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1.1 Policy and Procedure: Discipline Recognition Application

Policy Number:	COS 1.1
Section:	Office of Specialty Education, Committee on Specialties
Subject:	Discipline Recognition
Approved by:	Royal College Council

1. BACKGROUND

The Royal College, in its mandate articulated by a Royal Charter in 1929, plays a key role in the oversight of the system of specialty medicine in Canada. Through its committees, in particular the Committee on Specialties, the Royal College is responsible for evaluating applications for recognition of new disciplines in Canada, ultimately determining whether those disciplines should be granted formal recognition, and become part of the Royal College's formal system of specialty medicine in Canada.

Recognized disciplines fall into one of four categories including fundamentals, specialties, subspecialties, and areas of focused competence - diplomas (AFC-diplomas). While the rationale and definition for each discipline category is unique, the Royal College's Committee on Specialties evaluates all discipline applications within the context of this mandate, and using similar decision-making processes. Additionally, the Royal College recognizes, although not through formal discipline recognition, Special Interest Groups of Medical Activity (SIGMA's) which are special programs that represent emerging fields of interest and that meet a legitimate societal need, but do not yet have an established practice base or are without a widespread impact to date.

2. PURPOSE

This Royal College policy and procedure provides a standardized mechanism for oversight of and decision-making on applications for the recognition of new disciplines including fundamentals, specialties, subspecialties, and AFC-diplomas.

This policy is also intended to articulate the means by which the Royal College ensures that the recognition of disciplines is aligned with societal health needs and supports the ongoing provision of quality health care. Through recognizing fundamentals, specialties, subspecialties, and AFC-diplomas the Royal College supports new developments in medical

expertise while establishing of national standards for specialty medical training in these disciplines.

3. POLICY

The Committee on Specialties is responsible for providing advice and making recommendations on matters relating to discipline recognition to the Committee on Specialty Education, Executive Committee of Council and the Royal College Council. To provide guidance on discipline recognition, the COS has an articulated set of criteria, *Criteria for Royal College Categories of Discipline Recognition*, which are used to assess applications. These criteria, broadly for all categories, are as follows:

- The area(s) of expertise delineated by the application meet a legitimate societal need;
- The scope of medical educational standards are clearly defined;
- The discipline does not damage the current specialty medicine system including generalism; and
- There is an established educational, research and practice infrastructure for the discipline to promote its sustainability.

Evaluations according to these criteria will necessarily include consideration of the dynamic nature of medical science, changing practice, the burden of illness, and achieving an appropriate balance between generalism and specialization.

In addition to this policy and the *Criteria for Royal College categories of Discipline Recognition*, the Royal College also has related policies and guidelines that govern discipline recognition. In particular, any appeals related to discipline recognition should refer to the *Appeal Policy and Procedure: Major COS Applications*.

4. DEFINITIONS

Fundamentals Program

A fundamentals program is a primary core curriculum of fundamental competencies in a domain of medicine, and is the common training for several related disciplines to build upon. It is a post-MD discipline intended to prepare a physician for further advanced training, and in contrast to a primary specialty, does not normally prepare for practice or lead to certification in itself.

Specialties

A specialty is an area of medicine with a broad-based body of knowledge that is relevant in both community and tertiary settings and is a foundation for additional competencies (such as subspecialties).

Subspecialties

An area of medicine with a more focused or advanced scope that builds upon the broad-based knowledge defined in a parent specialty.

Area of focused competence (diploma) (AFC-diploma)

An Area of Focused Competence (AFC-diploma) is a discipline of specialty medicine that addresses a legitimate societal need, but does not meet the criteria for a specialty, fundamentals program, or subspecialty. Typically, AFC (diploma) programs represent either a) supplemental competencies that enhance the practice of physicians in an existing discipline, or b) a highly specific and narrow scope of practice that does not meet the criteria of a subspecialty.

Special Interest Groups of Medical Activity (SIGMAs)

An emerging area of interest in specialty medicine or community of practice that addresses a legitimate societal need without a widespread role in healthcare. SIGMAs serve to provide a forum for individuals with a common area of interest to come together to discuss the evolution of their discipline. This category is not considered a formally recognized discipline of the Royal College.

Impacted Disciplines

Impacted disciplines are either entry route disciplines (specialties and subspecialties) for the discipline in question and/or disciplines (specialties, subspecialties and AFC-diplomas), that may have closely-related scopes of practice and/or training standards with the discipline in question, as identified by the Committee on Specialties.

5. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Committee on Specialties (COS)

The Committee on Specialties is responsible for defining the categories and requirements of recognition for all disciplines and evaluating applications for recognition of new disciplines. The COS is responsible for rendering decisions through a two-part review process. During Part I, the COS reviews the application to render a decision on whether or not it meets the criteria for recognition in principle, and should proceed to Part II. Part II involves national stakeholder consultations, the results of which are reviewed by COS before recommending endorsement of the application to the Education Committee, deferring decision on the application for clarification, or denying the application. The Committee on Specialties also has the ultimate authority for identification of impacted disciplines, and can do so at any time through the application process.

Committee on Specialty Education

The Committee on Specialty Education (CSE) has delegated authority from Royal College Council, to render a final decision on the approval of applications for AFC-diplomas. However, for specialty, subspecialty and fundamentals discipline recognition applications, the Education Committee is responsible for making recommendations regarding whether or not these applications should receive endorsement by the Executive Committee of Council and Council.

Executive Committee of Council (ECC)

The Executive Committee of Council is responsible for making recommendations to Royal College Council regarding the recognition of fundamentals, specialty and subspecialty discipline recognition applications.

Royal College Council

The Royal College Council has authority for final decisions on applications to recognize new fundamentals, specialty and subspecialty disciplines.

The Office of Specialty Education

The Office of Specialty Education (OSE) receives all discipline recognition applications, determines the completeness of applications as well as coordinates and drafts communications for the COS, CSE, ECC and the Royal College Council regarding discipline recognition. The Office of Specialty Education is also responsible for coordinating the national consultation process and the synthesis of all responses received through this process, for consideration by the committees as noted above.

Senior Executive Responsible for COS Coordination

The Senior Executive Responsible for COS Coordination in the Office of Specialty Education is responsible for providing *non-binding guidance* on the disciplines which may be considered "impacted" by the COS, as a component of the ongoing coaching and assistance provided by OSE through the preliminary work to develop an application for discipline recognition.

Applicant

The applicant, usually consisting of a national group of experts in the field of medicine (including, for example, Royal College Specialty Committee(s), an established National Specialty Society or similar national group) is responsible for preparing the application for discipline recognition as well as obtaining letters of support to the Office of Specialty Education.

6. REFERENCES

- Criteria for Royal College Categories of Discipline Recognition
- COS Principles of Decision Making
- Appeal Policy and Procedure: Major COS Applications
- Dispute Resolution Mechanism for Adjudicating Areas of Focused Competence - Diplomas Overlaps with Existing Disciplines - Policy and Procedure

7. CONTACT

For further information or clarification, please contact:

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8. PROCEDURE FOR FUNDAMENTALS, SPECIALTY AND SUBSPECIALTY APPLICATIONS

1. Submission

- 1.1 Interested applicants, usually consisting of a national group of experts in the field of medicine (including, for example, Royal College Specialty Committee(s), an established National Specialty Society or similar national group), are required to submit the application for discipline recognition. The COS meets twice yearly and, as such, there are two annual deadlines for the receipt of applications: February 1st, for consideration at the Spring COS meeting or September 1st, for consideration at the Fall COS meeting.
- 1.2 A complete application for recognition as a new fundamentals program, specialty and subspecialty discipline must include:
 - A letter of intent;
 - A draft version of the Objectives of Training or Competency Training Requirements (CTR), if applicable;
 - A draft version of the Specialty Training Requirements or Competency Training Requirements (CTR), if applicable;
 - A proposed approach for candidate assessment;
 - Letter of support from sponsoring National Specialty Society, if applicable;
 - Letters of support from impacted specialties and subspecialties, if applicable;
 - A completed application form; and
 - In the case of subspecialty and specialty applications, the application fee.¹
- 1.3 The Office of Specialty Education reviews the application to ensure its completeness. If the application is incomplete, the Office of Specialty Education confers with the applicant to complete the application.
- 1.4 If the application does not have letters of support for impacted disciplines then the *Policy and Procedure: Dispute Resolution Mechanism for Adjudicating Discipline Recognition Application Overlaps with Existing Disciplines* will be used to resolve disputes between applicants and relevant specialty committee(s).

¹ Applications for consideration under the Fundamentals program do not require payment of a fee, insofar as they represent options for a common entry or curriculum only, and are premised upon continuation of training in another recognized discipline.

2. Part I – COS Initial Review Process

- 2.1 The complete application is sent to two voting members of the COS for initial review. The COS reviewers submit a confidential written report to the Office of Specialty Education, indicating their opinion on the application, in principle.
- 2.2 The application is considered at the next COS meeting, at which time the initial report of the COS reviewers is considered. The applicant is invited to be available to the committee to answer any questions regarding the application.
- 2.3 Upon initial review, Part I, of the application, the COS can make one of four decisions:
 - The application is recommended to proceed to Part II of the review process;
 - The application is recommended to proceed to Part II of the review process, pending minor clarifications;
 - The application is deferred pending major clarifications; or
 - The application is denied, on the grounds that it does not meet the applicable criteria for the recognition.

If the application is denied by the COS, the application will not proceed through the rest of the approval procedure.

3. Part II – COS Review and Approval Process

- 3.1 Part II of the COS review process involves national stakeholder consultations conducted by the Office of Specialty Education.² An anonymous summary of stakeholder consultations is developed for consideration by the COS.
- 3.2 The results of the national consultations and completed application will again be sent to the same two COS members, if possible, for their review. The COS reviewers again submit a confidential written report, indicating their opinion on the application to the Office of Specialty Education.
- 3.3 The application is considered at the next COS meeting, at which time the COS reviewers provide a verbal report and the applicant is asked to be available to answer any questions from the committee.
- 3.4 Based on the committee's evaluation of the application against the criteria noted above, and upon review of the national consultations, the COS can make one of four decisions:
 - The application is endorsed at Part II and is recommended to proceed to the CSE;

² The range of stakeholders consulted will include specialty committees and related National Specialty Societies (NSS's), Faculties of Medicine (deans and postgraduate deans), Ministries of Health (MOH's), Medical Regulatory Authorities (MRA's), resident associations, provincial and territorial medical associations, Royal College Regional Advisory Committees and sister colleges/organizations.

- The application is endorsed at Part II and is recommended to proceed to the CSE, pending minor clarifications;
- The application is deferred, pending major clarifications; and
- The application is denied, on the grounds that the application does not meet the applicable criteria for recognition or due to significant concerns raised during the national consultations.

If the application is denied by the COS, the application will not proceed through the rest of the approval procedure.

4. Education Committee, ECC and Royal College Council Approval Process

- 4.1 If the application is endorsed by the COS, it is then sent to the CSE for consideration. If the application is approved by the CSE, it will proceed to the ECC, and finally to the Royal College Council for final approval. If the application is denied by any of the aforementioned bodies, the application will not proceed through the rest of the approval procedure.
- 4.2 The Office of Specialty Education informs the applicant of the final decision.
- 4.3 For accepted requests, the Royal College issues a memorandum to stakeholders and implements the new discipline accordance with its internal processes, which would typically include communications with staff, committees and stakeholders.
- 4.4 If the application is rejected, the applicant may appeal using the *Appeal Policy and Procedure: Major COS Applications*, provided the appeal criteria is met. If the appeal is denied or the applicant chooses not to pursue an appeal, the applicant must wait three years before resubmission.

9. PROCEDURE FOR AFC-DIPLOMA APPLICATIONS

1. Submission

- 1.1 Interested applicants, usually consisting of a national group of experts in the field of medicine (including, for example, Royal College Specialty Committee(s), an established National Specialty Society or similar national group), are required to submit the application for discipline recognition. The COS meets twice yearly and, as such, there are two annual deadlines for the receipt of applications: February 1st, for consideration at the Spring COS meeting or September 1st, for consideration at the Fall COS meeting
- 1.2 A complete application for AFC-diploma must include:
 - A letter of intent;
 - A draft version of the Competency Training Requirements (CTR);
 - A proposed approach for candidate assessment including a list of possible assessment tools;

- Completed application form;
- Letters of support from impacted specialties and subspecialties if applicable;
- Letter of support from sponsoring National Specialty Society, if applicable;
- Letter(s) of support from at least one training site authority describing the infrastructure support to implement the discipline; and
- Application fee.

1.3 The Office of Specialty Education reviews the application to ensure its completeness. If the application is incomplete, the Office of Specialty Education confers with the applicant to complete the application.

1.4 If the application does not have letters of support for impacted disciplines, then the *Policy and Procedure: Dispute Resolution Mechanism for Adjudicating Discipline Recognition Application Overlaps with Existing Disciplines* will be used to resolve disputes between applicants and relevant specialty committee(s).

2. Part I – COS Initial Review Process

2.1 The complete application is sent to two voting members of the COS for initial review. The COS reviewers submit a confidential written report to the Office of Specialty Education, indicating their opinion on the application, in principle.

2.2 The application is considered at the next COS meeting, at which time the initial report of the COS reviewers is considered. The applicant is invited to be available to the committee to answer any questions regarding the application.

2.3 Upon initial review, Part I, of the application, the COS can make one of four decisions:

- The application is recommended to proceed to Part II of the review process;
- The application is recommended to proceed to Part II of the review process, pending minor clarifications;
- The application is deferred pending major clarifications; or
- The application is denied, on the grounds that it does not meet the applicable criteria for the recognition.

If the application is denied by the COS, the application will not proceed through the rest of the approval procedure.

3. Part II – COS Review and Approval Process

3.1 Part II of the COS review process involves national stakeholder consultations conducted by the Office of Specialty Education.³ An anonymous summary of stakeholder consultations will be developed for consideration by the COS.

³ The range of stakeholders consulted will include specialty committees and related National Specialty Societies (NSS's), Faculties of Medicine (deans and postgraduate deans), Ministries of Health (MOH's), Medical Regulatory Authorities (MRA's), resident

- 3.2 The results of the national consultations and completed application will again be sent to the same two COS members, if possible, for their review. The COS reviewers again submit a confidential written report, indicating their opinion on the application to the Office of Specialty Education.
- 3.3 The application is considered at the next COS meeting, at which time the COS reviewers provide a verbal report and the applicant is asked to be available to answer any questions from the committee.
- 3.4 Based on the committee's evaluation of the application against the criteria noted above, and upon review of the national consultations, the COS can make one of four decisions:
 - The application is endorsed at Part II and is recommended to proceed to the CSE;
 - The application is endorsed at Part II and is recommended to proceed to the CSE, pending minor clarifications;
 - The application is deferred, pending major clarifications; and
 - The application is denied, on the grounds that the application does not meet the applicable criteria for recognition or due to significant concerns raised during the national consultation.

If the application is denied by the COS, the application will not proceed through the rest of the approval procedure.

4. Committee on Specialty Education (CSE) Approval Process

- 4.1 If the application is endorsed by the COS, it will proceed to the CSE who has authority to make final decision on AFC-diploma applications.
- 4.2 The Office of Specialty Education informs the applicant of the CSE's decision.
- 4.3 For accepted requests, the Royal College issues a memorandum to stakeholders and implements the new discipline accordance with its internal processes, which would typically include communications with staff, committees and stakeholders.
- 4.4 If the application is rejected, the applicant may appeal using the *Appeal Policy and Procedure: Major COS Applications*, provided the appeal criteria is met. If the appeal is denied or the applicant chooses not to pursue an appeal, the applicant must wait three years before resubmission.