

POSTGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION SCHULICH SCHOOL OF MEDICINE & DENTISTRY

POLICY ON PROGRAM RESPONSIBILITIES IN AREAS OF FOCUSED COMPETENCE (AFC) PROGRAMS

Approved by PGME Committee: June 11, 2025

Approved by JSC: November 21, 2025

Date of Next Scheduled Review: 2028

Preamble

This purpose of this policy is to outline the required processes and procedures for application, selection, and registration of Areas of Focused Competence (AFC) trainees. This policy does not apply to residents, clinical fellows, research fellows, or trainees in a Subspecialty Examination Affiliate Program (SEAP).

An AFC training program is an accredited program by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College). It exists within a highly specialized discipline of medicine that addresses a legitimate societal need but does not meet the Royal College criteria for a specialty, foundation program, or subspecialty. As an accredited program, an AFC program is associated with a recognized Faculty of Medicine, overseen by an AFC Program Director and AFC Program Committee.

Physicians who have successfully completed all the training requirements are eligible for an Area of Focused Competence Diploma which recognizes an area of supplemental or advanced training.

Definitions

AFC Trainee (hereafter ‘trainee’): Trainees who are registered in an accredited AFC Program. They must meet the eligibility requirements for the Competency Training Requirements (CTR) for the AFC in which they are registered.

Clinical Fellow: Fellows who are acquiring post-certification training. According to the [Medicine Act, 1991](#), fellows must meet the educational requirements for certification as a specialist by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) or the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), or a member board of the American Board of Medical Specialties or be recognized as a medical specialist in the jurisdiction where the applicant practices medicine immediately before the appointment as a clinical fellow. Fellowship training does not lead to certification by the Royal College or CFPC. Clinical Fellows may conduct research as part of their fellowship training objectives.

Research Fellow: Fellows who are in a research program and have no clinical appointment. Research fellows do not require a College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO) license. Research fellows must hold a medical degree from an accredited medical school in order for their training to be registered through the PGME office.

Resident: Trainees enrolled in a RCPSC or CFPC accredited training program, including RCPSC subspecialties and CFPC Enhanced Skills. Residents are eligible for certification from the RCPSC or CFPC.

Registration With PGME

All trainees must be registered with the Postgraduate Medical Education (PGME) office. The relationship between the trainee and Western University is educational only and does not constitute an employment relationship with the University. The PGME office is responsible for informing the trainee of all registration requirements that must be completed prior to the training start date, and for providing all supporting documentation for Western University registration, CPSO, and immigration application requirements.

If AFC programs are not in compliance with the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry PGME Policy on Program Responsibilities in AFC Programs, PGME has the right to close the AFC program. If the program is not in compliance with the Standards of Accreditation for their AFC program, PGME and/or the RCPSC has the right to close the AFC Program.

References

- [General Standards of Accreditation for AFC Programs](#)
- [AFC Appeals Policy](#)
- [Selection Policy](#)
- [PEAP Policy](#)
- [CPSO Registration Requirements](#)
- [CPSO - Professional Responsibilities in Medical Education](#)
- [AFC Training Route](#)

Responsibilities For AFC Education

Refer to Figure 1 for a flowchart of the appointment process and Table 1 for Trainee Responsibilities for Application.

1. AFC Program Organization (Standards 1.1 and 1.2)

All AFC programs must have a designated AFC Program Director. The AFC Program Director will oversee the organization, administration, and operation of the AFC program. The AFC Program Director must have an official affiliation with the University through their respective Department. The AFC Program Director may be the same person as the educational supervisor.

All AFC programs must also have an effective and functional AFC Program Committee to support the AFC Program Director in planning, organizing, and advancing the AFC program. The AFC Program Committee is responsible for overseeing the training, mentoring, supervision, progression, and assessment of the trainee.

2. Program Information, Application and Selection Process (Standard 5.1)

The AFC program must provide a description of the program and clearly outline the requirements and deadlines for trainee application on the program website.

The AFC program must have a formalized, fair, and transparent application and selection process. Criteria for AFC selection (application review, interview requirement and format for example) must be posted on the program website.

3. Resources (Standard 3)

The AFC program must have the clinical, physical, technical, and human resources (e.g., teachers) to provide all trainees with the educational experiences needed to acquire all competencies.

The AFC Program Director must review the planned number of trainees with the affiliated residency Program Director to ensure that trainees will not negatively impact residency training. The Department Chair or delegate will make the ultimate decision on the number of trainees.

4. AFC Funding (Standard 3)

Trainees without salary funding are not permitted. All AFC programs must include a salary sufficient to cover the estimated basic cost of living in Southwestern Ontario, London, or Windsor. The minimum is \$65,000 per annum.

There are four acceptable sources of funding for a trainee:

I. Sponsored:

The trainee's salary and a tuition payment is provided by their home country. To be sponsored, the trainee must be a citizen of one of the countries with which Western has a contractual agreement in place (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates,).

II. Department-funded:

The Division or Department is paying the trainee's salary from a university or hospital account. The minimum allowable annual salary is currently \$65,000 CAD.

III. External funding:

External funding can come from a Canadian industry or from an institution such as a hospital, university, employer or government agency in their home country. The salary funding must be a minimum of \$65,000 CAD.

Before an offer is made to an international AFC trainee who indicates they have funding from a source in their home country, they must provide a document from their funding source, signed and on letterhead, confirming that funding will be provided, the duration of funding, and the annual amount in CAD. This requirement does not apply to sponsored applicants as their funding process is different and they cannot provide confirmation of funding before receiving an offer.

IV. Self-funded:

Self-funding is only allowed if the trainee is RCPSC or CFPC-certified and holds an Independent Practice or Restricted license from the CPSO, and is therefore able to bill for services, for example by surgical assisting or other clinical work that their licences will permit. They must have the appropriate CMPA Type of Work (TOW) coverage.

There must be a very clear plan communicated to the trainee for the work that will be done, and this must be written into the letter of offer. The program must be able to provide specific information to the trainee about available locums, rather than allow the trainee to find their own opportunities. As well, the remunerative work must be accommodated within the trainee's work schedule, not in addition to the full-time AFC education hours.

The PGME office does not provide salary, administrative, or operational funding for AFC programs.

Trainees are not included in the Professional Association of Residents of Ontario (PARO) collective agreement. Leaves during AFC training are funded at the discretion of the AFC program, or subject to the policy of the sponsoring agency.

Extensions of AFC training are at the discretion of the AFC Program Director and the PGME office.

5. Timelines

Programs must inform the PGME office of a new AFC trainee appointment:

- a minimum of 8 months in advance of the anticipated training start date for trainees who are international citizens, and
- a minimum of 4 months in advance for trainees who are Canadian citizens.

AFC training extensions must be provided to the PGME office a minimum of 3 months in advance of the trainee's current training end date, and 6 months in advance if the trainee is sponsored.

6. Application Requirements

- I. For Canadian and International Applicants not sponsored by their home country, applications are provided directly to the AFC program. At a minimum, the application must include:
 - Personal Statement of Interest
 - Up to date Curriculum Vitae,
 - Letters of Reference (three)
 - Copy of medical degree, with certified English translation if necessary
 - Copy of specialty certificate, with certified English translation if necessary
 - Proposed area of study
 - Proposed duration of AFC training
 - Copy of photo page of passport
- II. Internationally Sponsored Trainees are citizens of the countries that Western has an agreement in place with for AFC training, as follows: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

Internationally Sponsored trainees must apply through their sponsoring agency, which will then submit their application to PGME after confirming the applicant's eligibility for scholarship, and PGME will share the application with the program.

Applications made directly to clinical programs must be discarded. If a program is contacted by a sponsored applicant or if a current sponsored trainee refers a colleague, inform the PGME office and provide the candidate's name and country of citizenship or contact information. PGME can then vet that the candidate is eligible for sponsorship and refer the candidate to their sponsoring agency to apply through the correct channel.

7. Educational Objectives & Competencies (Standard 2.1)

The AFC program's design and delivery must be based on the standards of training for their AFC discipline (2.1.1). The educational design must allow trainees to identify and address individual learning objectives (2.1.2). Refer to the [General Standards for Areas of Focused Competence Programs](#).

8. Assessment of AFC Trainees (Standard 2.2)

The AFC program must have a planned, defined, and implemented system of assessment (2.2.1), as well as a mechanism in place to engage trainees in a regular discussion for review of their performance (2.2.2).

Review of a trainee's performance must include timely support for trainees not attaining the required competencies as expected. Refer to the [AFC Appeals Policy](#) (2.2.2).

9. Concerns about Supervision

Where, in the opinion of the trainee, there are serious deficiencies in the efforts of the supervising and collaborating clinical faculty members to provide a reasonable opportunity for the trainee to meet the AFC competency training requirements or serious deficiencies in those faculty members' compliance with the CPSO's Policy on Professional Responsibilities in Postgraduate Medical Education, the trainee will notify the Associate Dean PGME to discuss concerns. The Associate Dean PGME will review the progress of the AFC training. If the review supports the opinion of the trainee, the Associate Dean PGME will undertake corrective action, in consultation with the relevant parties, including the Academic Department Chair (or delegate).

Trainees may access the Learner Experience Office ([LEO](#)) for support, advocacy, accommodations, and to report learner mistreatment.

10. Eligibility Requirements

I. Work Permit

Trainees who are not citizens or Permanent Residents of Canada must hold a closed, employer-specific work permit issued by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

AFC training appointments are contingent upon the trainee's ability to obtain immigration clearance to work in Canada by the appointment start date in the form of a work permit from IRCC. The trainee's appointment with the University is conditional upon satisfactory immigration status maintained for the duration of the appointment. Should the trainee fail to comply with this requirement at any time during the contract period or should the trainee compromise their legal right to remain in Canada in any

way, the appointment with Western University is terminated immediately and without notice.

Trainees who are international citizens will be provided the necessary documentation and instructions to apply for a work permit by the PGME office, AFC programs are not responsible for this aspect. Work permit processing time ranges from 4 to 50+ weeks. International AFC trainees may not travel to Canada until their work permit application has been approved by IRCC, therefore it is important to allow a minimum of eight months processing time between the AFC training start date and the date that the program informs the PGME office of a new international AFC training appointment.

II. Medical Degree and Specialty Certification

AFC trainees must have been awarded a medical degree from an accredited Canadian or US medical school as defined in the [Ontario Regulation 865/93: Registration](#) or a doctor of osteopathy degree as defined in the [Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine](#) policy, or an acceptable international medical school as defined in the [Ontario Regulation 865/93: Registration](#) or in the [Alternatives to Degrees in Medicine from Schools Listed in the World Directory of Medical Schools Published by the World Health Organization](#).

They must also have successfully completed a residency training program or the equivalent in Canada or elsewhere and hold certification as a specialist by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC), or as a member of the American Board of Medical Specialties, or be recognized as a medical specialist in the jurisdiction where the applicant practices medicine immediately before the appointment as a trainee.

AFC trainees must be [eligible for a certificate of registration](#) authorizing postgraduate education with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO).

III. Professional Liability Protection

AFC Trainees will be provided instructions to apply for professional liability protection from the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA) and are required to have active coverage prior to engaging in clinical care.

Clinical aspects of AFC learning are subject to the policies, rules and regulatory compliance of the hospital or other clinical setting.

IV. Immunization record requirements

Before a trainee can be cleared to start training, they are required to complete a full health review, instructions for which are provided by Medical Affairs 60 days in advance of the training start date. Trainees are required to provide a Health Screen form and proof of immunizations to Occupational Health & Safety Services. More information can be found [here](#).

V. Vulnerable sector screening

The CPSO applications requires submission of a Canadian Criminal Record check; more detail is found on the [CPSO website](#).

VI. English Language Testing

English language tests are not required.

VII. Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP)

Personal health insurance coverage is mandatory, and the trainee will be instructed to apply for coverage from OHIP. Coverage will be active from the date of arrival, once an application is submitted.

Trainees sponsored by Saudi Arabia have personal health insurance which is facilitated by the Saudi Arabia Cultural Bureau but are able to apply for OHIP.

VIII. Workplace Safety Insurance Board (WSIB)

Hospital policies apply:

- [London Health Sciences Centre \(LHSC\)](#) or contact [Medical Affairs](#) for details
- [St. Joseph's Healthcare Centre \(SJHC\)](#) or contact [Medical Affairs](#) for details
- Windsor
 - [Procedure to be Followed in the Event of Workplace Injury: Windsor Campus](#)
 - [Occupational Health & Safety E-Orientation, Windsor Regional Hospital and Hotel-Dieu Grace Healthcare](#)

IX. Pre-Entry Assessment Program (PEAP)

All internationally trained trainees who have not completed any postgraduate training in Canada or the USA must complete a Pre-Entry Assessment Program (PEAP) prior to full acceptance into an AFC training program.

The PEAP is an assessment process that evaluates certified international medical specialists to determine whether they can function at the level of Ontario trainees who have completed their primary certification and are qualified to enter an Ontario AFC program. It is a mandatory 4 to 12 weeks in duration, is concurrent with the AFC training program, and serves to provide assessment of the candidate's general knowledge, skills (both technical and communication), judgment and competence in the designated specialty and the designated level of training for which the candidate is pursuing an AFC Diploma.

The PEAP must be successfully completed in order to complete the AFC program. If a candidate is not successful in the PEAP, the AFC appointment is terminated. See the [Schulich PGME PEAP Policy](#).

11. Offer Letter

The program must prepare and issue an Offer Letter for all new and extended AFC training appointments. The Offer Letter is the first step in the process after a program has selected a candidate. The trainee must sign and return the Offer Letter, which is their indication of acceptance of the AFC training offer.

AFC programs must use the Western University Offer Letter template, which is available by contacting the [International Trainee & Fellowship Coordinator in the PGME office](#).

Programs are welcome to use their own Offer Letter in addition to the Western Offer Letter, which must be used.

12. Notification of Training Appointment (NOTA)

To notify the PGME office of a new or extended AFC appointment, the program must complete a Notification of Training Appointment (NOTA) form, located [here on the PGME website](#). Page one of the NOTA is filled out by the program with the trainee's relevant training information. The second page of the form is then signed by the AFC Program Director as supervisor (if applicable) and Program Director, the Department Chair or Divisional Chair/Chief, and by the Manager of Administration & Finance of the Department if the trainee is being funded by the program.

The program then sends the completed and signed NOTA form, signed offer letter, and the trainee's documentation as listed on page one of the NOTA to the [International Trainee & Traineeship Coordinator](#) in the PGME office. The appointment will not be processed until the NOTA has been signed by all parties and all documentation has been submitted by the program. The AFC training appointment is conditional on the final approval of the Associate Dean of PGME.

13. Orientation

The AFC program must have an orientation process for trainees. This should include components of the training environment, medical records, dictation services as required, and the guidelines and policies applicable to the AFC program.

14. Extension of Training

Programs must provide an offer letter to the trainee for a training extension that exceeds the original training end date of the initial offer letter. When a trainee sign and accepts the extension offer, the program must notify the PGME office following the same procedure as the initial appointment; a Notification of Training Appointment (NOTA) form must be prepared and signed by all parties and sent to the PGME office along with the signed offer letter and revised training objectives that include any additional objectives for the extended training.

AFC training extensions must be provided to the PGME office a minimum of 3 months in advance of the trainee's current training end date, and 6 months in advance if the trainee is sponsored.

AFC training duration is subject to the CPSO policy "Postgraduate Education Term for Clinical Fellows". The CPSO will renew a certificate of registration for up to 5 years, provided that the AFC training remains in the same program and enrollment is continuous; the certificate automatically terminates at the end of the fifth year of the AFC program.

15. AFC Program Approval

Departments must provide the PGME office with support from the Chair and Program Director that ensures that the AFC trainee will not adversely impact residency training.

The NOTA form is signed by the AFC Program Director, the Program Director of the residency training program, and the Department Chair or Divisional Chair/Chief to confirm their review and approval of the trainee appointment.

If the AFC trainee is pursuing the AFC Diploma through the Royal College, the AFC Program Directory must also provide the name of any new trainee registered in the AFC program to the Credentials Unit (diplomas@royalcollege.ca) of the Royal College. The Credentials Unit will check the eligibility requirements in the discipline's CTR before inviting the trainee to apply for assessment, providing the trainee with an AFC Application Form. Applying confirms a trainee's intent to pursue the AFC credential in an accredited program. The trainee must then return to the Credentials Unit the completed application form and assessment fee. Payment is required at the time that the trainee submits their application.

16. Certificate of Completion of Training

The Certificate of Completion of AFC Training is awarded by the AFC Program Director and the Associate Dean, PGME on behalf of the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry. The Certificate is verification that the trainee has successfully completed the training requirements of the AFC program. Certificates are requested by the AFC program, and the request is made to the PGME office which then prepares the certificate document.

The Certificate includes the signatures of the AFC Program Director and the Associate Dean, PGME. The AFC program provides the information to include on the certificate in the request form they provide to the PGME office.

There is no cost for the initial certificate issuance. If the certificate is lost or damaged and a new certificate is required, PGME will issue a replacement certificate for a fee.

17. Obtaining the AFC Credential through the Royal College

An AFC program may only sign off on trainee portfolios if they are registered with the RCPSC. Registered status is granted upon payment of the annual RCPSC registration fee and allows programs to sign off on trainee portfolios between July 1 and June 30 of the upcoming academic year. Inactive programs without current trainees must maintain registered status to retain privileges to sign off on the portfolio of former trainees. Unregistered programs may re-register by paying the next cycle's fee. However, as per the RCPSC, if a program becomes unregistered more than three times during a regular eight-year review cycle, the program must submit an abridged reapplication to the RCPSC.

Once the trainee achieves the portfolio (e.g., has achieved the required evidence for each milestone in the portfolio and has submitted the evidence to the AFC program), the AFC Program Director advises the Royal College Credentials Unit. The Credentials Unit provides the AFC Director with a Confirmation of Competencies Acquired (CCA) form for the trainee.

The AFC Director sends the portfolio and signed CCA form to the PGME International Trainee & Fellowship Coordinator for review and sign-off by the Associate Dean PGME. If the Associate Dean PGME is satisfied that the trainee has a) met the competencies in the discipline's national standards, b) completed the accredited training program, and c) is eligible for the AFC Credential, then they will sign the CCA form and send it back to the AFC program.

The AFC program then sends the signed CCA form to the Royal College Credentials Unit and the Credentials Unit will provide the trainee with a letter confirming their achievement of the AFC credential.

The Membership Unit contacts the trainee, inviting them to have their AFC credential recognized by the Royal College, making them eligible to use the designation Diplomate (or DRCSPC).

If the trainee accepts the invitation to have their AFC credential recognized, the candidate will receive a printed diploma, an update to their Royal College identification card (if applicable) and have their name and new credential published in the public, online Royal College directory.

Figure 1: Flowchart of the appointment process

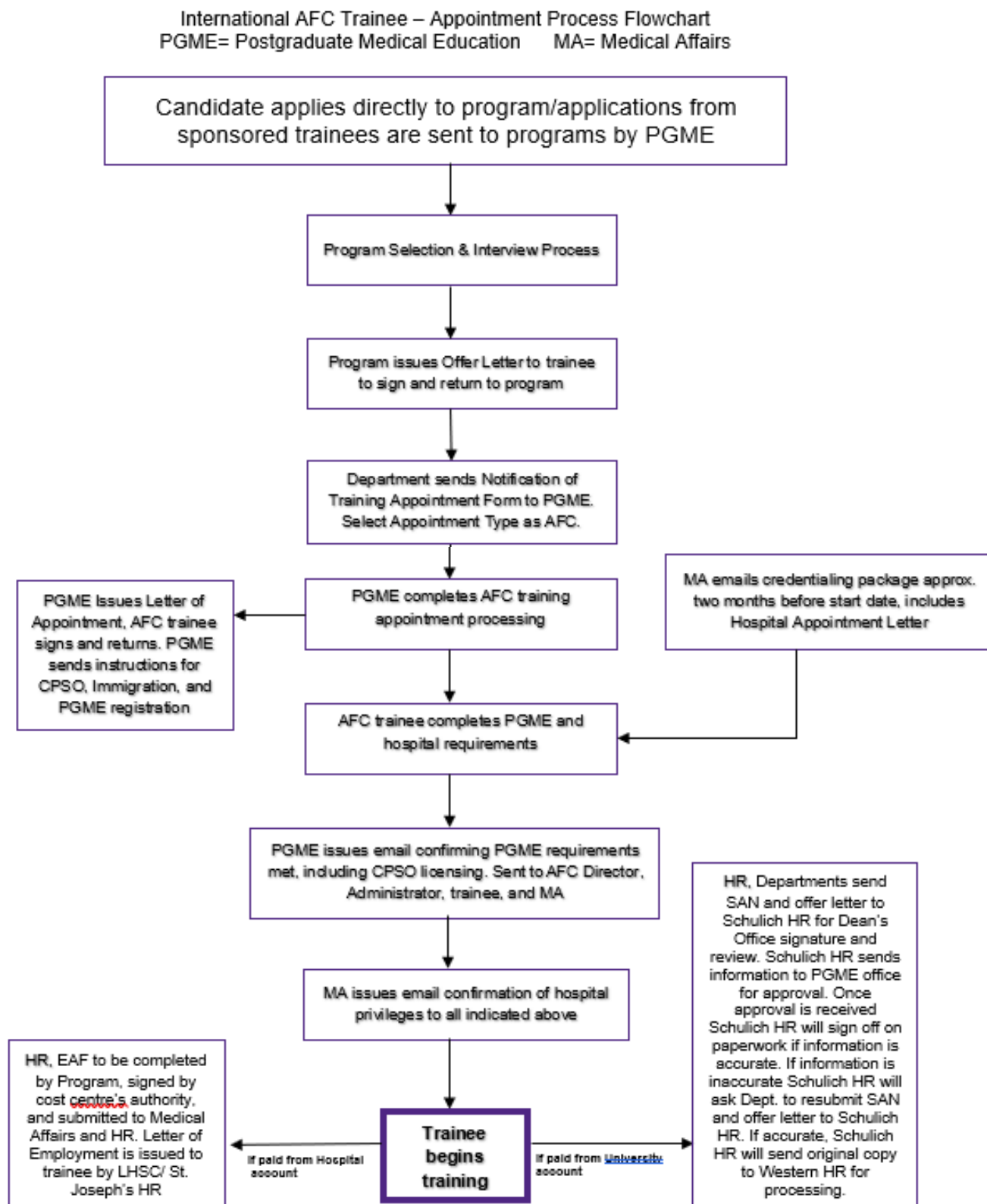


Table 1: Trainee Responsibilities for Application

***Applicable to internationally sponsored trainees only**

†Applicable to international citizens only

‡Applicable to internationally certified trainees with no previous postgraduate training in Canada or the USA.

Action	Timeline
Trainee signs and returns offer letter to PGME.	1 to 21 days
PGME confirms funding through sponsoring agency. No further action is taken until sponsoring agency confirms funding*.	Immediate upon receipt of signed offer letter or NOTA and all supporting documentation
Sponsoring agency returns confirmation of funding document to PGME*.	1 day to >4 months
PGME sends candidate letter of appointment (LOA – legal contract with Western University) along with welcome letter.	Immediate upon receipt of funding confirmation document
Candidate returns signed LOA back to PGME.	Ask for return within 21 days
PGME submits request for Letter of Eligibility to the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO)†.	Immediate upon receipt of the signed LOA
PGME receives Letter of Eligibility from CPSO, all eligibility requirements must be met (MCCEE, specialty certification etc.)†.	5 – 15 business days
PGME prepares immigration documents and submits Offer of Employment and employer compliance fee to Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada‡.	Within 1 – 5 business days of receipt of the LOE
PGME emails work permit documentation package and instructions to trainee, enabling them to apply for the required work permit‡.	Check processing time by country (3 weeks – 14 months)
Trainee must also apply for a Postgraduate Educational Certificate of Registration (license) through CPSO	Approx. 4 months
Trainee arrives at Canadian port-of-entry and work permit is printed by Customs officials, sends to PGME‡.	Immediate on arrival in Canada and clearing Customs
PGME verifies work permit and sends to CPSO‡.	Immediate upon receipt
Trainee cannot begin training until they have met all PGME and Medical Affairs (MA) requirements.	Instructions for meeting requirements are issued at least 4 weeks prior to start date
PGME and MA will issue email to both Program Director (PD) and Program Administrator (PA) once they have been verified.	
Trainee begins Pre-Entry Assessment Program (PEAP)‡. - The PEAP is an assessment process, 4 - 12 weeks in length that evaluates international medical graduates to determine whether they can function at the level of Ontario medical school graduates and are qualified to enter an Ontario training program. During the PEAP, the trainee is assessed on their clinical skills, knowledge, and judgment in the discipline. The overall purpose is to determine that the candidate is mentally competent to practice medicine, can practice with decency, integrity, and honesty and in accordance with the law, has sufficient knowledge, skill and judgment to engage in the kind of medical practice authorized by the certificate, and can communicate effectively and displays an appropriately professional attitude. - The program is responsible for completing a PEAP evaluation form to the PGME office no later than 7 days prior to the trainee's PEAP end date. If the evaluation determines the trainee has demonstrated appropriate ability during the PEAP, the trainee may continue in the program. If the trainee is unsuccessful during the PEAP, the CPSO terminates the certificate of registration and the appointment is terminated. There is an appeal policy available on procedural grounds only, more information is available in the PGME PEAP policy.	