

HCPC policy on use of tests of competence when assessing international registration applications

Introduction

The Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) is the regulator of 15 professions that provide health and care services. It is our job to protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public; promote and maintain public confidence in the professions we regulate; and promote and maintain proper professional standards and conduct for members of those professions.

We do this by:

- maintaining a register of properly qualified members of the professions;
- approving and upholding high standards for the education and training of the professions, and their continued good practice;
- setting the standards that professionals have to meet throughout their careers; and
- investigating concerns that registered professionals may not meet those standards, and taking action where necessary to protect the public.

This policy explains our approach to using tests of competence when we are considering applications for international registration.

Registration

There are six stages in the HCPC's international registration process:

- Reviewing the application
- Plagiarism checks
- Assessing education, training and experience
- Requests for further information
- Outcome of assessment
- Verifying information

Tests of competence

During the assessing education, training and experience stage, our registration assessors may decide to invite an applicant to undertake a test of competence.

Such an invitation will only be made when the registration assessors consider that a test of competence will help materially with their assessment of whether an applicant meets the standards of proficiency.

The decision on whether to invite an applicant to undertake a test of competence is at the discretion of our registration assessors. There may be situations where a test of competence is simply not appropriate because the gap between the information provided in support of the application and the provisional view taken by the registration assessors as to whether the standards have been met is too great.

Approach to tests of competence

The registration assessors conduct the test of competence through Structured Professional Discussion (SPD). This means each test will focus on the practice requirements for the profession and the context in which issues are placed. This will vary depending on the evidence submitted in support of the application, meaning each test of competence is bespoke to the individual applicant.

The test of competence is a dialogue-based assessment. It allows applicants to demonstrate their professional competence, clinical reasoning, and understanding of UK-specific practice contexts.

The test of competence has a number of important features.

Assesses real-world proficiency

It allows our assessors to explore how applicants would respond to real-life clinical and ethical scenarios. This helps determine whether the applicant can:

- apply their knowledge in practice;
- make safe, evidence-based decisions; and
- communicate effectively with service users and colleagues.

Bridges international differences

Health and care systems vary significantly across countries. By using the SPD approach, our assessors can assess:

- how well applicants understand UK-specific legal, ethical, and professional frameworks; and
- their ability to adapt to UK clinical environments and cultural expectations.

Provides a fair and flexible assessment

Unlike written and clinical examinations, our test of competence:

- allows for interactive clarification of complex or unclear evidence;
- gives applicants the opportunity to explain their reasoning and reflect on their practice; and

- is adaptable to different professional backgrounds and experiences.

Supports transparent and evidence-based decisions

Our tests of competence are structured and documented, ensuring:

- consistency across assessments and professions; and
- clear rationale for decisions regarding registration decisions.

A clear, documented process which can be reviewed through quality monitoring and relied upon in case of appeals.

Provides further assurance regarding the documentary evidence submitted by the applicant

While applicants submit qualifications, further education and training, work histories demonstrating their professional experience, and third-party references to support these difference evidence sources, these documents may not always fully demonstrate in relation to our standards:

- how applicants think and act in practice;
- their readiness to work within UK settings; and
- their ability to meet regulatory standards required for safe, effective practice.

Status of test of competence

The HCPC's test of competence provides a contextualised assessment of an applicant's practical and theoretical abilities, ensuring that they meet current standards of proficiency. Unlike documentary evidence, it verifies real performance rather than untested qualifications or varied international training documentation.

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Related documents

- [HCPTS Practice Note on Registration Appeals](#)
- [HCPC website guidance on assessing your education, training and experience](#)