

## **FINAL ASSESSMENT REPORT**

### **Institutional Quality Assurance Program (IQAP) Review**

#### **PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT EDUCATION PROGRAM (UG)**

**Date of Review: April 16 and 17, 2024**

*In accordance with the University Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), this final assessment report provides a synthesis of the external evaluation and the internal response, and assessments of the undergraduate program delivered by the Physician Assistant Education program. This report identifies the significant strengths of the program, together with opportunities for program improvement and enhancement, and it sets out and prioritizes the recommendations that have been selected for implementation.*

*The report includes an Implementation Plan that identifies who will be responsible for approving the recommendations set out in the Final Assessment Report; who will be responsible for providing any resources entailed by those recommendations; any changes in organization, policy or governance that will be necessary to meet the recommendations and who will be responsible for acting on those recommendations; and timelines for acting on and monitoring the implementation of those recommendations.*

#### **Executive Summary of the Review**

In accordance with the Institutional Quality Assurance Process (IQAP), the Faculty of Health Sciences submitted a self-study in March 2024 to the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning to initiate the cyclical program review of the Physician Assistant Education program. The approved self-study presented program descriptions, learning outcomes, and analyses of data provided by the Office of Institutional Research and Analysis.

Two arm's length external reviewers and one internal reviewer were endorsed by both the Vice-Dean, Education and Executive Vice-Dean and Associate Vice-President, Academic of Faculty of Health Sciences, and subsequently selected by the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning. The review team reviewed the self-study documentation and then conducted an in-person site visit on April 16 and 17, 2024. The visit included interviews with the Vice-Provost Teaching and Learning, Deputy Provost, Executive Vice-Dean and Associate Vice-President Academic of Faculty of Health Sciences, the Vice-Dean Education of Faculty of Health Sciences, Assistant Dean, Chairs of the PAEP program, and meetings with groups of current students, faculty, and support staff.

The Assistant Dean and the Program Manager submitted responses to the Reviewers' Report in August 2024. Specific recommendations were discussed, and clarifications and corrections were presented. Follow-up actions and timelines were included.

## **Strengths**

1. **Strong Leadership:** McMaster University's PAEP is noted for its strong leadership, significantly influencing the physician assistant profession at various levels. The program lead is involved in health human resource research, provincial regulation, and secured the first federal grant for the PA field, highlighting the program's role in advancing the profession.
2. **Proven Track Record:** The PAEP has a history of producing successful graduates who take on leadership roles in various settings, including faculty, hospitals, and clinics, as well as at provincial and national levels.
3. **Excellent Support System:** The program is effective in supporting learners, with monthly in-person meetings between faculty and student representatives addressing concerns promptly. Faculty respond quickly to issues involving clinical learners or preceptors, contributing to high learner satisfaction and success.
4. **Commitment to Quality Improvement:** McMaster's PAEP is dedicated to enhancing its program, as shown by the establishment of new Chair positions, an EDI lead, and additional Tutorial Lead roles, reflecting ongoing efforts to maintain and improve quality.

## **Opportunities for Improvement and Enhancement, including appropriateness of resources**

1. **Human Resources:** The PAEP should enhance faculty development by creating full-time faculty roles to support teaching, research, and service, along with benefits for skilled employees. As the program expands and demand for PAs grows, additional faculty and staff will be needed. Increased staffing for admissions is also recommended to manage the high volume of applications and GPA calculations.
2. **Dedicated Faculty Development:** Alongside new Chair positions, there should be investment in faculty development with resources from undergraduate and postgraduate medicine. This will help faculty excel in teaching, research, and service roles by providing the necessary skills and dedicated time.
3. **Enhanced Communication:** The core faculty team should establish monthly meetings with standing agenda items and meeting minutes to improve communication and collaboration, supporting ongoing program initiatives effectively.
4. **Program Transition:** With the evolving academic landscape in Canada, where more Master's level programs are expected, McMaster PAEP should consider transitioning from a Bachelor's to a Master's program to stay competitive.

**Recommendation #1: Academic Human Resources**

- Explore pathways towards full-time unionised faculty roles, with benefits, dedicated time for teaching, research and service opportunities
- Consideration given to transition to the staffing model required by US accreditation standards US ARC-PA that require Full Time Equivalents for core faculty, the Program Director, Academic Director, and the Clinical Director
- With the planned evolution of the curriculum to a graduate level, there is a need to address the needs of the PT faculty (>20) who currently lack post-bachelor's degrees. This is evolving as the core faculty already all have graduate degrees.
- Monitor the workloads and time commitments of the Chairs and should anticipate the potential need to increase time allocations of all Chairs, to better accommodate the workload and minimize the out-of-hours interruptions

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

Many recommendations regarding academic human resources reflect a US-centric approach, in part given the US background of one of our reviewers. In the US, programs are more established and use titles like Program Director, Academic Director, and Clinical Director, which do not align with Ontario's medical education governance structures. At present, program leaders are selected based on their demonstrated competencies both in medical education and in their clinical roles, ascertained through prior contributions, clinical site feedback, participation in training, etc. As noted, core faculty have graduate degrees and we will continue to encourage that, especially with the planned evolution to a graduate level program. It is essential to continue monitoring the workload and time commitment for the new Chair roles, introduced in late 2023/early 2024, especially as the program undergoes significant expansion in September 2024 with a planned doubling of student seats.

Dean's Response:

We will continue to work with the program and monitor these requirements over time. As the new leadership roles are new as of this past year, it is reasonable to have at least a full year of activity before making any further changes. Please note that faculty are not unionized at McMaster. An evolution to a graduate level will require assessment of faculty qualification to ensure alignment with School of Graduate Studies.

**Recommendation #2: Further Support for Faculty Development**

- Dedicated faculty development supported by UGME/PGME resources
- Teaching and learning, scholarship and research, service opportunities are integral to the continued faculty leadership in the PA profession

<p>Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:</p> <p>PAEP is actively engaging with the Faculty Development/Continuing Professional Development Office and collaborating with PA Faculty Development Leads from other institutions, such as the University of Saskatchewan. To support faculty, \$2,000 in professional development funding per program chair will be allocated for Fiscal 2024-25, aimed at enhancing their skills through relevant conferences and training. An annual faculty retreat is planned for Fall 2024 to further support faculty development.</p> <p>Additionally, a faculty development email distribution list will be established to facilitate the sharing of resources, training opportunities, and support, both within McMaster and from external sources relevant to the PA profession.</p>
<p>Dean's Response:</p> <p>Many of the leadership roles are new within the past year. We are satisfied with the program's approaches to enhancing faculty development activities.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #3: Faculty recruitment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effort should be made to recruit qualified and experienced PAs from beyond McMaster including from the national and global pool, to facilitate cross fertilization with diverse educational and professional backgrounds of more experienced PAs</li> </ul>
<p>Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:</p> <p>Job postings for formal roles in the PAEP are centrally managed according to McMaster HR policies and are also distributed nationally through the Canadian PA Association (CAPA). The current pool of tutors, preceptors, and facilitators is diverse, reflecting a wide range of backgrounds. However, since the program is delivered in person, this geographical requirement may limit the pool of potential candidates interested in teaching roles.</p>
<p>Dean's Response:</p> <p>We are happy with the program's response.</p>
<p><b>Recommendation #4: Administrative support during admissions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider increased administrative support during admissions time to alleviate challenges processing large application numbers (specifically around GPA calculations)</li> </ul>
<p>Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:</p> <p>The updated budget model for the PAEP includes an increase in administrative support, allocating 0.5 to 1.0 FTE for admissions to complement the existing staffing. The program will also investigate new methods and technologies to improve manual GPA calculations. Additionally, there will be ongoing collaboration with other Canadian PA education programs and McMaster's health professional programs to address similar challenges in GPA calculation.</p>
<p>Dean's Response:</p> <p>No concerns.</p>

**Recommendation #5: Enhance Faculty Communication**

- Implement monthly faculty meetings with agenda items and meeting minutes
- Facilitate collaboration across roles and support ongoing program initiatives effectively with faculty
- Program leadership should consider exploring regularly scheduled in-service/away days for academic enhancement and increased team building opportunities

**Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:**

The PAEP currently holds monthly Education Committee meetings and will update the Terms of Reference to include new Chair roles, inviting these Chairs to participate in these meetings.

Additionally, the PAEP Curriculum Committee has been reestablished to address roles related to PA curriculum delivery and accreditation. However, the nature of part-time faculty roles, who often remain in full-time clinical positions, makes it challenging to schedule in-service or away days effectively. The program will continue to consult with leaders regarding ways to optimize faculty engagement.

Dean's Response: No concerns here.

**Recommendation #6: Program transition from Bachelor to Master's program**

- Explore transition to a Master program to remain competitive within the PA academic landscape in Canada

**Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:**

Discussions are actively progressing with support from the Faculty of Health Sciences (FHS) to transition the PAEP to a graduate degree program. A Letter of Intent has been submitted to Dr. Steve Hanna, Dean of Graduate Studies, and a Master's proposal is currently under development.

Stakeholder engagement continues to ensure broad input and support throughout the transition process.

**Dean's Response:**

This recommendation is being actively pursued. This will represent a major undertaking and change which will require a number of constituent consultations, including securing funding with government and the university; nonetheless, all current constituents are strongly committed to this change in line with other national movement in this direction.

**Recommendation #7: Enhance communication around clerkship lottery system**

- Reinforce to learners the lottery system rotation allocation and confidentiality of the process to combat perception of unfair distribution of clerkship rotations
- Reinforce to students that last-minute changes are outside program control

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

The program is a 2-year intensive program with first year covering medical sciences and the second year involving full time clinical rotations (clerkship). To support diverse clinical rotations and to enhance clerkship capacity, the program makes use of several clinical sites across Ontario. Many of these sites are outside of the Hamilton area. Program applicants are aware that year 2 clerkship (clinical rotations) will likely involve travel outside of Hamilton. The PAEP ensures that first-year learners are clearly informed about the distribution of clinical rotations and the possibility of unforeseen changes. This information is communicated through the admissions package, covered during orientation week, and addressed in dedicated pre-clerkship information sessions. To ensure fairness in year 2, the program uses a lottery system to place learners outside of Hamilton to not unfairly burden one learner over another. Students will often reach out asking to switch with someone else (having not contacted that other learner) and the program continues to reinforce that last minute changes are outside program control.

Dean's Response:

While we understand learner concerns and expectations, the program makes ample attempts to ensure that learners are adequately informed of the need to travel during the clinical clerkship. We have no concerns about the program response.

**Recommendation #8: Ongoing access to the Career Start Program**

- Efforts need to be made to ensure continued availability for employers

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

In 2010, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care created the "PA Career Start Grant" (PACS) which provides 45K of funding for successful applicants who have hired a new PA graduate from McMaster or the University of Toronto. This is a Ministry initiative to boost the uptake of physician assistants into the Ontario health workforce. This funding also supports rural employment for Ontario PA program graduates. The reviewers recommended ensuring the sustainability of this program, however this is outside of the control of the program. McMaster and the University of Toronto's PA education programs have both advocated to transition away from the career start grant as it is no longer required. In addition, the timing of the PACS no longer aligns well with when graduates enter the health workforce. The PA program will continue to meet with MOH stakeholders regarding PACS but ongoing access is no longer required as the employment market is very stable for PA program graduates.

Dean's Response:

We agree that this is well beyond the scope of the program or university.

**Recommendation #9: Regular clinical site visits**

- Scheduling of regular site visits to address emerging issues with preceptors, further understanding of the PA role and expectations of students, especially in rural rotations

Department's Response and Actions to be Taken:

PAEP will connect with UGME regarding their site visit process to share resources and allocate appropriate budget if necessary to facilitate travel. This has also been integrated into PA program accreditation (which is supported by Equal, Health Professions Accreditation Program, Accreditation Canada).

Dean's Response:

A collaboration between UGME and PAEP will ensure optimal achievement of this recommendation for both programs.

## Implementation Plan

### Summary of the Reviewers' Recommendations with the Department's and Dean's Responses



Recommendation	Action(s) to be Taken	Responsibility for Leading Action	Timeline for Completing Action
<p><b>1. Academic Human Resources</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore pathways towards full-time unionised faculty roles, with benefits, dedicated time for teaching, research and service opportunities</li> <li>Consideration given to transition to the staffing model required by US accreditation standards US ARC-PA that require Full Time Equivalents for core faculty, the Program Director, Academic Director, and the Clinical Director</li> <li>With the planned evolution of the curriculum to a graduate level, there is a need to address the needs of the PT faculty (&gt;20) who currently lack post-bachelor's degrees. This is evolving as the core faculty already all have graduate degrees.</li> <li>Monitor the workloads and time commitments of the Chairs and should anticipate the potential need to increase time allocations of all Chairs, to better accommodate the</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many recommendations regarding academic human resources reflect a US-centric approach, in part given the US background of one of our reviewers. In the US, programs are more established and use titles like Program Director, Academic Director, and Clinical Director, which do not align with Ontario's medical education governance structures. At present, program leaders are selected based on their demonstrated competencies both in medical education and in their clinical roles, ascertained through prior contributions, clinical site feedback, participation in training, etc. As noted, core faculty have graduate degrees and we will continue to encourage that, especially with the planned evolution to a graduate level program. It is essential to continue monitoring the workload and time commitment for the new Chair roles, introduced in late 2023/early 2024, especially as the program undergoes</li> </ul>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows <i>(explore pathways to full-time roles)</i></p> <p>Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira <i>(monitor workload/ time commitment)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fall 2024-Winter 2025: Explore full-time faculty pathways; clarify faculty appointment status</li> <li>Complete full annual review for each Chair position, including workload and time commitments commencing in January 2025</li> </ul>

workload and minimize the out-of- hours interruptions	<p>significant expansion in September 2024 with a planned doubling of student seats.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Continue to monitor workload and time commitment as the Chair roles are new to the program (effective late 2023/early 2024) and the program is undergoing significant expansion in September 2024 (doubling of student seats)</li> </ul>		
<p><b>2. Further support for Faculty Development</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated faculty development supported by UGME/PGME resources</li> <li>Teaching and learning, scholarship and research, service opportunities are integral to the continued faculty leadership in the PA profession</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ongoing discussions with McMaster Faculty Development/Continuing Professional Development Office</li> <li>Collaboration with other PA Faculty Development Leads (i.e., University of Saskatchewan)</li> <li>Allocation of \$2,000 PD funding for each program chair for professional development or conferences related to their role for Fiscal 2024-25</li> <li>Development of an annual faculty retreat (planned for Fall 2024)</li> <li>Creation of a faculty development email distribution list to facilitate sharing of resources, training opportunities, and available supports (both within McMaster and beyond when relevant to the PA profession)</li> </ul>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows</p> <p>Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Faculty Development is an ongoing standing monthly agenda item for the Canadian Federation of Physician Assistant Education (newly formed, National meeting of Canadian PA program leads)</li> <li>Funding allocation – complete (August 2024)</li> <li>Faculty Retreat (planning for late November 2024)</li> <li>Faculty Development email distribution list (completed August 2024)</li> </ul>

<p><b>3. Faculty Recruitment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effort should be made to recruit qualified and experienced PAs from beyond McMaster including from the national and global pool, to facilitate cross fertilization with diverse educational and professional backgrounds of more experienced PAs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Job postings for formal roles are shared centrally per McMaster HR policies and are distributed Nationally through the Canadian PA Association (CAPA)</li> <li>The current pool of tutors/preceptors/facilitators reflects a diverse background of individuals</li> <li>The program is delivered in person which geographically limits who may be interested in teaching roles</li> </ul>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows</p> <p>Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<p>N/A</p> <p>There are currently no active job postings or unfilled positions within the program.</p>
<p><b>4. Administrative support during Admissions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consider increased administrative support during admissions time to alleviate challenges processing large application numbers (specifically around GPA calculations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The new budget model includes increased administrative time (0.5-1.0FTE Administrative Role) to help with admissions (in addition to the current staffing model)</li> <li>The Program will continue to explore other methods/technology that might better support manual GPA calculations</li> <li>Ongoing collaboration and discussion with the other Canadian PA education programs and McMaster health professional programs navigating similar challenges around manual GPA calculations</li> </ul>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows</p> <p>Chair of Admissions, Dr. Michelle MacDonald</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Review in November 2024 (in advance of the September 2025 admissions cycle)</li> <li>Request GPA calculation be added to the Canadian Federation of Physician Assistant Education committee's agenda for the October 2024 meeting</li> </ul>

<p><b>5. Enhance Faculty Communication</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement monthly faculty meetings with agenda items and meeting minutes</li> <li>• Facilitate collaboration across roles and support ongoing program initiatives effectively with faculty</li> <li>• Program leadership should consider exploring regularly scheduled in-service/away days for academic enhancement and increased team building opportunities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program already supports monthly scheduled Education Committee meetings</li> <li>• Terms of References for the Education Committee will be updated to include new Chair roles (including invitations for Chairs to participate in monthly Education Committee meetings)</li> <li>• Reestablishment of the PAEP Curriculum Committee (now in place for Chair roles and tutor/preceptor/facilitator roles related to PA curriculum delivery and accreditation)</li> <li>• The nature of part time faculty roles (recognizing faculty choose to stay in full time clinical roles) is not particularly conducive to scheduled in- service/away days</li> </ul>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows</p> <p>Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meetings resume September 2025 (Education Committee, Curriculum Committee)</li> <li>• Update ToR for Education Committee (August 2024)</li> </ul>
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<p><b>6. Program transition from Bachelor to Master's program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore transition to a Master program to remain competitive within the PA academic landscape in Canada</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussions are underway and there is FHS support to transition the program to a graduate degree. A Letter of intent was submitted to Dr. Steve Hanna, Dean, Graduate Studies</li> <li>• Master's proposal is under development</li> <li>• Stakeholder engagement is ongoing</li> </ul>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows</p> <p>Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Letter of intent was submitted to Graduate Studies</li> <li>• Meetings pending in early fall to discuss next steps to transition to a graduate level program</li> <li>• Transition is expected to take 1-2 years (aiming for the start of a new MPAS program effective September 2026 pending Ministry and University approval)</li> </ul>
<p><b>7. Enhance communication around clerkship lottery system</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reinforce to learners the lottery system rotation allocation and confidentiality of the process to combat perception of unfair distribution of clerkship rotations</li> <li>• Reinforce to students that last-minute changes are outside program control</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No action required. This is covered in multiple documents and clerkship specific information sessions. Program continues to be very explicit with year 1 learners regarding the distribution of clinical rotations and potential for unforeseen changes</li> <li>• This information is included in the PAEP admissions package, discussed during the orientation week, and discussed during dedicated pre-clerkship information sessions.</li> </ul>	<p>Chair of Clerkship, Sahand Ensafi</p> <p>Chair of Clinical Education, Nancy Davis</p> <p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows</p> <p>Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<p>N/A</p>

<p><b>8. Ongoing access to the Career Start Program</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Efforts need to be made to ensure continued availability for employers</li> </ul>	<p>No action required. The PAEP meets regularly with the Ministry of Health's health workforce branch, however this is outside of program control and is government mandated. The PA program continues to gather employer feedback.</p>	<p>Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows  Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<p>N/A</p>
<p><b>9. Regular clinical site visits</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scheduling of regular site visits to address emerging issues with preceptors, further understanding of the PA role and expectations of students, especially in rural rotations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PAEP to connect with UGME regarding their site visit process to share resources</li> <li>• Travel budget to be allocated to cover expenses related to clinical site visits to be scheduled on a regular basis</li> </ul>	<p>Chair of Clerkship, Sahand Ensafi  Assistant Dean, Dr. Kristen Burrows Program Manager, Lavinia Carreira</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meet with Associate Dean, UGME, Dr. Matt Sibbald (Fall 2024)</li> <li>• Meet with MacCARE Assistant Dean, Dr. Mike Lee (Fall 2024)</li> <li>• Initiate site visit process and bring forward to Education Committee for approval (by January 2025)</li> </ul>

### Quality Assurance Committee Recommendation

McMaster's Quality Assurance Committee (QAC) reviewed the above documentation at the November 28, 2024, meeting. The committee recommends that the **Physician Assistant Education** undergraduate program should follow the regular course of action with an 18-month progress report and subsequent full external cyclical review to be conducted no later than eight years after the start of the last review.