

A Guide to EPIC and Registration for HPCSA Professional Boards

Compiled by:
Dr. Mohammed Parak and Dr. Adila Omar

Dear Colleagues,

As Adila Omar and myself were the first South African students to have made use of the ECFMG EPIC portfolio and write the HPCSA Professional Boards within 3 months of graduating, we have received tons of questions regarding how to go about this process and avoid the lengthy wait of up to 2 years, which most previous graduates have faced.

It is for this reason that we have decided to create this guide which will hopefully serve to make this seemingly daunting process quick and efficient for you so that you may realize your dreams of becoming a Doctor in South Africa without having to sit at home for an extended period of time waiting for documents.

All the information contained in this document was gathered entirely by us mainly through online research and numerous calls to Philadelphia.

This document in large parts will be detailing the process that is required by medical graduates from China, but will also be of help to graduates from any other country.

I'm sure all the questions you have will be adequately answered below. If you have any questions or queries I urge you to contact the necessary authority to assist you further.

Please ensure you read the entire document before starting the application process.

I sincerely hope this guide will benefit all of you and that you will share this guide with your fellow classmates. Please remember us in your duas/prayers.

Best wishes,

Dr. Mohammed Parak

***Disclaimer: The processes we outline in the document below is the procedure that we followed and successfully registered with the HPCSA within a month of graduation. ECFMG and the HPCSA did not find any errors in our documents hence we were able to complete the process in record time.*

While all efforts have been made to ensure that the information presented in the documents below is accurate, we will not take responsibility for any errors and consequences thereof. We urge graduates to be proactive in this process and verify information themselves.

We have received no financial remuneration for putting together this guide, our only intention is to help future students because we have been through this and know how difficult it was for us not having any guidance on what to do upon graduation.

Abbreviations

ECFMG	Educational Commission for Foreign Medical Graduates
EPIC	Electronic Portfolio of International Credentials
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
NFNG	Not for new graduates

Some frequently asked questions

What is EPIC?

The ECMFG Electronic Portfolio of International Credentials (EPIC) has been around for a while, but it is only in the last few months that the HPCSA has registered for this service, replacing the old EICS process. EPIC aims to streamline the verification process by creating a completely online verification process thereby eliminating the entire process of couriering documents to ECFMG in Philadelphia and from there to your University which generally resulted in documents getting lost and ultimately delaying the entire process.

Why do we need to do this?

The Health Professionals Council of South Africa requires that every Foreign Medical Graduate verify their qualification with ECFMG in order to be allowed to write the Professionals Board exam. ECFMG does this through a process called Primary-source verification.

"Primary-source Verification

Primary-source verification or source verification is, by definition, confirming authenticity directly with the source. For a credential (qualification), this means confirming that the credential is authentic directly with the institution that issued the credential. It is a best practice and the best protection against fraudulent credentials. ECFMG's rigorous primary-source verification process for medical education credentials is required for international medical graduates who train and practice in the United States. It also provides assurance to organizations worldwide that the medical credentials of their physician applicants are authentic."

Source: <http://www.ecfmgepic.org/what-is-epic.html>

How long does this process take?

This process is in large parts dependent on your university and how efficient they are in verifying your documents. It is my suggestions that after graduation you speak to the administration department at your university and ask them to verify your documents as soon as they receive it from EPIC.

Depending on the efficiency of your university the entire process could take anywhere between 16 days to 2 months.

Ensure that you have the contact details of the person in charge of verifying your documents at your university so that you can inform them when it has been sent to the university.

I would advise you to call/email ECFMG and your university regularly to ensure there are no problems with your documents.

How much does it cost?

As of compiling this document, the cost of the entire process is \$350. This can be reduced to \$275 if you chose to do identity verification at home, which will be discussed later in this guide.

Why have some graduates spent so much of money on this process?

It is a common misconception that you need to verify every single document you receive at graduation with ECFMG. The cost of verification for a single document is \$75 so you can imagine why it cost people much more than \$350.

There are ONLY TWO documents that need to be verified by EPIC for the purposes of HPCSA registration. That is:

1. Degree /diploma
2. Transcript

How do I pay?

For South African Citizens the only method of payment currently accepted by EPIC is with a Credit card.

My university gives me my degree in English as well as Chinese, why do I still need to translate it to English?

EPIC DOES NOT accepts university translations. Translations have to be done by an authorized Translation service. I will provide details for a Chinese to English translator authorized by the American Translation Association later in this document.

The Notary office translated my documents to English why do I still need to translate it again?

A LOT of people have had the notary translation rejected by EPIC, which has resulted in delays sometimes up to 18 months in some cases. So it is my suggestion that you spend the extra \$10 and translate your documents with a translator authorized by the American Translation Association, which is a recognized body approved by ECFMG.

Step 1:
Establishing an account and Identity Verification

Step 2:
Graduate and Translate Documents

Step 3:
Uploading documents to EPIC

Step 4:
Notary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and South African
Embassy

Step 5:
Sending EPIC verification to the HPCSA

Step 6:
Registering with the HPCSA

Making an account:

To begin this process, you will have to sign up for an account at <http://www.ecfmgepic.org/>. The cost of signing up is \$75 and it takes 3-10 days for your account to be set up. You will have to wait for EPIC to email you a Username and password in order to access your account. The registration process will require you to upload a copy of your passport as well as an ID photo. You can do this simply by using a scanner app on your smart phone.

I strongly suggest all students sign up for this account before they begin their final graduation exams as this will really speed up the process.

I have my username and password, what do I do now?

The next step in the process involves identity verification. EPIC will provide you with a document that needs to be signed and stamped by a Commissioner of Oaths.

There are two ways of doing this:

1st Method - FAST: (Cost \$79)

<https://www.notarycam.com/>

You will have to upload your document to Notary Cam, which can be accessed via your EPIC account. This process involves a Notary Cam agent contacting you via Video Call to verify your identity. This is a relatively simple process and takes about 5mins to complete. There after EPIC will verify your account. Using this method EPIC verifies your account within a few hours.

2nd Method – SLOW: (Cost \$10 for document + Courier fees)

EPIC will provide you with a document; you will need to follow these steps below:

1. Print out document
2. Have it stamped by your local Commissioner of Oaths
3. Courier it EPIC in Philadelphia

This process will be slower and your account will be verified after EPIC receives this document, which could take up to 14 business days.

I have verified my identity using one of the methods above, now what I do?

Once EPIC has verified your account, you are now ready to upload your necessary documents so the verification process can begin. The documents you are required to upload will be discussed later (Please see step 3)

Step 1:

Establishing an account and Identity Verification

Step 2:

Graduate and Translate Documents

Step 3:

Uploading documents to EPIC

Step 4:

Notary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and South African
Embassy

Step 5:

Sending EPIC verification to the HPCSA

Step 6:

Registering with the HPCSA

I have graduated and received my Degree Certificate and Transcript, now what do I do?

Now you get your documents translated. This is pretty straightforward.

For those graduating from Chinese Universities. I suggest you use Anna Cao from the Shenzhen Bolan Translation Company. She is a verified member of the American Translation Association and is familiar with ECFMG requirements. Anna is very efficient and usually gets your documents translated within a few hours. All you have to do is take a picture of your Degree certificate IN CHINESE and send it to her via Wechat or email and she will email you back the translated document. Which will ONLY be used for your EPIC verification so you don't need a physical copy.

Anna Cao
Cell: +86 186 82175408
Email: info@booland.cn
Wechat: szzyfy

At the time of compilation of this document, her cost per document is 200 CNY and this payment can be done via wechat wallet/Alipay.

*If you tell her "Mohammed Parak" referred you, she will do it at 180 CNY

It is only my suggestion you use the above-mentioned translator. Further I have recommended her to a countless number of people and no one has had a problem thus far. I was advised by ECFMG to use a translator verified by the American Translation Association in order to avoid any problems with translations. I found out about Anna via the American Translation Association website.

For graduates from other countries, please visit the American Translation Association website for a certified translator in your country.

My Degree Certificate has been translated now what?

You can now upload your documents to the EPIC portfolio to start the verification process.

Step 1:

Establishing an account and Identity Verification

Step 2:

Graduate and Translate Documents

Step 3:

Uploading documents to EPIC

Step 4:

Notary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and South African
Embassy

Step 5:

Sending EPIC verification to the HPCSA

Step 6:

Registering with the HPCSA

How do I upload my documents?

Once you have completed the process outlined in Step 1. You are ready to upload your documents.

You will need to scan the following documents separately:

- Degree certificate (YOU DO NOT NEED TO SCAN THE NOTARIZED VERSION)
- University Transcript (If your university transcript is on more than one page you will need to combine the scanned copies into a single PDF as the EPIC portal will only allow you to upload a single document)

Once you have completed the above, follow the steps below. Please note you will need a Credit Card to complete the following process.

Step 1: Log in to your EPIC Portfolio

Step 2: Navigate to the "My Credentials" tab

Step 3: Click on "Upload Credentials"

Step 4: Click on the drop down list and select "Medical School Diploma"

Step 5: You will automatically be routed to the upload page; here you will be asked to upload your document. Upload your degree certificate in its original language and click on "Upload and Preview"

Step 6: You will see your uploaded document. Above the uploaded document you will see "Is this document in English" click on "No" and proceed to the next page where you will be asked to upload the translation.

Step 7: Upload the certified translation you have received from Anna or any other certified ATA translator.

Step 8: You can proceed to payment OR follow the procedure above to upload your "Final Medical School Transcript"

Step 9: Proceed to checkout

Step 10: Once payment has been completed your documents have been successfully uploaded to EPIC; you will now be able to track the progress of your documents through the "My Credentials" tab.

Step 11: Track your documents, once you see that your documents have been sent to your University for verification, contact your University and ask them to verify your documents ASAP (This will speed up the process)

To ensure that there are no problems call EPIC regularly to make sure the process is going smoothly. (Michelle and Steven were very helpful should you have a deadline and need to speed up the process). Make sure you have your epic number ready when calling and try to call at 8am USA time so that they have the whole day to sort out any problems)

Once both your documents have been successfully verified by EPIC you will receive a email confirming this. You will now need to follow the steps below.

Approximate time frames

- EPIC Initial verification 10 days
- University verification - dependent on how quick your university is.
- Final EPIC verification - 3-10 days

You do not need to wait in China while EPIC verifies your documents. You do need to remain in china for step 4

Step 1:

Establishing an account and Identity Verification

Step 2:

Graduate and Translate Documents

Step 3:

Uploading documents to EPIC

Step 4:

**Notary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and South African
Embassy**

Step 5:

Sending EPIC verification to the HPCSA

Step 6:

Registering with the HPCSA

I have received my graduation certificates and other documents from my University, now what do I do?

- Take all your documents to your local Notary office for notarization. You can do either 3-4 copies depending your needs (For registration in SA you will need two copies, one for HPCSA and another one when applying for a job) – Notary usually takes 3-10 working days.

My documents have been notarized, now what do I do?

Once the notary office has given you back your documents, you will need to submit your notarized documents to either your local or provincial Ministry of Foreign Affairs office for verification.

*Please enquire with your university as to where these offices are located.

Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Documents can take up to 14 days at MOFA (free of charge). However this can be done in one day for a fee of 50 RMB per document, which can be rather costly if you are getting 3-4 copies stamped.

*In my experience so far, only 2 copies are required. One for the HPCSA and another when applying for a job.

Why do I need my notarized documents to be re-validated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs?

The South African Embassy in China will only put a Notary Seal on your documents if the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has validated it.

All documents issued overseas that are to be used in South Africa need to be notarized by the Embassy.

I have got my documents from The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, now what do I do?

The next step will be to visit The South African Embassy in either Shanghai or Beijing. At the embassy you will give them the documents you received from MOFA and they will place a Seal of Authentication on your documents.

It is recommended that you also get the Embassy to notarize a copy of your passport and South African ID

Step 1:

Establishing an account and Identity Verification

Step 2:

Graduate and Translate Documents

Step 3:

Uploading documents to EPIC

Step 4:

Notary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and South African
Embassy

Step 5:

Sending EPIC verification to the HPCSA

Step 6:

Registering with the HPCSA

My documents have been verified successfully by EPIC, now what do I do?

Follow the steps below. You will need a credit card to complete the following.

Step 1: Log in to your EPIC portfolio and click on the “My Reports” tab.

Step 2: Click on the “Request a report” button

Step 3: Tick the boxes for both your credentials

Step 4: Select Country “South Africa”

Step 5: Type in City: Pretoria and click on “search”

Step 6: Click on the “Entity name” drop down list and select “Health Professionals Council of South Africa”

Step 7: Reference: You can use your name and EPIC number

Step 8: Click on Request report and check out.

Your ECFMG verification has now been sent to the HPCSA.

Please contact the HPCSA to ask them to retrieve your verification from their online system (contact records department)

Step 1:

Establishing an account and Identity Verification

Step 2:

Graduate and Translate Documents

Step 3:

Uploading documents to EPIC

Step 4:

Notary, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and South African
Embassy

Step 5:

Sending EPIC verification to the HPCSA

Step 6:

Registering with the HPCSA

While awaiting ECFMG verification

Download Form 12 from the HPCSA website (Link:

[Http://www.hpcs.co.za/uploads/editor/userfiles/downloads/medical_dental/Form_12.pdf](http://www.hpcs.co.za/uploads/editor/userfiles/downloads/medical_dental/Form_12.pdf))

Filling in Form 12

Fill in from points 1 – 6, don't worry about 7 and 8 if you haven't completed a recognized internship or are a recent graduate.

On the next page you will need to fill the relevant details and then you will need 3 signatures:

1. Commissioner of Oaths signature/stamp
2. Doctor/Dentist
3. Doctor/Dentist or anyone else

The Commissioner of Oaths will have to sign under signatures 2 and 3 as well.

Commissioner of Oaths and Notary

For those living in Durban, I would recommend you visit Ridwan Desai, he is a lawyer and notary and is familiar with HPCSA requirements:

Ridwan Desai

Contact no: 031 208 5878

Address: 279 Randles Road

Alternatively any other Commissioner of Oaths and Notary.

Why do I need a notary?

You will need to notarize a copy of your ID document (For SA citizens)/ Passport (Foreigners) as per HPCSA requirements.

Form 12 complete and Identify Document Notarized, now what?

You will need to gather the following documents:

- All your notarized documents (Degree certificate, Diploma certificate, Transcript, ID)
- University Syllabus
- Curriculum Vitae
- Certificate of good standing from University
- Completed Form 12

You will need to gather all these documents and send them to the HPCSA once your ECFMG verification is complete. You can either post it or hand deliver to the HPCSA in Pretoria. I would suggest hand delivery, as the HPCSA tends to lose posted documents.

I would also recommend that you follow up with the HPCSA once your ECFMG/EPIC verification has been sent to the HPCSA, as these documents are sometimes not retrieved unless you ask them to retrieve it.

If posting to HPCSA I would further advise calling the HPCSA and getting a specific name and contact details of the person that will be receiving your document to ensure that it is not lost. Ask the delivery company to call you as soon as the documents have been delivered to ensure that it was given to the right person.

If your university has given you any other documents you may include these on your application, but they are not necessary.

Useful numbers:

ECFGM/EPIC

Email: info@ecfmgepic.org

Tel: +1 215 966 3900

Monday to Friday 9am – 5pm (7 hours behind SA)

HPCSA

Call center: 012 338 9300

Examination Committee:

- Ms Bongsi Mtshweni 012 338 9308 / bongim@hpcsa.co.za
- Ms Matsheko Mokau 012 338 9469 / matshekom@hpcsa.co.za
- Mr N Ntloko 012 338 9459 / nkululekon@hpcsa.co.za

** It's often really difficult to get hold of anyone at the HPCSA, just keep trying till you do.*

Summary of steps

Step 1: Create EPIC account and verify identity

Step 2: Graduate

Step 3: Translate your degree to English

Step 4: Upload Degree with translation + Transcript to EPIC portal

Step 5: Send documents for Notarization

Step 6: Take Notarized documents to Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Step 7: Take documents to South African Embassy for verification

Step 8: Come home

Step 9: Fill in form 12

Step 10: Start studying

Step 11: Gather all relevant documents

Step 12: Check on EPIC verification progress

Step 13: EPIC verification complete

Step 14: Submit all documents to HPCSA

Step 15: Study and wait for a reply from HPCSA confirming application approval. Follow up with HPCSA regularly

ECFMG CHECKLIST

1. * Medical diploma (translated by professional company)	
2. * Medical school transcript (translated by professional company)	
3. Medical license to practice in china (translated by professional company) (NFNG)	
4. * 2 x ID photos	
More documents may be needed for those from other countries as well as those who have already worked. The above is for new graduates.	

HPCSA CHECKLIST

1. * Detailed academic curriculum for the medical degree indicating the course of study, specifying courses, content of education and training which comprise the following a. The name of subjects covered in every year of study; b. The content of each subject; c. Learning outcomes for subjects; d. Assessment criteria/method.	
2. * <u>Notarized</u> medical degree certificate including notary translation	
3. * <u>Notarized</u> academic transcript including notary translation	
4. * <u>Notarized</u> South African ID (or passport for foreigners)	
5. * <u>Notarized</u> Graduation certificate including translation	
6. * Original letter of good standing from your university	
7. * Curriculum Vitae	
8. * Form 12 duly completed with the 3x official stamp of the Commissioner of Oaths	
9. Form 10 (Intern duty certificate signed with the official stamp of the Hospital) (NFNG who have not done an official internship)	
10. Letter from DWM (foreigners only)	
11. Previous work experience (NFNG)	
12. Original Proof of registration with the medical regulator from the Country were currently registered (NFNG)	
13. Proof of having completed a Board approved English Course (IELTS) – if English is not your first language	
14. * Proof that EPIC final verification has been sent to HPCSA	

* = Documents that applicants from WZMU (China) must have

CONGRATULATIONS!

This brings you to the end of the application process

We really hope that this document makes the entire application process slightly less daunting with fewer nail biting, hair-pulling moments.

On a personal note the advice I have to offer is:

1. Find a buddy. Having someone going through this whole process with you makes it a whole lot easier. For every phone call Dr. Parak made (or vice versa) – We phoned and asked the exact same question again to make sure the information given was correct. It also helps having someone know EXACTLY what you are going through emotionally!
2. This document really should guide you through every step, but steps and processes are constantly changing. Make sure you call both EPIC, ECFMG and HPCSA yourself to ensure that you have the most up-to-date and latest information just before you submit your application
3. The administrative part of getting all the paper work done is more daunting and stressful than the actual exam. Be organized and don't let things out of your control get to you
4. Make at least one extra copy of everything. You never know when you may need it. Ensure that if you are sending off any documents that you scan or copy them before you send it off so that you have a copy available should it get lost.
5. We got our documents done in record time - not because of the new EPIC process but because we were smart with how we went about it. Familiarize yourself with the documents you need, make the necessary phone calls in advance, set deadlines and time frames and inform those involved in the process of these timeframes so that everyone is onboard!
6. Do not stop studying. From the moment you have set your mind to writing the board exam, IF you have done everything correctly, met the deadlines and followed all procedures you WILL write that exam. You may only be told the week of the exam so do not wait for an official letter to tell you that you are writing!
7. PRAY – its what got us through most of it.

Wishing you all the success

Kind Regards,

Dr Adila Omar