

JOINT STATEMENT

College changes align assessments with Board standard

23 April 2025

The Medical Board of Australia has thanked the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) for its transparency and accountability after RACS identified that, between January 2021 and July 2024, it had assessed specialist international medical graduates (SIMGs) against standards that varied from the Board's requirements.

RACS identified the variation in June 2024 and has since implemented process and policy changes to align SIMG assessments with the Board's standard.

The Australian Medical Council has also imposed a condition on RACS' accreditation, requiring the development and implementation of quality assurance processes to ensure ongoing, compliance with the standards of both the *Medical Board of Australia* and the *Medical Council of New Zealand*.

The Medical Board's specialist assessment standards require specialist medical colleges to assess international specialists at the level of a new Fellow in Australia and to consider their proposed scope of practice. However, between January 2021 - when the standard took effect - and June 2024, RACS assessed international specialists at the level of a surgeon with five years of specialist practice and did not routinely consider their scope.

RACS has since offered new assessments on a 'no disadvantage' basis, taking into account all relevant information from the original application, intended scope of practice, recent specialist experience, any performance assessments and any continuing professional development completed by the SIMG.

New assessments have been offered to 215 SIMGs who may have been affected since 1 January 2021.

RACS remains committed to working collaboratively with Ahpra, the Medical Board of Australia, and other stakeholders to develop solutions that address workforce shortages while maintaining the high standards of surgical practice and training in Australia.

"We need to ensure that SIMGs entering Australia are properly trained, supported, and retained in the areas where they are most needed. This is about ensuring every Australian, no matter where they live, has access to safe, high-quality surgical care," said RACS president Associate Professor Kerin Fielding.

Medical Board of Australia Chair, Dr Susan O'Dwyer, said patient safety and medical workforce supply were both essential, and transparency was key.

"Patients need to feel safe seeing any medical specialist in Australia and be able to get an appointment when they need one. The Board is working really hard to make this happen," Dr O'Dwyer said.

"We appreciate the work RACS has done to identify and address this issue and recognise the impact it may have had on international surgeons," she said.

The Board has accepted RACS' assurance that it had prioritised the wellbeing of individual applicants who may have been affected by these decisions and offered them appropriate support.

SIMGs seeking more information should contact RACS at SIMG.newassessment@surgeons.org.

Background

There are three pathways available to SIMGs for specialist registration:

1. the Comparability Specialist pathway (available since before 2010)
2. the Expedited Specialist pathway (established in 2024)
3. through the completion of the approved qualification (the college training program)

Comparability Specialist pathway

Under the Comparability Specialist pathway – the route to specialist practice in Australia for most SIMGs - the specialist colleges have been appointed to assess individual specialists and advise the Board if individuals are substantially comparable, partially comparable, or not comparable to an Australian qualified specialist.

In place nationally since before 2010, this process requires SIMGs to apply to the relevant specialist medical college for assessment of comparability. Once a SIMG meets the specialist medical college requirements, the Board grants the SIMG specialist registration. Consultation on options to streamline this pathway will begin in the months ahead.

Ahpra has been working with RACS – and all specialist colleges – since 2016, to improve transparency, with public reporting on the timelines and outcomes of college SIMG assessments.

Expedited Specialist pathway

In 2024, the Board opened a new [Expedited Specialist pathway](#) for a small number of eligible, highly qualified SIMGs with experience in similar health systems, to apply directly to the Board, bypassing the College assessment process. The gateway to the Expedited Specialist pathway is a list of accepted specialist qualifications that have been through a robust assessment process by the AMC. This pathway is not yet open to internationally qualified surgeons.