



UEMS-CESMA GUIDELINE FOR THE QUALITY CONTROL ON BEHALF OF UEMS-CESMA OF EUROPEAN POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL ASSESSMENTS

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BACKGROUND

The free movement of healthcare professionals and patients within the European Union (EU) is a fundamental principle stated in EU treaties and promoted by the most recent EU directives. This principle clearly also affects all countries associated with the EU: candidate states, members of the broader European Economic Area (EEA), and countries with special treaties with the EU. Based also on EU treaties, there is mutual recognition of the qualifications of medical specialists or other healthcare professionals. However, there are three important problems:

- Not all countries have established mechanisms for assessing the qualifications of medical professionals upon completion of their training prior to accrediting them as specialists.
- Some countries evaluate the progress of a trainee while in training but do not have an overall exit assessment prior to their accreditation as specialists.
- The existing national assessment processes are reflecting the national training framework and they do not guarantee in any way that a specialist has the necessary qualifications to practise at pan-European level.



The assessments organised for many years by the European Medical Specialists Boards are aimed to:

- Complement existing national processes;
- Offer an assessment to countries that do not have established assessment processes;
- Offer an assessment to all European countries as a quality control process at a pan-European level;
- Ensure quality control of the highest standards for medical professionals practising in Europe.



QUALITY CONTROL OF ASSESSMENTS

Although the assessments of the European Boards are well established and well respected for many years, it is of paramount importance to have an established robust quality control mechanism to ensure that they are fit for purpose. This is becoming even more important if the *European Union of Medical Specialists (UEMS)* is to offer formally to the European Union (EU) the assessments organised by the European Boards as the solution to the recent EU directive that focuses on ensuring high standards of medical professional qualifications and practice across Europe. In addition, many non-European countries wish to use the assessments for specialist accreditation (without this representing a licence to practise in the EU); a robust quality control mechanism will make the European assessments more popular and trustworthy internationally.



UEMS-CESMA AS A QUALITY CONTROL ORGANISATION

The *Council for European Specialist Medical Assessments* (UEMS-CESMA) is the ideal organisation for establishing and operating the quality control mechanisms for the assessments of the European Boards. This is for the following reasons:

- UEMS-CESMA operates within the *European Union of Medical Specialists* (UEMS), which ensures that all processes are streamlined with UEMS bylaws, guidelines and overall strategy.
- The fact that UEMS-CESMA consists of all European Medical Examination Boards guarantees a true wealth of experience in assessments at a pan-European level, which is by definition the first important element for proper quality control.
- The diversity of the Boards operating under UEMS-CESMA offers a plethora of top class professionals from many different specialties that can objectively assess the assessment of other specialties.
- Although for simplicity purposes the terms of reference refer only to medical specialist, they could be applied to all healthcare professionals and their relevant Boards operating under the auspices of the UEMS.



PROCESS FOR QUALITY CONTROL (EVALUATION) OF ASSESSMENTS

Principles

The evaluation:

- Will be voluntary: the aim is to encourage the Boards to embrace the process and not to impose the process;
- Has to be professional and objective;
- Has to offer a balance of reviewers appointed by the *Council for European Specialist Medical Assessments* (UEMS-CESMA) (internal reviewers) as well as from other organisations relevant to the specific assessment (external reviewers);
- Has to be cost neutral: UEMS-CESMA will not make a financial profit from the process;
- Has to be repeated regularly;
- Will be objective, detailed and robust offering specific scoring and overall comments about the strengths of the assessment and areas in which it can be improved: it will not offer an overall pass/fail mark;
- Terms of reference will be on the UEMS-CESMA website.

First step: Invitation

The relevant Board sends an invitation for the evaluation of the assessment to UEMS-



CESMA. At that stage:

- Two internal reviewers will be appointed by UEMS-CESMA and two external reviewers will be appointed after invitation from the relevant assessment organisation or society or board. An effort will be made to offer the opportunity to appoint external reviewers from the organisations responsible at a national level for assessments of medical specialists. This is in order to promote closer collaboration between the European Boards and their national counterparts.
- An agreement will be made between the inviting Board and UEMS-CESMA regarding reimbursement of the expenses of the reviewers which are directly linked with the evaluation process. An effort should be made so that the reviewers are appointed from the country (or countries close to it) where the exam will take place to minimise travelling and accommodation costs. Cost should be kept to a bare minimum. Social events designed to entertain the reviewers are not allowed. In addition, a fee of €400 for covering administrative costs related to the evaluation process should be paid to UEMS-CESMA.

Second step: Initial summary by the Board seeking evaluation

The Board seeking evaluation will initially provide a written summary to the panel of reviewers including:

- Details regarding the initial establishment, the development and the current status of the assessment. In addition, information regarding partner organisations that participate in the assessment and ways by which the assessment is promoted.
- A clear description of the assessment that has to cover:
 - a) the process of assessing eligibility of the applicants;
 - b) the structure and content of the assessment;



- c) the marking of the performance of the applicants;
- d) the communication of the results to the applicants.
- Rate of pass/failure since the establishment of the assessment
- Any established mechanisms for internal or external quality control during the examination process.
- Processes for getting feedback from the applicants/candidates and evidence that this has been applied constructively in order to improve the assessment.
- Pass rates since the establishment of the assessment.
- Evidence of recognition of the assessment process at a national, European or international level.

The summary should be submitted to the panel of reviewers at least 6 months before the actual assessment that will be reviewed on site. The reviewers need to evaluate the summary and request clarification or more information within 4 weeks of the submission of the summary. The Board in turn must respond within 4 weeks following the request from the reviewers, who will then have two more weeks to declare to the Board under evaluation and to the Executive of the UEMS-CESMA their acceptance or rejection. In the case of rejection, a new summary may be required, but this must be justified in a formal response giving the reasons for the rejection. If the decision is “approval”, the process will proceed to the third step (below). If it is “request for a new summary”, then a new application has to be submitted based on the recommendations of the reviewers.

Third step: On-site visit at the assessment by the panel of reviewers

The panel of reviewers will attend the next scheduled assessment to undertake the on-site evaluation of the process. Prior to the visit the Board should provide to the reviewers the following information:



- Number of applicants, names/short description of their qualifications and country of origin.
- Names of the examiners, short description of their professional status with special emphasis as to the criteria used for their selection.
- Full details of the assessment venue, programme for examiners, schedule for candidates, any travel/accommodation recommendations and key local contact person.

The reviewers will attend the whole assessment process (initial set-up and/or briefing, actual assessment, marking, completion). During the assessment process the reviewers will be attending different assessment stations. There should be no more than one reviewer per station during any one assessment session. The reviewer will not participate in the assessment or marking process.

The reviewers will score (independently and without communicating with each other) the assessment for the following domains (score 1-10, where ten is the best):

- Administrative/organisational preparation and support;
- Quality/status of candidates;
- Quality/status of examiners;
- Assessment content;
- Assessment format;
- Balance between stations;
- Fairness;
- Professionalism of the examiners;
- Marking process;
- Decision making process for pass/fail;
- Minutes of examination, marking and pass/fail decision making process;



- Quality control mechanisms (e.g. external examiners);
- Established mechanisms for appeals and challenges (including legal);
- Process for candidates and examiners to offer feedback;
- Announcement of the results;
- Overall marking for the quality of the assessment.

The review panel will meet with a random sample of candidates and examiners (separately with each) asking them to offer their comments regarding the above domains anonymously. The members of the review panel will retain the minutes of these meetings.

The draft report of the panel will be sent to the chairman of the Board (or other organisation commissioning the assessment) for factual checking, before final sign-off.

Outcome

The review panel will supply to the UEMS-CESMA Executive a report presenting their individual scores with average scores per domain and summaries of the confidential meetings with the examiners and the candidates, along with a written section per domain that will comment on strengths of the assessment process as well as areas for improvement. The UEMS-CESMA Executive will be able to ask for clarifications, but will not be able to alter the outcome of the report. Following this the final report will be forwarded to the Executive of the Board under evaluation.

With the agreement of the Board under evaluation, the average scoring (without the comments) of the review process can be published on the UEMS-CESMA website.



RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Mathysen D.G.P., Rouffet J.B., Tenore A., Papalois V., Sparrow O., Goldik Z. (2015).
Guideline for the organisation of European postgraduate medical assessments.
UEMS-CESMA Publication
- Tenore A., Mathysen D.G.P., Mills P., Westwood M., Rouffet J.B., Papalois V., Sparrow O., Goldik Z. (2015). A guide to successfully writing MCQs: Executive summary. UEMS-CESMA Publication (2nd edition)
- Sparrow O., Mathysen D.G.P., Rouffet J.B., Tenore A., Papalois V., Goldik Z (2015).
Guideline on appeal procedures for European postgraduate medical assessments.
UEMS-CESMA Publication
- Goldik Z., Mathysen D.G.P., Rouffet J.B., Tenore A., Papalois V., Sparrow O. (2015).
Guideline on examiner selection for European postgraduate medical assessments.
UEMS-CESMA Publication
- Boorman J., Mathysen D.G.P., Noël J.L., Bloch K., Rouffet J.B., Tenore A., Papalois V., Sparrow O., Goldik Z. (2014). Survey on European postgraduate medical assessments by the Council for European Medical Specialty Assessments (UEMS-CESMA). *MedEd Publish* 3 (42), 1-4
- Mathysen D.G.P., Goldik Z. (2015). On the quality control and importance of European postgraduate medical assessments. *Medical Teacher*