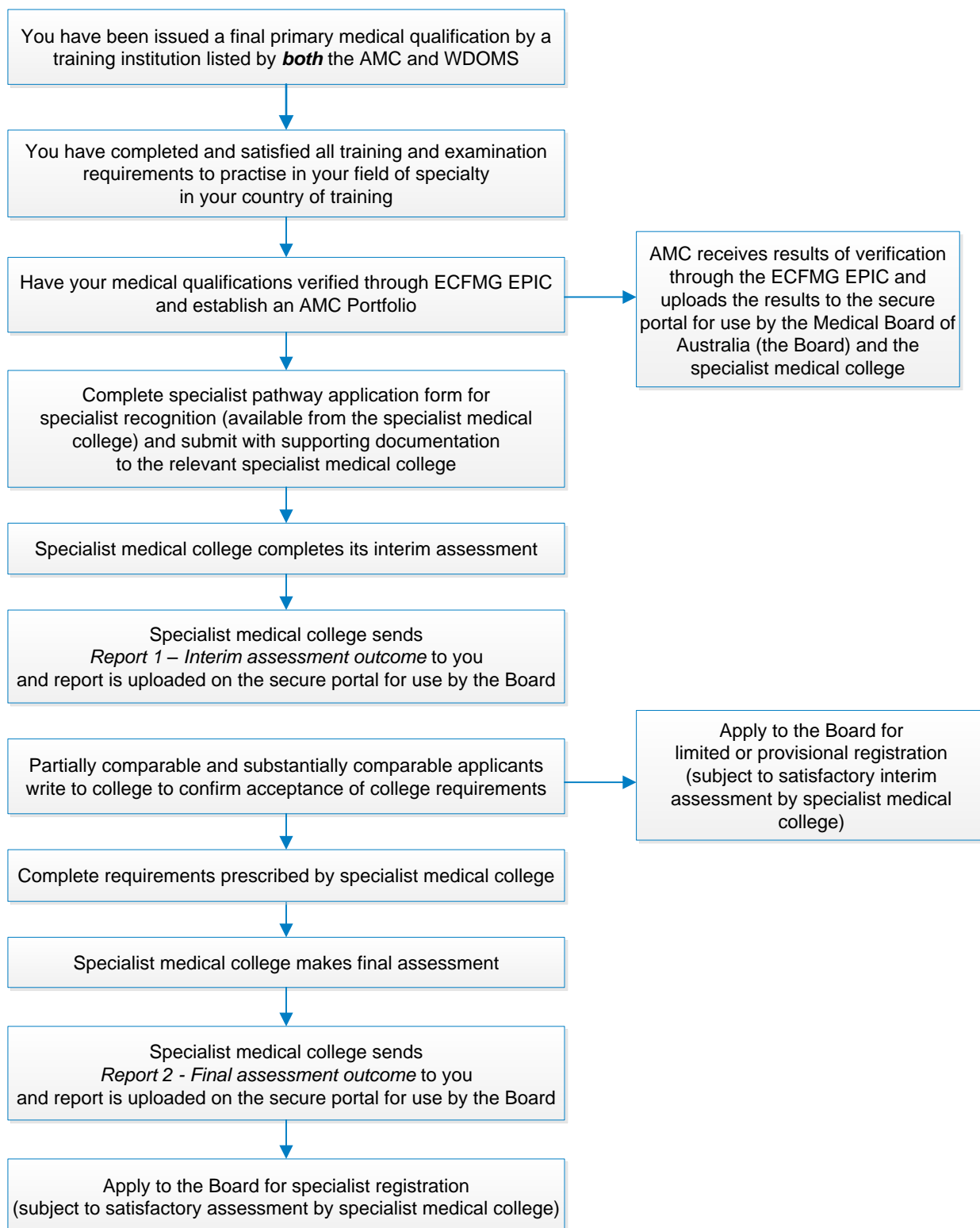
If an IMG is assessed as partially comparable they may be required to undertake a period of supervised practice and further training, which may involve college assessment, including examinations.

The IMG can apply to the Board for *Limited registration for postgraduate training or supervised practice* or *Provisional registration* to work while they complete the college requirements. (An IMG who qualifies for provisional/general registration, via the Competent Authority Pathway, is not eligible to apply for limited registration under the National Law. They must apply for provisional registration.)

After the IMG has completed all the college requirements, the college documents their final decision on comparability in 'Report 2' which is sent to the IMG and loaded on the secure portal. The college determines if the IMG has satisfactorily completed all the requirements. The college decides whether to recommend to the Board that the IMG be granted recognition as a specialist. The decision to grant registration is a Board decision.

A flowchart of the Specialist Pathway – specialist recognition process is provided to assist applicants.

Figure 1 – Specialist Pathway - specialist recognition process



Specialist Pathway - area of need

The Specialist Pathway - area of need is for IMGs who wish to work in Australia in a designated area of need. Area of need is determined by the relevant state or territory health authority (the AMC, the college and the Board have no role in determining which areas are declared area of need).

The IMG applies directly to the specialist medical college. The college assesses the IMG's qualifications and relevant experience against the specified requirements of a position in a confirmed area of need.

This pathway does not lead to specialist registration. IMGs on the Specialist Pathway - area of need may also apply for the Specialist Pathway - specialist recognition if they wish to gain specialist registration with the Board. The IMG can complete the requirements for specialist recognition while working in an area of need position.

The college determines if the IMG is suitable for the position in the area of need. The assessment is specific to the position description and cannot be used for other positions, a new assessment would be required.

Outcome of assessment

The outcome of the college assessment is formally documented in the 'Area of need assessment report'. Following the assessment, the college formally advises the IMG of the outcome of assessment by sending them a copy of the report. A copy of this report is also loaded on the secure portal for access by AHPRA and the Board.

The college will advise the IMG and the Board of the IMG's suitability for the position and any recommendations including proposed restrictions on scope of practice. The IMG can apply to the Board for *Limited registration for area of need*. (An IMG who qualifies for provisional/general registration, via the Competent Authority Pathway, is not eligible to apply for limited registration under the National Law.) The decision to grant registration is a Board decision.

The role of the employer in area of need applications

The employer identifies a position that needs to be filled and contacts the relevant specialist medical college for assistance in preparing a detailed position description and key selection criteria. It is in relation to this position description that the college will assess the suitability of an applicant under the Specialist Pathway - area of need.

The position description should include the following information:

- the position title
- a comprehensive statement of duties
- qualifications and experience—identifying and distinguishing between what selection criteria are regarded as 'essential' or 'desirable'; and clarifying whether candidates must show either that they have practical experience or that they have aptitude in a particular aspect of clinical practice
- special requirements of the position, which may be due to the geographic location or specific nature of the medical services to be provided
- clinical practice privileges or appointments relating to the position
- any special conditions of employment
- the remuneration package for the position, including whether the applicant will be providing services that need to attract Medicare rebates.

The employer then contacts the state or territory health authority to have the position declared an area of need position. The employer is expected to demonstrate that advertising has failed to attract a suitably qualified local applicant and that, unless the position is filled, service delivery will be affected adversely. The employer must provide evidence of reasonable efforts to recruit locally.

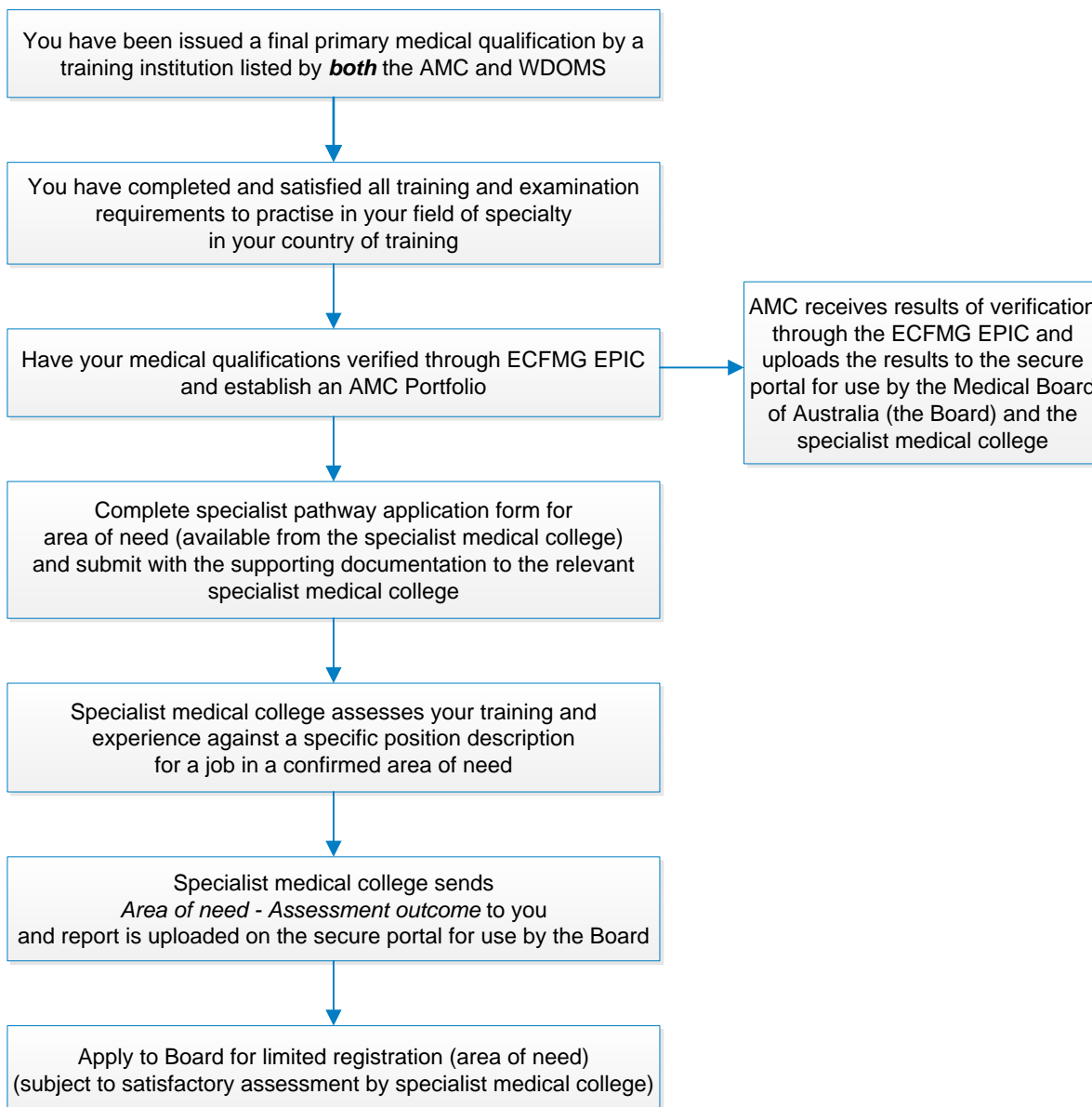
If a position is approved as an area of need position, the employer matches applicants for area of need positions against the position description and selection criteria, and selects a suitable applicant.

The applicant and the employer complete the relevant documentation, including the visa application, where necessary.

If access to Medicare is required, the employer will need to contact the Australian Government Department of Health to confirm that the position identified as an area of need position is also in a district of workforce shortage. The employer should also ensure that the applicant for the area of need position will be eligible to apply to the Board for Limited registration area of need.

A flowchart of the Specialist Pathway – area of need process is provided to assist applicants.

Figure 2 – Specialist Pathway – area of need process



Combined assessment

IMGs on the Specialist Pathway - area of need who wish to gain specialist registration with the Board will need to also apply for the Specialist Pathway – specialist recognition. The IMG can complete the requirements for specialist recognition while working in an area of need position.

Outcome of combined assessment

For an IMG who has applied to the college for a combined assessment for Specialist Pathway – area of need **and** Specialist Pathway – specialist recognition, the outcome of the assessment will be documented in a 'Combined report – area of need and specialist recognition'. A copy of the report will be sent to the IMG and loaded on the secure portal. The report includes the college's recommendations for the IMG's suitability for the area of need position and any requirements for specialist recognition.

The IMG can apply to the Board for *Limited registration for area of need* to work in the position in the area of need and complete the college requirements for specialist recognition. (An IMG who qualifies for provisional/general registration, via the Competent Authority Pathway, is not eligible to apply for limited registration under the National Law.) The decision to grant registration is a Board decision.

After the IMG has completed all the college requirements, the college documents their final decision on comparability in 'Report 2' which is sent to the IMG and loaded on the secure portal. The college determines if the IMG has satisfactorily completed all the requirements. The college decides whether to recommend to the Board that the IMG be granted recognition as a specialist. The decision to grant registration is a Board decision.

Appeals process

Each college has an established appeals process for the Specialist Pathway. Information on college appeal processes is available from the relevant college.

Medical registration

The outcome of a specialist medical college's assessment of the IMG's application for the Specialist Pathway will determine the type of registration an IMG may apply for with the Board. The Board makes the final decision on whether to grant registration.

An IMG who qualifies for provisional/general registration, via the Competent Authority Pathway, is not eligible to apply for limited registration under the National Law. They must apply for provisional registration.

Registration types for IMGs on the Specialist Pathway:

| Pathway | Assessment outcome | Registration type |
|--|---|--|
| Specialist Pathway – specialist recognition | IMGs who have been assessed by the college as substantially comparable or partially comparable and are working towards specialist recognition | <i>Limited registration for postgraduate training or supervised practice</i> or <i>Provisional registration (for IMGs qualified for the Competent Authority Pathway)</i> |
| Specialist Pathway – area of need | IMGs who have been assessed by the college as suitable for an area of need position | <i>Limited registration for area of need (IMGs who are qualified for the Competent Authority Pathway are not eligible to apply for Limited registration for area of need)</i> |
| Specialist Pathway – specialist recognition and area of need | IMGs who have been assessed by the college for specialist recognition and an area of need position | <i>Limited registration for area of need (IMGs who are qualified for the Competent Authority Pathway are not eligible to apply for Limited registration for area of need)</i> |
| Specialist Pathway - specialist recognition | IMGs who have been admitted as Fellows of an AMC accredited specialist medical college, or who have been advised by the college that they are eligible for fellowship | <i>Specialist registration</i> |

All IMGs are required to comply with the Board's [mandatory registration standards](#):

- Continuing professional development registration standard
- Criminal history registration standard
- English language skills registration standard
- Professional indemnity insurance registration standard
- Recency of practice registration standard.

Limited registration

Limited registration is granted to IMGs who do not qualify for general or specialist registration.

The [registration standards](#) for the two types of limited registration applicable under the Specialist Pathway set out the requirements that an applicant for registration must meet in order to be granted limited registration to practise as a medical practitioner.

IMGs on limited registration must work under supervision. Refer to the Board's [Guidelines for supervised practice](#) for further information about supervision arrangements.

An IMG who has limited registration cannot use the title 'specialist' regardless of whether they are working in specialist practice.

Provisional registration

An IMG who qualifies for provisional/general registration, via the Competent Authority Pathway, is not eligible to apply for limited registration under the National Law. They must apply for provisional registration.

IMGs on provisional registration must work under supervision. Refer to the Board's [Guidelines for supervised practice](#) for further information about supervision arrangements.

An IMG who has provisional registration cannot use the title 'specialist' regardless of whether they are working in specialist practice.

Specialist registration

An IMG can only apply for specialist registration after they have been admitted as a Fellow of an AMC accredited specialist medical college, or after they have been advised by the college that they have passed all the requirements for the approved qualification and are eligible for registration as a specialist.

The list of specialties that has been approved by the Ministerial Council is available on the Board website at [Specialties and Specialty Fields](#).

Fees

The colleges each set their own fees for the Specialist Pathway assessment. More information about fees is available on the college websites.

The AMC charges applicants a fee for PSV. Information on AMC fees is available on the [AMC website](#).

After an IMG has been assessed by the college they may apply to the Board for registration. An application fee and a registration fee is payable. More information about registration fees is available on the [Board website](#).

Further information

More information for IMGs, including registration forms is available on the [Board website](#).