



Australian Pharmacy Council - Response

Department of Education – Department of Immigration and Border Protection

Discussion Paper: Streamlining recognition in skilled migration and employment

1. What has been your experience with Australia's skilled migration programme?

The Australian Pharmacy Council (APC) is an independent not-for-profit company limited by guarantee that is the national assessing and accrediting agency for pharmacy. It has been undertaking the assessment of overseas trained pharmacists and graduates of Australian/New Zealand programs for over 30 years.

The APC operates in a co-regulatory environment where it fulfils the accreditation/assessment functions and the Pharmacy Board of Australia (PBA)/Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) registers and regulates the profession. Graduates of Australian/New Zealand accredited university programs must complete a year-long internship and several summative assessments prior to gaining general registration with the PBA.

a. What are your organisation's main roles and responsibilities and how have these changed over time?

The APC's main responsibilities include:

- a) Accrediting pharmacy schools and programs; intern training programs; and accrediting agencies to accredit continuing professional development activities
- b) Conducting written examinations on behalf of the Pharmacy Board of Australia that must be passed prior to sitting the final oral competency assessment (from 1 July 2010).
- c) Assessing the qualifications and skills of overseas trained pharmacists and international students graduating from an accredited Australian / New Zealand pharmacy program to determine their eligibility to apply to commence the registration process.

In 2014, the APC was endorsed by the pharmacy profession as the independent assessment entity responsible and accountable for the credentialing of advanced pharmacist practitioners. The APC is currently consulting on the processes to be put in place for this, and will start assessments in early 2015.

b. How is skilled migration benefiting the occupation(s) you have a role in?

Hospital/Retail pharmacy (ANZSCO codes: 251511/251513) is currently off the Skilled Occupations List (SOL). Anecdotal evidence indicates that the APC's English requirements have more influence on applications for skills assessments than does the profession's status on the SOL.

c. What trends are you seeing in skills assessments?

Over the past eight years, there has been a general reduction in applications for skills assessments of approximately 30%. The reasons for this reduction are multi-factorial and include changes in English requirements and availability of certain bridging visas for international graduates of Australian/New Zealand programs.



d. What are the main policy issues for recognition preventing skilled migration in your occupation(s) where there is scope for improvement in the short- to medium-term?

The APC does not comment on Government policy.

2. What are your skills assessment criteria based on? How do you review your criteria and assessment methodology? Who do you consult with?

APC assessment criteria are based on establishing the comparability of overseas qualifications and registration processes with the Australian qualifications and registration processes.

The APC has two different streams depending on the country in which the original pharmacy qualification is received – Stream A (<http://pharmacycouncil.org.au/content/index.php?id=10>) and Stream B (<http://pharmacycouncil.org.au/content/index.php?id=11>). In both cases, the applicant's qualification must be, at a minimum, comparable to an accredited and approved Australian qualification.

Stream A applicants must either be registered in their country of training or eligible/eligible to commence registration in their country of training. Stream B applicants must be currently registered in their country.

The APC has undertaken significant research into the equivalence of qualification, practice environment, legislation and registration requirements in the USA, the UK, Canada and Ireland. This research has confirmed that registered pharmacists from these countries are substantially equivalent to their Australian counterparts. All four Stream B countries have substantially equivalent qualifications and all four have year-long internships leading to general registration.

Stream A applicants must pass the Knowledge Assessment of Pharmaceutical Sciences (KAPS) examination. Prior to sitting the KAPS, candidates must provide valid English results (IELTS minimum overall 7.5 at the academic level with a minimum of 7 in all four categories or OET academic A or B in all categories). The KAPS examination is offered twice annually in all capital cities in Australia and in approximately 25 international sites in Europe, Asia, Africa and South America. This examination is designed to confirm that the applicant has the equivalent level of knowledge in core pharmacy-related sciences as an Australian graduate.

Stream B applicants must pass the Competency Assessment of Overseas Pharmacists (CAOP) examination. The CAOP examination is offered four times annually in London, Auckland and all Australian capitals.

Upon successful completion of these examinations, applicants are issued with a skills assessment letter for the purposes of commencing the registration process with AHPRA and/or visa/migration purposes. Stream A applicants are then required to meet the same requirements for general registration as graduates of Australian/New Zealand programs. Stream B applicants have a slightly abbreviated process leading to general registration.

The APC assessment processes are overseen by the APC Examining Committee which is made up of a range of pharmacists from community, hospital and academic backgrounds and two community representatives. There are set of assessment guidelines and evidentiary indicators that are applied to each assessment and reviewed and updated regularly.



3. What interaction do you have with Australian education providers?

The APC is the accrediting authority for pharmacy in Australia and New Zealand. The APC Accreditation unit assesses degree and intern training programs leading to registration for pharmacists. The APC regularly holds fora and workshops with both University and pharmacy professional body education providers to consult on accreditation standards, evidence guides and facilitate understanding of the pharmacy education and profession needs.

The APC Accreditation teams undertake full Site Evaluation Team visits on a five yearly cycle for degree programs, and have an audit program for Intern Training Providers.

<http://pharmacycouncil.org.au/content/index.php?id=7>

While APC undertakes the accreditation of programs, the Pharmacy Board of Australia (PBA) is responsible for approving the program for the purposes of gaining registration in Australia. The Pharmacy Council of New Zealand (PCNZ) is responsible for approving programs for the purposes of gaining registration in New Zealand.

<http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Education/Accreditation-Authorities.aspx>

http://www.pharmacycouncil.org.nz/cms_display.php

a. What benefit does the accreditation of courses have on your skills assessments?

International graduates who hold a qualification from an APC accredited and PBA/PCNZ approved program can apply to the APC for an assessment of qualifications. They are not required to complete the additional examination steps prior to provisional registration as intern pharmacists with the PBA or PCNZ.

The APC will verify the application and qualification and issue a skills assessment letter.

b. Are there any issues with course accreditation relating to skills assessments or employment, and are they being effectively managed?

The APC does not comment on employment issues.

4. What has been your experience with skills assessments of Australian graduates?

Assessment of international graduates of Australian/New Zealand programs are relatively straightforward. These applicants are able to apply directly to the PBA/AHPRA upon graduation from their programs and only require a skills assessment letter for visa/migration purposes.

a. Can you describe the circumstances where an Australian qualification would not meet the criteria for a positive skills assessment?

Applicants graduating from a program that was not accredited by the APC and approved by the PBA would not be eligible for a skills assessment. This has not yet happened and would be very unusual.



5. In relation to employment:

- a. What are the main issues preventing workforce participation in your occupation(s)?**
- b. For an occupation(s) that has another body controlling access to employment, what are the advantages and disadvantages of this separate structural arrangement?**

The APC does not comment on employment/workforce issues.

6. What would be the consequences if meeting the criteria for registration/licensing/membership for employment in an occupation is deemed as meeting the criteria for a positive skills assessment in that occupation?

The requirements for gaining general registration as pharmacist in Australia are complex and require, among other things, a year-long period of supervised practice in an Australian pharmacy environment, participation in an intern training program and the successful completion of two summative assessments.

Requiring overseas trained pharmacists to undertake the intern year without establishing first the level of training in their country of origin could result in a significant barrier to their ability to register in Australia.

8. How can the Department of Education better support your role in skilled migration?

Regular meetings with the Department of Education would assist the APC in keeping the Department abreast of its work.