

Fellowship of the Academy of Medical Educators Information and Guidance for Applicants

About the Academy

The Academy of Medical Educators (AoME) is the professional organisation for all those involved in medical education – this includes the education and training of students and practitioners in medicine, dentistry, and veterinary science. Established in 2006 and gaining charitable status in 2009, the Academy exists to provide leadership, promote standards and support all those involved in the academic discipline of medical education.

Throughout this document the term ‘medical educator’ is used to include educators, educational and clinical supervisors, educational supervisors and trainers of practitioners in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science.

Professional Standards

AoME recognises that medical education has distinct attributes compared with teaching in higher education in general because of the central place that patient care occupies not only in teaching and learning but also in assessment and feedback, and in quality assurance.

In order to achieve the objectives of the Academy, the AoME's [Professional Standards](#) have been produced. These Standards, revised in 2014, are designed to provide the basis upon which a curriculum for medical educators can be developed. They act as a framework against which professional progression as an educator can be planned and measured.

The Standards are a tool designed to assist medical educators to work towards excellence. They provide an opportunity for individuals to benchmark themselves against standards that have been agreed by a consensus process with the wider community. They may also be used and adapted by healthcare and higher education organisations to identify the skills and competencies required of those who undertake an educational role.

The Professional Standards encompass the skills, knowledge and practice required of those who perform the wide variety of educational roles undertaken within medical education. The Professional Standards Committee of AoME is responsible for setting the standards and providing guidance on how to meet these standards.

“If you are involved in teaching you must develop the skills, attitudes and practices of a competent teacher.” (GMC, Good Medical Practice 2006)

Use of the Professional Standards framework to determine recognition by the Academy

The Professional Standards are divided into a section on the Core Values of Medical Educators and five distinct Domains. Each Domain provides details of the knowledge, understanding and practice that underpin the roles of those involved in medical education. The Domains are divided into Levels that aim to facilitate progression of individuals throughout their careers. The levels are used by AoME in helping to determine whether to award Membership or Fellowship. The achievement demonstrated by Fellows generally exceeds Level 2 and significant achievement is always at Level 3. However, it is recognised that few will achieve each element in the Domains at every level.



Why should I apply for Fellowship?

Fellows are entitled to use the post nominal letters FAcadMEd. This signifies that you have recognised achievements and expertise in medical education, in the same way as Fellowship of a medical or surgical Royal College signifies craft knowledge and skills.

Effective clinical supervision depends on the application of skills in education and training, and increasingly employers look for evidence that people applying for posts with significant roles in medical education meet the professional standards laid out by the Academy. Academy recognition at Fellowship level may also help when you apply for more senior posts or for promotion.

Fellowship of the Academy of Medical Educators can be seen as evidence of your contribution to high-level professional development of medical education. The Academy, like similar professional organisations, responds to governmental requests for professional advice, and is increasingly consulted on all matters related to medical education, including the framing of appropriate job descriptions, and the development of courses.

The hope is that those educators who have successfully demonstrated that they meet the Professional Standards of the Academy will find the experience of their self-assessment helpful as they take on wider roles within the Academy as Fellows.

Above all, we have tried to make the application process a worthwhile professional activity, and we hope it is something from which every medical educator will benefit. Applicants have fed back to us that they have found both the process of developing their own reflections and our feedback helpful in planning their further educational development.

The Academy offers high quality educational activities for continuing professional development in line with its charitable objectives of improving patient care through medical education. There are reduced rates for some Academy activities and attendance at these courses allows Fellows to accumulate further useful evidence for appraisal and revalidation.

Applying for Fellowship of the Academy

You will soon notice, as you complete your application for Academy recognition, that you, the applicant, provide the evidence on which the application is assessed. Think of it as a self-assessment exercise, with calibration and validation provided by the expert assessors. Those assessing your application will be referring to the Professional Standards to judge whether you have demonstrated that you qualify for Fellowship of the AoME.

Thus, a key use of the Professional Standards is as a basis for your self-assessment. Map your knowledge, competence, and achievements against the Standards in order to assess the level of recognition to apply for. As a guide, Level 3 mainly demonstrates the achievement Fellows are aiming at, particularly if they are claiming significant achievement in one Domain. Remember that very few, if any, educators meet or surpass the standards in every Domain at these levels! The judgement that is made is whether, on balance, you have demonstrated the appropriate level of achievement.

As you use the standards to develop your application, you will probably find that the benchmarking statements help you to identify your professional development needs. The feedback on your application should help you to complete your learning cycle.

There are some key points about preparing your application, which this guide aims to help you with. We will refer to them as the 10 Tips.

Ten tips for a successful Fellowship application

1. Make your case assertively
2. Master the art of reflective writing to make your case effectively.
3. Understand the Domains and what evidence is required
4. Map yourself against the Professional Standards.
5. Make sure you can demonstrate that you support all the 'Core Values'. If it is not possible for you to demonstrate one of the values, explain why.
6. Decide between applying on 'Achievement' across all 5 Domains or 'Substantial Achievement' in one Domain
7. Experiment with formats to make the best case with your evidence.
8. Engage in peer review and take advice from colleagues to help you strengthen your application.
9. Choose and brief your referee carefully
10. Treat peer review as an opportunity to learn and improve

The Tips in more detail

Tip 1. You need to make your case assertively

Real assertiveness is nothing to do with arrogance, but it involves setting aside a degree of modesty and certainly avoiding all false modesty. It is judging your own performance and achievements just as you would judge those of others: impartially and rigorously. Set out your strengths fairly and honestly. This is a skill which many humble educators find hard to master, but it is a very useful skill and can help you in many other fields. For example, applications for training programmes often depend on your self-assessment, and clinicians need to become assertive in applying for Clinical Excellence Awards.

Remember you have to make the claim about your commitments and achievements: they cannot be inferred by the Assessors. Also, if you have worked predominantly in groups and teams, it is important to describe your particular individual contribution to the achievements of the group rather than talking in general terms about the successes you shared.

Tip 2. You need to master the art of reflective writing to make your case effectively

If you remember nothing else, remember this about how your application will be judged: It is not the posts you have held that counts: it is what you have done in those posts that matters. You will be assessed on what use you have made of the opportunities you have had.

You can therefore see that it is vital that you reflect deeply on all the roles and posts you have had. Think about what you have done: what impact have you had? What have you learnt? How have you applied this learning? How have you filled the gaps in your knowledge, skills and experience? Trace your career development reflectively in your narrative and try to show the threads running through.

Look at the following examples of text for an application: can you see which one demonstrates the higher degree of reflection?

Example A

"I teach different groups of doctors using problem based and lecture formats, with up to 60 in each group. Feedback scores from these sessions indicate they are well received."

Example B

"The groups of up to 60 doctors I teach respond well to a mixture of problem based and lecture formats that I have designed. The problems draw on cases with which they are familiar and the lectures are a guiding structure for constructivist learning."

Example C

"Whilst they were doing the experiment, I went from group to group, asking them questions about what they were observing and what conclusions they were making. I find interactions like this really useful, as it enables me to see who understands what. I am then able to try to stretch the more able, and support the less able."

The art of reflective writing

Descriptive writing (just stating what you have done) is NOT what we are after. Just like the Higher Education Academy, AoME places the emphasis on reflective writing in the application. It is a vital component of any process where the applicant is providing all the material to stake their claim for recognition. Your assessors need to see that you have reflected effectively about the impact of your work, the significance of your contribution, the philosophy and values which underpin your contribution, and your own personal development. Unless you demonstrate that level of reflection, it is not possible to assess your application effectively.

Tip 3. Understand the Domains and what evidence is required

Study the Professional Standards carefully and refer to them as you are asked to supply the evidence for a Domain. In any assessment process much grief is caused by candidates not reading the question! This process is no different, and it is worth asking yourself first, "What is the evidence that is being sought here?" before you set about trying to evidence a Domain. Obvious though this advice may seem, it has proved necessary!

Tip 4. Map your knowledge, competence, and achievements against Professional Standards benchmarks

Before you look at Level 3 descriptors (the ones which you will mainly demonstrate) read through the descriptors for Level 1 and Level 2. If any of those are problematic, in the sense that you could not demonstrate them, ask yourself why that is so. Remember, it is you who are staking your claim to the award and you should, in your reflective writing, authentically mitigate any weaknesses which you perceive in your case.

Tip 5. Make sure you have enough evidence to demonstrate 'Core Values'

Education is underpinned by values. Make sure that you give evidence for every one of Professional Integrity, Educational Scholarship, Equality of Opportunity and Diversity, and Respect. The demonstration of respect should cover public, patients, learners and colleagues. If any component is difficult or impossible for you to demonstrate, you should explain why.

It may surprise you to know that a few applications fail because, for example, there is no evidence anywhere about supporting diversity. It is not difficult to write sentences that show that you understand the values by giving examples of how you apply them.

An example of reflection demonstrating values in a successful Fellowship application
Professional identity and integrity – I regularly highlight to colleagues that the first duty of a medical educator is to protect the interests of the public and patients; that the second duty is to uphold the interests of learners/students; and that the third duty is to support colleagues. Most recently this has been demonstrated in leading discussions about difficult decisions regarding final examination results – in reaching a decision I indicated that I was willing to put the interests of students above the views of examiners (when deciding on the pass-mark for an exam question), but not above those of the public (in deciding on the overall pass-mark for the examination).

Tip 6. Decide whether to apply for Fellowship on the basis of 'Achievement' across all Domains (the Broad Route) or of 'Substantial Achievement' in one Domain (the Specialist Route)

For most people, achievement across all five Domains is demonstrable. The alternative choice of presenting evidence of substantial achievement in a single theme is designed to help those who have been focussing on one aspect of medical education for a long time. The best advice here is to draft in rough (perhaps as bullet points). If your decision is finely balanced, it may help to know that for applications which include evidence in all Domains, your assessors may allow a small degree of compensation if one Domain falls short of the required standard but the evidence is very strong across the other Domains.

Tip 7. Set out your evidence in rough format (eg bullet-points) to see which are the strong areas and which are the weak areas

You have choices to make about much of your evidence, which could be used to attest to different Domains, so experiment with moving bits of evidence around to make the best case.

Tip 8. Write a draft and share it with chosen colleagues

People who know you well, and who have worked with you, will probably be able to suggest ways in which you can strengthen your application. Remember that quality counts at least as much as quantity when it comes to assessment. Two or three well described achievements are more likely to be successful than a list of a dozen roles.

Tip 9. Choose your referee carefully

It is not the eminence of your referees that matters, it is the thought that they are prepared to give your application that makes the difference. You will do best with referees who will take the time to read your application carefully, perhaps suggesting areas you might want to reword, and then write a careful reference which gives the context to your commitment to and achievement in medical education. Time and again an application which was appearing rather borderline suddenly looks like a strong case when the assessors read the references. The referee who merely states that you are the best thing since sliced bread and expects the assessors to rely on his/her judgement is not helpful to your case. The one you want is the one who cites real examples of the impact you have in the field. It is often helpful to nominate a Fellow as one of your referees as they will be familiar with the process and the Professional Standards, but this is not obligatory.

It is useful to discuss your plan to apply at an early stage and give referees time to read your application and write their reference, identifying to them any deadlines you have in mind.

Tip 10. Treat peer review as an opportunity to learn and improve

Peer review of learning and teaching (PRLT) is an essential component of developing an individual's educational practice and, it follows, improving students' learning experiences and ultimately patient care. Reflection on peer review is essential if individuals are to build on their skills, identify areas for improvement and plan further professional development activity within their educational practice. We encourage you to consider the review feedback carefully and think about what messages it has for your educational practice. Ask yourself a few simple questions:

- What did I do, why did I do it that way
- What went well
- What could have been improved
- What have I learned from the feedback I received
- What do I plan to do next (when, how, and by what means)?

If you wish you can use an existing reflection model to help you structure your thoughts. There are many available and you may find through trial and experimentation that you are more comfortable with a particular one. Further advice and details about models of reflection are widely available online. See for example the Open University's [Learning to teach: becoming a reflective practitioner](http://www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/education/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-0) (<http://www.open.ac.uk/openlearn/education/learning-teach-becoming-reflective-practitioner/content-section-0>)

About the Assessment Process

Applications are reviewed monthly and depending on the number of applications you should normally expect to hear a result of your application within 8 weeks of the acknowledgement of receipt.

The two Assessors who consider your application will have checked that they do not have a conflict of interest. (Your Assessors may well know you or your work, as it is possible to be acquainted without any conflict of interest.)

The two Assessors make independent judgements and then moderate together making a joint decision and constructing joint feedback. The possible recommendations are:

1. Fellowship award recommended.
2. More information to be requested from applicant (where the assessors feel that the applicant could have supplied more information to justify the award of Fellowship and the referee and peer review corroborate this, but that sufficient detail is lacking.
3. Refer to second level assessment. This is used when an application is borderline (one assessor thinks the case is made, and the other does not; or both feel it is too finely balanced to judge.)
4. No award recommended on the basis of this application. (NB this option will always be applied if there is evidence of fraud.)
5. In the event of your application being unsuccessful, if you are not already a member and would like to be awarded Membership, then the Assessors are able to recommend this. We do not award Fellowship on the basis of Membership applications, no matter how outstanding they may appear to be; Fellowship is awarded on the basis of formal application only.

Should the Assessors recommend Membership rather than Fellowship, the Academy will not normally accept a further application for Fellowship within twelve months of your original application.

Feedback is applied to each section of your application, so it should be easy for you to see how and why the judgements were made. It is important for you to understand that a global judgement is made after all the components have been assessed and it is possible to invoke a small degree of compensation in most cases whereby excellence in some themes compensates for some inadequacy in a single other theme.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q What happens if my application is referred as borderline?

A The application is 'referred to second level assessment', i.e. it is re-assessed by a third assessor who makes an independent and binding judgement.

Q What does it mean if I am asked for further information?

A This option indicates that the assessors have reason to believe that you could now demonstrate that you have the required level of commitment/achievement if you reworked the relevant section(s) of the application within the same word limit. It sometimes indicates that your reflection on available evidence has not been sufficiently robust to demonstrate what the assessors need to see. You must respond to any request for further information within the time limit specified otherwise your application will be determined on the original evidence.

Q Can I appeal?

A There is a formal appeal process enabling you to appeal against any faulty process, but not against honest academic judgements.

Q When do I receive my award?

A You will be notified of the Academy's decision on your application by e-mail and you will be asked to pay the first year's subscription. On payment you are entitled to use the post-nominal letters and receive the benefits of Fellowship. You will also be informed about the next Award Ceremony when you will be presented with your Certificate (or you can choose to receive your certificate in the post).

We hope the guidance in this leaflet has helped you to construct a successful application.

If you still feel unsure, one of our 'Recognising Teaching Excellence' workshops could help. You can find details on the AoME website or contact the Academy at info@medicaleducators.org to find when there is next one near you. We will happily consider organising a workshop locally if there are sufficient colleagues who would welcome this. It can be fun working on your applications together and developing the skills of assertive claims and reflective writing.

Good luck!

The AoME Assessment Group (Lead; Professor Nick Cooper)

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