

**PACC-UK**

# Certificate Examination Handbook

2011



# PACC-UK Certificate Examination Handbook

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# About This Handbook

## Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to take the Certificate of the Professional Association of Clinical Coders (PACC-UK). At the outset the Association acknowledges your commitment to your career and the health information profession.

The Certificate is awarded by the Professional Association of Clinical Coders. Individuals who hold the PACC-UK Certificate are able to demonstrate current professional competency and express a high level of commitment to the field of health informatics.

This handbook includes information about:

- Eligibility
- The design and content of each part of the examination
- Application guidelines
- A guide as to what to expect at the examinations centre
- What to expect after completing the examination

We hope that the information contained in this booklet is useful to you. If you have further questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us at [info@paccuk.org](mailto:info@paccuk.org).

## About the Certificate and Professionalism

To achieve the Association's Certificate in Clinical Coding, individuals must pass an examination.

The Certificate provides validation of professional competence for employers, other health professionals and yourself.

As a clinical coding professional you should be able to:

- demonstrate a dedication to quality healthcare information and maintain high standards in managing confidential and sensitive patient information
- present evidence of your commitment to implementing best practice

- ensure and maintain your current knowledge through continuing education, experience, and verification of entry-level (NHS CfH (Connecting for Health) National Clinical Coding Qualification) and/or more advanced level competency (PACC-UK Certificate and/or Diploma in Clinical Coding)
- demonstrate your ability to adhere to national clinical coding standards and regulations and
- enhance your career development by providing validation of attaining and maintaining a level of competence.

### **About the Professional Association of Clinical Coders UK**

The Professional Association of Clinical Coders is the only organisation solely dedicated to supporting clinical coders in the UK.

The Association was formed to improve the profile and status of clinical coders and other professionals working within the UK clinical classifications arena. Our primary objective is to help raise the profile of Clinical Coders and to promote the understanding of the value of clinically coded data. In order to achieve this, the Association:

- makes representations on behalf of the coding profession
- provides a forum for Clinical Coders and those interested in the classification of health data and
- actively promotes the professional practice of clinical coding in the UK.

As the only professional organisation that is solely dedicated to supporting the clinical coding profession in the UK, the Association operates with a higher level of purpose representing the ideals of health informatics. Every member of the Association is accountable to an ethical standard that is derived from the vision and values of the Association.

### **About the available UK Clinical Coding Qualifications**

Qualified clinical coders are professionals skilled in classifying clinical data from patient records, normally in a hospital setting. Clinical Coders review patients' records and assign statistical codes for diagnoses and interventions. To perform this task, they must possess

expertise in the clinical coding schemes used in the UK. In addition, clinical coders must be knowledgeable of medical terminology, anatomy and physiology and disease processes. Hospitals report clinically coded data to commissioners and to the government for many reasons including reimbursement and epidemiology. Researchers and public health officials also use coded clinical data to monitor patterns and explore new interventions.

Coding accuracy is thus highly important to healthcare organisations because of its impact on revenues and describing health outcomes, and in fact, qualification is becoming an implicit standard in the health informatics industry. Accordingly, the Certificate demonstrates the clinical coding competency in a clinical coding practitioner.

The Certificate examination assesses a higher level of competency in clinical coding skills rather than basic-level skills which are measured through the National Clinical Coding Qualification administered via IHRIM(UK) on behalf of the NHS CfH. Professionals experienced in clinical coding, should consider obtaining the Certificate to demonstrate that their skills are current.

# Applying for the Certificate Examination

## **Examination Eligibility and Requirements**

Whilst the Certificate is an obvious next step for those coders who have already achieved ACC status, the NCCQ is not a prerequisite for the Certificate.

Although not a prerequisite, it is recommended that candidates have:

- at least three years of on-the-job experience in hospital-based inpatient coding for multiple case types (for example, vascular system, obstetrics, oncology, genitourinary medicine, orthopaedics, respiratory medicine, and endocrinology, nutritional and metabolic diseases, and immunology)
- be proficient in anatomy and physiology and medical terminology and
- have achieved a pass in both papers of the National Clinical Coding Qualification.

A number of candidates have successfully achieved this Certificate without having met all the above recommendations. Taking the examination is voluntary. It is the responsibility of the individual applying to take the examination to ensure they have the requisite skills and knowledge required for a successful examination pass.

## **Non-Discrimination Policy**

The Association does not discriminate against any candidate on the basis of race, colour, creed, age, gender, national origin, religion, disability, marital status, parental status, ancestry, sexual orientation, or source of income. All examination applicants will be judged solely on their skills and knowledge as demonstrated by examination on the day of the examination.

## **Application Submission**

Before submitting an application, carefully review the information contained in this handbook. It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure eligibility before submitting the application. Applicants, who are determined to be ineligible, submit an ineligible application, or request

withdrawal of their application will receive a refund of the application fee minus an administration fee.

Applicants may register by submitting an application form which can be downloaded from the Associations web site ([www.paccuk.org](http://www.paccuk.org)).

When completing the application be sure to:

1. Ensure the name on your application matches the name on the identification (ID) that will be used for admission to the test centre (see section on Identification Requirements).
2. Sign and date the application in ink.
3. Make copies for your records.
4. Mail the application form to the address given on the application form.
5. Ensure the application form reaches the Association before the closing date for applications.

### **Name and Address Changes**

Please notify the Association of name or address changes as soon as possible. In order to ensure correct identification at the test centre, any name or address changes must be made before the examination.

### **Incomplete Applications**

If an application is incomplete, the candidate will receive a letter explaining what is required for completion. An application may be considered incomplete for the following reasons:

- Illegible
- Sections not completed
- Insufficient fee included, returned check
- Application is not signed

Once an application is complete, the application will be processed and the candidate will be sent a letter of receipt.

### **Accommodations for those with Disabilities**

PACC-UK will attempt to provide reasonable accommodations for individuals with disabilities that substantially limit one or more major

life activities (for example, walking, talking, hearing, seeing, performing, manual tasks).

If accommodations are required, you must complete and submit a FORM B - Request for Accommodations for those with Disabilities form. [The form may be submitted with the examination application or separately.]

Written notification will be provided detailing the accommodations and any procedures that must be followed to assure that the testing centre will be able to accommodate your needs on your testing date. Arrangements for accommodations may take up to 45 days to coordinate. The form can be downloaded from the Associations website ([www.paccuk.org](http://www.paccuk.org)).

### **Examinations Centre**

Before the day of the examination, please be sure that you are clear about the address of and directions to the Test centre.

### **Examination Fee Refunds**

1. Candidates may cancel up to 20 days prior to the scheduled examination date at no charge.
2. Any candidate who cancels their examination between 230 days and 5 working days of the exam date will be charged a penalty fee of £30.00
3. Candidates who do not arrive for their examination will forfeit the examination fee.
4. A new application and the full application fee must be submitted in order to re-test.
5. Candidates failing to appear for the examination or who arrive after the examination has begun will not be allowed to test. A new application and the full application fee must be re-submitted in order to test.

Deadline	Fee
Up to 20 days before the examination date	No charge
Between 20 days and 5 working days from the examination date	£30.00

No-shows or failure to cancel before noon of the 5th-working day before the examination	Full examination fee
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### **Cancellations Policy**

In the event of a personal emergency, consideration to re-schedule the examination without submitting a new application fee may be requested. Candidates must contact PACC-UK in writing within 30 days of the examination and provide a description of the emergency, as well as any supporting documentation (if applicable or requested).

Re-scheduling without an additional fee will be considered on a case-by-case basis (see contact information at the back of this handbook).

### **Late Applications**

In exceptional circumstances the Association may, at its absolute discretion, accept an application for late entry on payment of an additional fee, currently £50. This will only be considered if a written application explaining the circumstances is received within one month of the closing date.

# Preparation for the Certificate Examination

## **Examination Structure**

The Certificate examination is based on an explicit set of competencies.

The certificate examination tests only content outlined in the following competencies.

## **Competencies/Content**

### Information Abstraction

1. Be able to interpret the questions using knowledge of anatomy and physiology, disease processes, and medical terminology to identify those diagnoses and/or procedures that are relevant.
2. Be able to select the primary diagnosis, primary procedure, relevant complications, relevant co-morbidities, other appropriate diagnoses and procedures that require coding according to UK National Standards contained within the current National Clinical Coding Instruction Manual and Coding Clinics produced by the National Classification Service.

### Diagnosis Coding

1. Select the diagnoses that require coding according to those National Standards published in the current National Clinical Coding Instruction Manual V2 and Coding Clinics produced by the National Classification Service that are current at the time of the examination.
2. Interpret those conventions, formats, instructional notations, tables, and definitions of ICD-10 to select diagnoses, conditions, problems, or other reasons for the encounter that require coding.
3. Sequence diagnoses and other reasons for encounter according to notations and conventions of ICD-10 and UK National Standards.
4. Apply any other relevant National Standards that are current at the time of the examination

## Procedure Coding

1. Select the procedures that require coding according to those National Standards published in the current National Clinical Coding Instruction Manual and Coding Clinics produced by the National Classification Service that are current at the time of the examination.
2. Interpret conventions, formats, instructional notations, and definitions of OPCS 4.6 to select procedures/services that require coding.
3. Sequence procedures according to notations and conventions of OPCS 4.6.
4. Apply any other relevant National Standards that are current at the time of the examination

## Examination Details

The Certificate examination consists of two parts.

Part I (3 hours) consists of:

- Short ICD-10 questions
- Short OPCS 4.6 questions
- Short ICD-10 and OPCS 4.6 questions

Part II (3 hours) consists of:

- Vignettes
- Required case-studies
- Optional case studies

Total testing time for the exam is 6 hours. Candidates cannot return to Part I after beginning Part II of the exam. It is important for candidates to pace themselves throughout the examination.

- Answers may have fewer codes than the number of spaces provided. Code what is essential, but do not over-code.
- A penalty may apply to some inappropriate codes and for a failure to list a required code.

- Marks may be deducted for incorrect codes.
- Record only the required digits of the codes.
- Use the filler X in the 4<sup>th</sup> character space as appropriate.
- Morphology Codes are required.
- Do not use Local (hospital or regional) standards that differ from National Standards.

In order to pass the examination, candidates must meet or exceed the passing scores for both Part I and Part II of the examination.

### Tutorial

Before the start of the examination, there will be a short tutorial that reviews the administration of the examination and how to navigate the papers. It will also cover the procedures required should you need to leave the room, location of toilets, and any health and safety procedures appropriate to the test centre.

### Breaks

There is one official, mandatory break during the examination. The break is scheduled at the completion of Part I. Candidates may leave the room at any other time, however, additional time will not be allowed to make up for this time and you will not be allowed to take mobile phones with you.

### What to bring

You should bring the following:

1. ICD-10 Index and Tabular list
2. OPCS 4.6 Index and Tabular list
3. The current Chemotherapy list
4. The current High Cost Drugs list
5. A copy of the current Co-morbidities list

You may also bring

1. A BNF or MIMMs formulary
2. A small medical dictionary

You should also bring a black pen, pencil, sharpener, ruler, eraser.

The content of the examination is based on the current UK NHS CfH National Classifications Service Clinical Coding Instruction Manual and coding clinics published up to 30 days prior to the examination.

# Taking the Certificate Examination

## **The Day of the Examination**

The invigilators adhere to approved procedures to ensure that the test Centre meets PACC-UK's testing criteria. Please review the following information before the examination date to ensure familiarity with the procedures.

- Plan to arrive at the test centre at least 30 minutes before the scheduled examination start. Candidates arriving at the test centre after the scheduled examination start time will not be allowed to test and will forfeit the examination fee.
- It is recommended that candidates bring their authorisation to test letter to the test centre; however, it is not required to test.
- When arriving at the test centre, candidates will be required to present identification:

## **Test Centre Restrictions**

To ensure that examination results for all candidates are earned under comparable conditions, it is necessary to maintain a standardised testing environment.

Candidates must adhere to the following:

No reference or study materials may be brought into the examination room other than those permitted above.

- ICD-10 and OPCS 4.6 books with tabs, handwritten notations, or comments are allowed. However, the invigilator reserves the right to deny books that contain information that are considered to give the candidate an unfair advantage.
- written documents or notes of any kind may not be removed from the examination room.
- eating, drinking, and smoking are prohibited in the test room.
- Questions regarding the content of the examination may not be asked of the invigilator during the examination.

## **Security**

Test administration and security standards are designed to ensure all candidates are provided the same opportunity to demonstrate their

abilities and prevent any candidates from gaining an unfair advantage due to irregularities or misconduct.

### **Misconduct**

Individuals who engage in any of the following conduct may be dismissed from the Test Centre and their scores will not be reported.

Examples of misconduct include but are not limited to:

- Using electronic communications equipment such as personal digital assistants (PDAs), radios, pagers, and mobile telephones
- Giving or receiving help during the examination or being suspected of doing so
- Attempting to take the examination for someone else
- Removing or attempting to remove note paper from the Test Centre
- Creating a disturbance, behaving in an abusive, or otherwise uncooperative manner

### **Testing Irregularities**

Occasionally, testing irregularities occur. Such problems include but are not limited to administrative errors, defective equipment or materials, improper access to test content and/or the unauthorised general availability of test content, natural disasters, and other emergencies. When a testing irregularity occurs, The Association will conduct an investigation. Based on the results of the investigation, Association may decide not to score the examination or to cancel the examination results. If it is appropriate to do so, Association will arrange with affected examinees an opportunity to take the examination again at no charge. Affected examinees will be notified of the reasons for the cancellation and their options for retesting.

### **Cancellation due to bad weather or other emergencies**

In the event of bad weather, a natural disaster, or other emergency, the Association will determine whether circumstances warrant cancellation and rescheduling of examination. The examination will not be cancelled and rescheduled if the test centre invigilator is able to open the test centre. Every attempt will be made to administer the examination as scheduled. However, should the examination be

cancelled, all affected candidates will be contacted about rescheduling their examination.

**Feedback on your examination Experience**

After completing the examination, candidates will be asked to complete a short evaluation of the examination experience. Comments will be reviewed but responses to individual candidates will not be provided.

# After the Examination

## **How we process your results**

The Association goes to great lengths to ensure that each examination paper is rigorously checked and tested so that it fairly and accurately tests the abilities of well prepared candidates.

## **Setting the examination papers**

Association Certificate examination papers are set by a team of examiners and are subsequently checked by a lead examiner, an external examiner.

Each Examiner is responsible for setting questions, writing the suggested published answers and producing a marking scheme. Examiners are required to report any attempt made by a student/candidate to discuss future papers with them.

Once an examination paper has been drafted, it is reviewed by the external examiner with the lead examiner whose job it is to ensure that the questions are relevant to the syllabus and that the paper is fair and balanced throughout. They also ensure that the suggested answers and marking schemes are suitable for publication, check to see that the examination is consistent with any previous examinations, avoid unnecessary overlap with other papers and ensure progression.

Once the paper has been fully considered, it is attempted by the exam sitters (members of the PACC-UK) Council (The Association Council do not expect you to sit a paper that they are not prepared to sit themselves!). The purpose of this is to ensure that the paper can be completed by an average candidate in the time available.

## **Marking examination papers**

To ensure fairness in the marking of papers, the examiners do not know the identity of the candidates. We do not set a target percentage of candidates to be successful at each exam sitting. Your results in each and any paper are totally uninfluenced by any previous exam record, or the performance of other candidates. Examiners pay

particular attention to borderline scripts and the need to ensure consistency between examiners.

### **Notification of Examination Results**

Individual results will be in the form of a grade

Pass

Merit

Distinction

DNC – Did not complete

DNS – Did not sit

The postal results are the only official notification of examination performance.

### **Can I have my exam re-marked?**

You may request a re-marking of your examination; however you will be charged a fee. Your examination paper will be sent to a different marker for re-evaluation. Your request for an examination re-marking must be made in writing within 5 working days of the results being issued. Once the results have been formally published publicly, the examination is considered closed. It can take up to 30 working days to receive the results of your re-marked examination.

### **What if I have a question about a specific examination question?**

All Certificate examination questions will have been through a rigorous review process involving several subject matter experts however, if you are concerned about a specific examination question, you should contact the Association in writing within 5-days of the examination. You should include your name, your examination ID, the paper and question number you are concerned about, as well as specific details about your concern.

We will review your concerns and contact you with our response

### **Appeals Procedure**

There are only two grounds for appeal:

- a material administrative error
- extenuating circumstances

If you appeal on the grounds of material or procedural error, you must if possible provide written evidence of the error. (for example, that the examination was not conducted in accordance with Association's examination regulations, or that some other procedural defect has occurred during the examination such as a fire alarm sounding).

An appeal on grounds of extenuating circumstances will usually only be considered if you first raised the extenuating circumstance with the invigilator prior to the start of the examination (you will have to provide good reasons why you did not raise the circumstance with the invigilator to be considered for an appeal).

Without good reasons, you cannot appeal on grounds of circumstances which you knew about before the examination. An appeal is likely to be rejected if you say that your circumstances were too sensitive to reveal before examination, but you are able to explain them after the examination. You also need to provide authentic documented evidence of your extenuating circumstances. In the event that the documentary evidence of extenuating circumstances relates to an individual or individuals other than yourself (for example, a relative), you should be prepared to provide authentic documentary evidence to verify your connection or relationship to the named individual(s).

You cannot appeal on the grounds that you did not understand or were not aware of the Association's examination regulations. It is your responsibility to ensure you are appropriately informed.

### **Maintenance of Certification**

The Certificate of the Professional Association of Clinical Coders UK has a currency of three years from the date of issue. To maintain your competency you should be aiming to re-take your Certificate every three years thereby ensuring that your currency as a currently competent clinical coder is maintained.

## **Contact Information**

Examination Enquiries:

Examinations Secretary  
Ford Mill  
Oake  
Taunton  
Somerset  
TA4 1BE

General Enquiries  
PACC-UK  
Farringford  
Bankside Close  
Harefield  
Middlesex  
UB9 6TB

Please note the Association will always endeavour to respond to queries as quickly as is possible. However, to keep membership fees at a minimum, the Association is run by the Board and Council members in their own time. The Association does not have employees.