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SIGN OFF MENTOR GUIDELINES

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this document is to provide Sign-Off Mentors (SOM) with guidance, to enable the SOM to prepare an applicant for registration.

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The SOM assesses the clinical components of the applicant's portfolio and provides guidance on the academic standards, in accordance with GCRAB requirements.

It is important to refer to the **current versions** of the following documents, which are available on the GCRAB website:

- GCRAB Applicant Guidelines (027_DOC)
- GCRAB Code of Conduct (005_POL)
- AGNC Code of Ethics
- GCRAB Mentoring Framework (047_DOC)
- GCRAB SOM Mentoring Contract (048_DOC)
- Applicant Form Part B-E (028-031_FORM)
- Applicant Registration Portfolio Document Checklist (032_DOC)

SOM ELIGIBILITY

Applicants must identify a mentor for support and guidance throughout the submission process. The Sign-Off Mentor must be a Registered Genetic Counsellor with at least three years (full time or part time equivalence of three years full time) experience of working as a Registered Genetic Counsellor. They **MUST** have undertaken the Sign-Off Mentor training provided by the GCRAB within three years of the Intention to Register date. For example, if acting as a SOM for submission in 2024 the SOM will need to have completed training during or after 2021.

If it is necessary for the SOM to change during the portfolio preparation, the SOM should sign off any work that is completed and write a SOM reference for inclusion with a submission. The subsequent SOM should then sign off the remainder of the portfolio and provide a further reference.

The GCRAB maintains a list of Registered Genetic Counsellors who have undertaken SOM training. It is essential that the SOM and the applicant confirm the eligibility of the SOM to mentor for the desired submission date. Both the SOM and the applicant can contact the GCRAB on enquiries@GCRAB.org to confirm this.

Where possible the SOM should be working in the same department as the applicant. If a SOM from another Trust or location is required, it may be necessary for the SOM to have an honorary contract. Applicants are responsible for organising this and are advised to seek the advice of their managers.

The GCRAB are unable to cover any travel expenses for the SOM or applicant in this situation and suggest that the applicant covers the cost of the SOM's travel or an acceptable agreement is made between the two individuals.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The following situations would represent a conflict of interest:

- An individual cannot act as a SOM and as an assessor for the same applicant.
- GCRAB Board members can act as a SOM during their term of office and should declare this at each Board meeting.
- A SOM should support no more than 2 applicants per cohort.

THE ROLE OF A SOM

A SOM should be selected by the applicant to advise, support and assist with the critical analysis of the evidence being collected to demonstrate competence.

The SOM has responsibility to guide the applicant to submit a portfolio of the required academic standard. The GCRAB have produced a document containing General tips for Academic Writing (033_DOC). The portfolio must provide evidence that the applicant has the ability to work as a reflective and competent genetic counsellor. Anonymised academic work (essay and case studies) will then be assessed by two assessors (see Appendix 1).

The SOM will be responsible for assessing the clinical components of the portfolio. The clinical components of the portfolio will then be anonymised and reviewed to check consistency, as part of the portfolio assessment (Appendix 1).

The SOM and applicant should:

- Create a timetable and agree acceptable timeframes for completing required sections of the portfolio and for reviewing the progress of the portfolio. This should be incorporated over the six month period of final portfolio preparation but ideally will take place over a longer time period
- Ensure that periods of leave have been noted and allowances made to accommodate these within the time frame
- Approach the GCRAB Chair with queries or concerns **before** portfolio submission.

Appendix 1 of this document shows the limited time frame between intention to submit (Feb 1st - 8th) and submission of the portfolio (April 1st). Thus, the process for mentoring and SOM assessment should be well underway at the point of submitting the intention to register.

SOM ASSESSMENT PROCESS

The SOM will complete their assessments of Portfolio Parts B, C and their reference in Applicant Form Part D (030_FORM). All evidence provided within a portfolio must have occurred within 3 years of the date of submission of the Intention to Register Form.

Once the SOM has completed their sections of Portfolio Parts B and C, the applicant is required to electronically submit these documents in PDF format. Electronic signatures are required. Applicants must also submit a plagiarism report for Applicant Form Part C (029_FORM) of their portfolio (see Applicant Guidelines 027_DOC).

The SOM will receive an email request and must upload their reference (Applicant Form Part D (030_FORM), in PDF format with an electronic signature.

All of the Portfolio Parts should be submitted no later than 12 midday on the 1st April (irrespective of the day of the week the 1st occurs). Failure to do this could result in a refusal to process the application for registration.

It will be necessary for the SOM to create both a digital signature and initial. SOM assessment will vary depending on the route of entry of the applicant. The requirements for different routes of entry are set out in the applicant guidelines. SOM assessment will include (depending on route of entry):

- **Direct observation of counselling sessions** used in the Case Log and evaluation of these in the SOM reference (Applicant Form Part D 030_FORM). The SOM will be required to write a short paragraph on each observed counselling session highlighting 2-3 competencies particularly observed. One of the observed cases should be outside the applicant's specialist area.
- **Review of the case log** all sets of case notes in the applicants' log must have been seen and the work evaluated. The SOM will be asked to check and digitally initial each case and comment on the breadth of Case Log experience in their reference.
- The case log should provide evidence of a breadth of experience including prenatal, paediatric, adult and cancer genetics. Those genetic counsellors working in a specialist area

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(e.g. cancer or HD) need to complete **ten cases** from an area in which they do not usually work e.g. cystic fibrosis, fragile X, prenatal. Genetic Counsellors working with a general caseload should include **ten cancer genetic cases**. Genetic counsellors are expected to feel confident in working in the non-specialist area and if additional training is required then this should be organised. The client information used in the counselling reports and three case studies may also be used as part of the cases in the case log.

- **Observation of 5 cases** included in the log, a consultation between the applicant and the client must be observed by the SOM, who must comment on these in the reference. Those genetic counsellors working in a specialist area (e.g. cancer or HD) need to have one observed case from an area in which they do not usually work, e.g. cystic fibrosis, fragile X, prenatal.
- **Continued Professional Development (CPD)**. This is submitted in Applicant Form Part B (028_FORM). For detailed information on the requirements for this, see the AHCS CPD Guidelines. The dates of CPD experience should include any training or education (e.g. course, conference, journal club, literature review) undertaken as a participant in the **two years** prior to the submission of the Intention to Register.
- The SOM must review the standard of the applicant's reflection on each piece of CPD. It is expected that the applicant will provide reflective notes on the learning experience and application to practice for each piece of CPD. Description of what was learned is not sufficient. Where possible the SOM should check that they have seen evidence of the applicant's attendance at learning activities relating to the submitted CPD. This evidence does not need to be submitted as part of the portfolio.
- **Core Competencies**. This is submitted in Applicant Form Part B (028_FORM). (For detailed information see Applicant guidelines: record of evidence of competence – Registrant section).
- Additional evidence (e.g. teaching plans, evidence of contribution to audits and contribution to the development and organisation of genetic services) should each be placed in Applicant Form Part B (028_FORM), as an appendix in the final section. Extra testimony from a line manager or other clinical mentor to confirm specific competencies may be included in this section.
- The number for each piece of evidence must be provided against the competence demonstrated.

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- As the portfolio is submitted completely in electronic PDF format, evidence only available as hard copy must be scanned, with the applicant's 8-digit number inserted as a header on each page of the portfolio.
- **Reflective record of two counselling sessions.** This is submitted in Applicant Form Part B (028_FORM). These should demonstrate the applicant has reflected and responded appropriately to the comments of the counselling supervisor and that this is in accordance with GCRAB competences. Check that the counselling supervisor has inserted their eSignature in Applicant Part B (028_FORM).
- **Case Studies and Essay.** This is submitted in Portfolio Applicant Form Part C (029_FORM). The SOM should advise on the clinical and academic standards of case studies and essay in relation to the applicant's work. For guidance see [Appendices 2](#) and [4](#) of this document.
- Check that all the documentation relating to individuals and families is anonymised.

SOM REFERENCE

The SOM will be expected to sign a confidential reference.

As part of the mentoring process if the work does not demonstrate the required competence, the SOM must discuss this with the applicant in detail. If, after discussion, the applicant still wishes to submit a portfolio that, in the SOM's opinion, is not of the required standard the SOM should note their concerns within their reference (Applicant Form Part D 030_FORM).

The expectation is that the SOM and applicant will have discussed the portfolio in detail. The SOM will verify the evidence submitted as the applicant's own and have proofread the work. The SOM **must** be able to comment on all of the following points:

- The adequacy and currency of the applicant's genetic knowledge base and expertise overall.
- The applicant's self-awareness, recognition of boundaries and ability to liaise appropriately with colleagues.
- The applicant's professional/academic activities.
- The applicant's use of counselling supervision (as defined by the AGNC Supervision Working Group Report on Supervision, 2006) and practice within the AGNC Code of Ethics and GCRAB Code of Conduct (005_POL).
- The safety of the applicant's practice and the reasons for any concerns.

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- The SOM's support of the submission.
- The SOM's assessment of the five observed consultations. The Sign-Off Mentor will be required to write a short report (paragraph) within their reference on each observed consultation, highlighting two to three competencies particularly observed in the consultation. Genetic counsellors working in a specialist area (e.g. cancer or HD) need to have one observed case from an area outside the applicant's usual area of specialist practice (e.g. cystic fibrosis, fragile X, prenatal).
- Applicant is able to effectively prioritise their work and undertake on call duties in line with the stipulated role.

CONFIDENTIALITY

SOMs must maintain the confidentiality of the applicant and the documentation within the portfolio. If the SOM or the applicant has a specific question regarding the Registration process an email can be sent to the GCRAB Chair. The Chair is not involved in the assessment process and therefore has no conflict of interest.

QUALITY & STANDARDS

The quality of the Registration process will be under annual review; each SOM and assessor pair is required to complete an evaluation questionnaire about the process after each cohort. Each SOM will be required to attend a SOM training day every three years, if they wish to continue to practice as a SOM. Each SOM will receive a copy of their applicant's outcome letter for information. If a SOM has two deferred applicant's the GCRAB Administrator will inform the GCRAB Chair so that support can be given to the SOM. Anonymised parts of portfolios may be shared with GCRAB Board members if appropriate to ensure that the Board's responsibility for quality and regulation is met.

EVALUATION

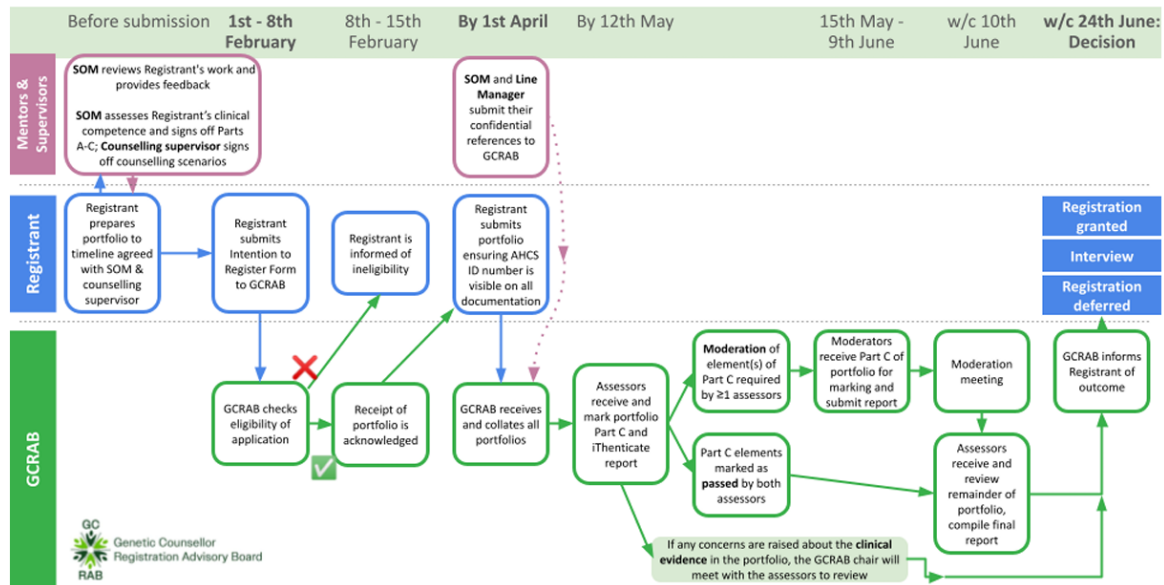
Evaluation is obligatory for all those participating in the Registration process i.e. applicants, SOMs and assessors. The evaluation will be conducted via an electronic anonymous survey. A summary of the evaluation will be available to the membership.

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APPENDIX 1: Registration Process Diagram

GCRAB Registration Portfolio Assessment Timeline 2024

NOTE: This timeline is intended to serve as a guide; it cannot cover all possible scenarios



APPENDIX 2: Assessing Work at Master's Level: the Bottom Line

Overall impression

Generally, a presentation at Master's level standard will appear as a scholarly piece of work that conveys that the author has some authority in the subject. The reader has the clear impression of confidence and competence in handling complex information. More detailed examination should then confirm this.

The critical features

The following features are those that should be evident as a minimum to comply with Master's level:

- The knowledge presented is comprehensive and detailed, demonstrating familiarity with the body of relevant literature, and of the current/'cutting edge' issues
- A good level of critical analysis is demonstrated by the ability to filter out the relevant important features/key issues from the broader field of knowledge, and to consider/evaluate these, using evidence to support the arguments made. Critical analysis is also indicated by making judgements about the relative quality of evidence presented.

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- The ability to adhere to a word count is evidence of intellectual discipline and the ability to focus on the critical elements.
- Synthesis and creativity are demonstrated by the use of an effective structure to present arguments, and an appropriate discussion on the practical application of knowledge. The work is well planned, showing a logical flow of ideas/arguments, extending current thinking by considering the implications for practical application. The applicant integrates evidence from different sources to present a coherent argument.

Thus, the work goes beyond the descriptive/limited analysis and synthesis that might typify undergraduate work, i.e. “A said this and B said that, but C said something else” to”A said this and her argument was supported by D when he found X, but in contrast B said that. Although C said something else, the validity of his argument could be questioned in the light of E’s findings, and in the author’s view ...”

As the work is at Master’s Level the presentation itself should be of high quality, with very few spelling mistakes, grammatical and typographical errors.

APPENDIX 3: Master’s Level

Master's Level: Descriptor for a higher education qualification at level 7

Achieved when Registrants have demonstrated:

- a systematic understanding of knowledge, and a critical awareness of current problems and/or new insights, much of which is at, or informed by, the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice
- a comprehensive understanding of techniques applicable to their own research or advanced scholarship
- originality in the application of knowledge, together with a practical understanding of how established techniques of research and enquiry are used to create and interpret knowledge in the discipline
- conceptual understanding that enables the student:
- to evaluate critically current research and advanced scholarship in the discipline
- to evaluate methodologies and develop critiques of them and, where appropriate, to propose new hypotheses.

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Typically, Registrants will be able to:

- deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, make sound judgements in the absence of complete data, and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences
- demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, and act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks at a professional or equivalent level
- continue to advance their knowledge and understanding, and to develop new skills to a high level.

Additionally, Registrants will have:

- the qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment requiring:
- the exercise of initiative and personal responsibility
- decision-making in complex and unpredictable situations
- the independent learning ability required for continuing professional development.

Based on: The UK Quality Code for Higher Education, Master's level (Level 7 - England, Wales and Northern Ireland; Level 11 - Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)), and the criteria set out in the AHCS Standard of Education and Training for Undergraduate and Postgraduate Programmes document

<https://documents.ahcs.ac.uk/docs/262/-101-AHCS-Standards-of-Education-and-Training-for-Undergraduate-and-Postgraduate-Programmes-v2.2-June-2024.pdf>

GCRAB Assessment

Assessment of Master's level, as specified by QAA (Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education), has been operationalised in a set of rubrics (Individual Assessment Form 050_FORM), one for case studies and another for essays. The rubrics are a set of marking rules that enable marking of academic work to be standardised for GCRAB registration portfolios.

Document Control

Document review

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This document will be reviewed every 2 years by GCRAB Board Member.

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