

# Policy on The application of new versions of *AFC Competency Portfolios*

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## 1. Objective

The Royal College sets national training standards to assure consistency of graduate competence, in service of high quality care and patient safety. Each discipline recognized by the Royal College has a suite of standards that are developed and maintained by a Royal College discipline-specific committee. Standards are applied nationally by universities to inform training and assessment of trainees in accredited programs.

A discipline's standards will evolve over time. There are a variety of factors that may lead to a revision, including developments in the discipline, changes in practice profile, changes to related disciplines, new technologies, revisions for clarity or to ensure the standards are contemporary, etc.

Areas of Focused Competence (AFC) programs admit trainees on a variety of dates throughout the academic year and the duration of training may vary more substantially between learners.

Recognizing the national standards will change and the unique character of AFCs, this policy defines expectations for the application of new versions of an AFC discipline's *Competency Portfolio* (portfolio) and credentialing requirements for trainees' training in accredited AFC programs.

There are several principles guiding this policy:

- *Application of national standards*  
New sets of standards are designed and launched with the intention that all programs will use the same standards. Royal College accredited AFC training programs are expected to apply the new version of the discipline-specific standards as they become available, wherever possible. Parameters are set out, below, to provide guidance on how new versions of the portfolio will be launched in times of transition (i.e., if the standards change while a trainee is enrolled).
- *Contemporary standards for assessment*  
Changes to discipline-specific standards will be applied in a timely manner, ensuring that trainee achievements are held to the most contemporary standards wherever possible.
- *Minimize disruption for seamless progression of training*

Changes to discipline standards should not disrupt a trainee's ability to progress through the program. Should it be applicable, decisions about the version of the portfolio that apply to current trainees should be made in the best interest of the trainee.

- *Flexibility and discretion for decision-making at the local program level*  
Should a new version of the standard become available while a trainee is training, AFC Directors, supported by the AFC Program Committee, have the discretion to make decisions about which version of the portfolio to apply to such trainees. This discretion allows programs to balance the two goals as above: the importance of contemporary standards, with seamless progression.

## 2. Definitions & Acronyms

AFC	Areas of Focused Competence are a type of discipline recognized by the Royal College.
Suite of AFC standards	A suite of standards for an AFC discipline consists of the <i>Competency Training Requirements</i> (CTR), the <i>Competency Portfolio</i> (portfolio) and the <i>AFC Standards of Accreditation</i> (AFC-SA).
Portfolio	The <i>Competency Portfolio</i> includes the competencies outlined in the CTR as well as individual milestones to be achieved by a trainee during training at an accredited program. The portfolio also identifies the standards of assessment for each milestone along with the required evidence a trainee must provide to demonstrate competence. New versions of the portfolio are disseminated annually on July 1 and their implementation is subject to this policy.
CTR	The <i>Competency Training Requirements</i> outlines the training requirements a program must provide to be accredited. It includes a high-level description of the competencies an AFC trainee must demonstrate in order to be eligible for the credential, and the training experiences that are necessary to achieve these competencies.
Royal College	Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
OSE	Office of Specialty Education
COS	Committee on Specialties
CSE	Committee on Specialty Education
PGME	Postgraduate medical education
SSRC	Specialty Standards Review Committee
AFC Committees	The AFC discipline-specific committees of the Royal College. The term is inclusive of working groups, subcommittees and committees.

### 3. Policy

- 3.1 Each discipline-specific AFC portfolio specifies an effective year, always beginning on July 1.
- 3.2 New versions of the portfolio apply to all new trainees entering a program as of or after the effective date.
- 3.3 New trainees must be held to the most recent version of the standards available at the time they register. AFC Directors may also choose to hold new trainees to versions of the standards which are scheduled to come into effect in the future, so long as those standards have been approved and broadly disseminated.
- 3.4 Some trainees may be enrolled and in progress through training when the new version of the portfolio becomes available. Only in these cases, programs have the option to:
  - apply the new version of the portfolio to existing trainees, or
  - allow existing trainees to continue to train and be assessed using the version of the portfolio in place at the time of the trainee's registration date.
- 3.5 Should the AFC Director choose for the trainee to continue to train and be assessed in the previous version of the portfolio, the trainee has one year to complete training and submit the portfolio for assessment to the AFC Director.
  - 3.5.1 The period of one year is calculated from the date the new version came into effect. If a trainee is not able to complete training and submit the portfolio during that time, the new version of the portfolio must be used for the trainee.
  - 3.5.2 Considerations by an AFC Director to allow a trainee to continue to train and be assessed in the previous portfolio may include:
    - the amount of work a trainee has already completed in their current portfolio,
    - the effort required to update or achieve new evidence,
    - the trainee's ability to complete training and the required portfolio in the requisite one year timeframe, and
    - whether the trainee was on official leave from the training program (i.e., maternity/ parental leave, sick leave, etc.) when the new version of the portfolio became available.
  - 3.5.3 The AFC Director must inform the AFC Program Committee and document the decision to allow a trainee to continue with a previous version of the portfolio, including in the trainee's file.

## 4. Roles and Responsibilities

### 4.1 Royal College

The *Specialties Unit* works in collaboration with the Royal College AFC Committees to support changes to discipline-specific standards. The Unit disseminates new versions of the standards to stakeholders, ensuring PGME offices are notified about changes to discipline-specific standards via a memorandum on a quarterly basis. The Unit will also communicate internally within OSE any changes to standards.

The *Credentials Unit* receives attestation from the AFC Director and PGME office that a trainee is competent in the discipline, having completed training according to the standards applied during their time in training.

The *Educational Standards Unit* reviews accredited AFC training programs including decisions regarding the assessment of trainees and the application of standards.

### 4.2 Committee on Specialty Education (CSE)

The CSE is responsible for approving changes to this policy and the procedure for its implementation.

### 4.3 Specialty Standards Review Committee

The SSRC has been delegated authority by the COS and CSE to review and approve all Royal College discipline-specific standards in order to maintain the highest standards of postgraduate medical education.

### 4.4 Royal College AFC Committees

AFC Committees are responsible for monitoring the health of the Royal College recognized discipline and ensuring its standards are up-to-date, which includes maintaining the discipline-specific standards and recommending to SSRC any necessary changes.

### 4.5 Postgraduate Medical Education offices (PGME)

PGME offices will ensure that the discipline-specific standards applied to a trainee's assessment are either the version in place when a trainee entered training or the version in place at the time of completing the program. When attesting to the eligibility of a trainee for the AFC credential, the Postgraduate Dean affirms that the trainee completed training according to the appropriate portfolio and that any version change during training was adopted according to the policy stipulated above.

### 4.6 AFC Director

The AFC Director will ensure the proper application of standards which includes determining the version of the portfolio that ought to apply to registered trainees and documenting the rationale for such decisions. When attesting to the eligibility of a trainee for the AFC credential, the AFC Director affirms that the trainee is competent in the discipline, having completed training according to the appropriate standards and that any version change during training was adopted according to the policy stipulated above.

#### 4.7 AFC Program Committee

The accredited training program's AFC Program Committee, or similar committee akin to a Competence Committee in residency education, must participate in decisions about a trainee's competence and eligibility for the AFC credential. Decisions regarding which version of the portfolio to apply to a particular trainee will be made by the AFC Program Director and shared with the AFC Program Committee.

## 5. References

- Policy on Areas of Focused Competence Assessment and Credentialing – Training Route
- (Prototype) Policy Manual for Areas of Focused Competence Accreditation, November 2019

## 6. Contact(s)

For information or clarification, please contact any of the following units of the Royal College Office of Specialty Education:

Credentials Unit (CU)  
Ottawa, ON  
diplomas@royalcollege.ca

Education Strategy, Innovation and Development Unit (ESID)  
Ottawa, ON  
educationstrategy@royalcollege.ca

Educational Standards Unit (ESU)  
Ottawa, ON  
accreditation@royalcollege.ca

Specialties Unit (SU)  
Ottawa, ON  
documents@royalcollege.ca

## 7. Appendices

### Procedures

Procedures for this policy are attached in Appendix A.

## 8. Record of Policy Review

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## Appendix A: Procedures for applying new versions of the *Competency Portfolios* for AFC disciplines

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- 1 Changes to standards can be proposed by a variety of sources, i.e. AFC Committees, Royal College staff, the Committee on Specialties, among others. AFC Committees are responsible for developing new versions of discipline-specific standards based on such feedback.
- 2 Once the requisite approvals are received (e.g., considered by SSRC), the new version of a discipline's standards are disseminated by memorandum to postgraduate offices and other stakeholders by the Specialties Unit.
- 3 Upon the effective date of the new version of the portfolio, all trainees newly registering into the AFC program must use the new version of the portfolio
- 4 Upon receipt of the new version of the portfolio, AFC Directors are responsible for determining whether trainees already registered in the program ought to train and be assessed using the portfolio that was in effect when the trainee started training (i.e., in place at the time the trainee registered in the training program) or move to the new version. This decision must be shared with the AFC Program Committee.