

30 April 2021

Australia-UK FTA Coordinator
Regional Trade Agreements Division
Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
RG Casey Building, John McEwen Crescent, Barton ACT 0221
Email: ukfta@dfat.gov.au

**Re: Provision for mutual recognition of professional medical qualifications
in the UK - Australia free trade deal**

Dear Sir or Madam,

We, the undersigned, write to petition for you to include provisions for the mutual recognition of professional medical qualifications in the UK - Australia free trade agreement currently under negotiation.

We are a collective of medical doctors, from both Australia and Britain, who have emigrated either temporarily or permanently to the other nation variously for further education, clinical fellowships, academic research, industry or the opportunity to practice clinical medicine across two countries with a deep and rich shared history and culture.

At present the process for recognition of medical qualifications in either nation, for doctors trained in the other, whether for general or specialist registration, is laborious, slow, costly and a hindrance to the free flow of trade, research, innovation, collaboration and industry.

Recognition of specialist medical registration can routinely take twelve months or longer, costs thousands of pounds sterling, and can be unsuccessful on seemingly arbitrary points. Our countries share almost point-for-point curriculum, syllabus and assessment criteria for our primary medical degrees and many postgraduate specialist training pathways with the various Australian specialist medical colleges Royal Colleges in both Australia and the UK. Many Australian specialist medical colleges have received Royal assent, in recognition of the common origin with antecedent Royal Colleges in the UK, for example, the Royal Australasian College of Physicians and the Royal College of Physicians. Primary medical degrees are often mutually recognised, but this is only one part of the process to general registration and licence to practise with the respective medical registration bodies.

Provision for mutual recognition of professional medical qualifications in the UK - Australia free trade deal

Australia already has made some steps to streamline the medical registration of UK medical graduates, recognising the UK General Medical Council (GMC) as a 'competent authority' and exempting UK graduates from some aspects of the application pathway.¹ However this falls well short of reciprocity as it often still requires a period of observed clinical practice for twelve months.

Precedents for reciprocal medical registration

European Union

While the UK was a member state of the EU, directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the European Council ensured reciprocal recognition of medical practitioners on the basis of coordination of minimum training conditions.²

Canada

There are existing precedents for reciprocal medical registration. Post-graduate medical training in Australia is recognised by both the Royal College of Physicians & Surgeons of Canada (for most specialties) and the Canadian College of Family Physicians (full reciprocity).³ Such a pathway ensures applicants have met specialty-specific training requirements in a recognised and approved program.

New Zealand

There exists a streamlined path for medical registration in New Zealand for medical practitioners registered with the Australian Medical Board.⁴ Many post-graduate medical specialist colleges operate across both Australia and New Zealand, for example both the Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) and Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS), whereby fellowship in either is accepted in both Australia and New Zealand as a prerequisite for specialist registration.

¹ Medical Board of Australia - Competent Authority Pathway
<https://www.medicalboard.gov.au/Registration/International-Medical-Graduates/Competent-Authority-Pathway.aspx> [Accessed 30/04/2021]

² Directive 2005/36/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 September 2005 on the recognition of professional qualifications.
<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32005L0036> [Accessed 30/04/2021]

³ Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada - International Medical Graduates
<https://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/credentials-exams/assessment-international-medical-graduates-e>
[Accessed 30/04/2021]

⁴ Medical Council of New Zealand - Australian General Registrants
<https://www.mcnz.org.nz/registration/getting-registered/registration-pathways/general-scope/australian-general-registrants/> [Accessed 30/04/2021]

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Benefits to the UK

The UK would stand to benefit, as such a pathway would encourage highly skilled and educated medical professionals, often of high net worth, to bring their skills, experience and productivity to benefit from the world class medical research capacity and post-fellowship training in the UK, often on a temporary basis before returning to Australia.

Benefits to Australia

Australia would stand to benefit, as it would increase access for Australian medical specialists to practice clinical medicine, study, conduct academic research and innovate in the UK, furthering their skills and training before very often returning to Australia.

Our Proposal

We propose a bilateral system that emulates the previous agreement between the UK and EEA, derived from the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualification Directive, whereby relevant primary and specialist qualifications from each nation were accepted by the healthcare professional regulators of the other nation as evidence of the requisite knowledge, skills and experience for registration. Such recognition would encourage the best and brightest medical professionals from both nations to work, conduct research, innovate, study and invest in the other with a net benefit to both.

We wish to lend our support, as a collective of both British and Australian medical professionals, the publicly stated Australian objective of establishing ambitious provisions on mutual recognition of professional qualifications.

We hope you will look on our proposal favourably and we look forward to your advocacy and we look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Brent O’Carrigan⁵ MBBS FRACP, Medical oncologist

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**Provision for mutual recognition of professional medical qualifications
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The Hon George Brandis QC

High Commissioner for Australia

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