

A Historic Milestone: PIOA's First Exit Examinations at the National Referral Hospital, Honiara, Solomon Islands



- Held from Monday 21 September to Friday 25 September 2026

Acknowledgements

National Referral Hospital / Ministry of Health Solomon Islands

Orthopaedic Department

External Examiners: Richard Lander (NZ), Andreas Loeffler (Australia)

National University of Samoa (NUS)

Pacific Islands Orthopaedic Association (PIOA)

Executive Summary

The first Pacific Islands Orthopaedic Association (PIOA) Exit Examinations held at the National Referral Hospital (NRH) in Honiara, Solomon Islands, marked a major milestone for specialist orthopaedic training in the Pacific. Conducted from Monday 21 September to Friday 25 September 2026, the examinations were completed successfully over the scheduled five-day period and demonstrated that a structured, comprehensive, and regionally relevant exit assessment involving 47 different case scenarios could be delivered effectively at NRH.

Four candidates from Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji were assessed through written papers, operative viva sessions, clinical viva examinations, patient-based assessments, and computer-based imaging and investigation cases. These assessment formats enabled examiners to evaluate candidates' clinical knowledge, decision-making, technical understanding, communication, and readiness for independent specialist practice.

The examinations strengthened regional training standards by supporting consistency, quality assurance, and professional benchmarking within the PIOA training pathway. They also enhanced local examination capacity by demonstrating the ability of NRH and the Solomon Islands Orthopaedic Department to host and support a high-level regional specialist examination.

The event also improved collaboration between PIOA, the National University of Samoa, the Ministry of Health Solomon Islands, NRH, local clinical teams, and external examiners from New Zealand and Australia. Importantly, it recognised the value of Pacific-led specialist training systems that respond to local service needs while maintaining strong professional and academic standards. Three of the four candidates successfully passed the final PIOA Exit Examinations, reinforcing the significance of the Honiara examinations for sustainable orthopaedic workforce development across the Pacific.

Introduction

The inaugural Pacific Islands Orthopaedic Association Exit Examinations held at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara, Solomon Islands, marked a historic achievement for orthopaedic training in the Pacific. Conducted from Monday 21 September to Friday 25 September 2026, the examinations represented an important milestone in the development of structured specialist training, assessment, and certification within the region.

Hosting the first Exit Examinations at NRH reflected the growing capacity and commitment of the Solomon Islands health system to support advanced surgical education. It also highlighted the

important partnership between the National Referral Hospital, the Ministry of Health, the Orthopaedic Department, the National University of Samoa, and PIOA in strengthening regional training pathways. The involvement of external examiners from New Zealand and Australia further supported a rigorous, fair, and professionally benchmarked assessment process.

This report provides an overview of the first PIOA Exit Examinations in Honiara, acknowledges the institutions and individuals who contributed to their success, and reflects on the significance of this achievement for the future of orthopaedic training across the Pacific.

Background

The Honiara examinations represented the seventh PIOA Exit Examinations since the association's establishment in 2013. Over the past 13 years, PIOA has graduated 15 orthopaedic surgeons. Through regional partnerships and structured training pathways, PIOA has helped strengthen the capacity of Pacific Island countries to train and retain specialist orthopaedic surgeons who understand the clinical needs, resources, and realities of their local health systems.

The establishment of an Exit Examination process represents a key component of this training pathway. It provides a formal assessment of trainees who have completed the required clinical experience and learning outcomes, ensuring that they are ready to progress as independent orthopaedic specialists. For trainees, trainers, hospitals, and regional training institutions, the examination process offers an important mechanism for maintaining quality, consistency, and accountability in specialist education.

Holding the first PIOA Exit Examinations at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara was therefore a significant achievement for the Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific region. It demonstrated the capacity of NRH and the local Orthopaedic Department to host a high-level regional examination, while also showcasing the value of collaboration between local health services, regional academic partners, and experienced external examiners.

This background provides the foundation for understanding why the inaugural examinations in Honiara were more than an assessment event. They represented a major step in building sustainable specialist training systems within the Pacific and strengthening the long-term capability of orthopaedic services in the region.

Objectives

The key objectives of the inaugural PIOA Exit Examinations in Honiara were to:

- Provide a formal and structured assessment process for orthopaedic trainees who had completed the required training pathway.
- Evaluate trainees' clinical knowledge, decision-making, technical understanding, and readiness for independent specialist practice.
- Strengthen the quality, consistency, and credibility of orthopaedic training and certification across the Pacific region.
- Demonstrate the capacity of the National Referral Hospital and the Solomon Islands Orthopaedic Department to host a regional specialist examination.
- Promote collaboration between PIOA, NUS, local health institutions, and external examiners in supporting sustainable specialist workforce development.
- Highlight the importance of regional training systems that respond to the health needs and service realities of Pacific Island countries.

Examination Programme

The inaugural PIOA Exit Examinations were conducted over five days, from Monday 21 September to Friday 25 September 2026, at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara. The programme was designed to provide a comprehensive and structured assessment of candidates through a combination of orientation, clinical examinations, case-based discussions, viva sessions, examiner deliberations, and final reporting.

The examination activities were supported by local faculty, hospital staff, administrative teams, and external examiners. Their combined contribution ensured that the programme was delivered in an organised, transparent, and professionally rigorous manner. The timetable below outlines the examination schedule for the week, during which candidates were assessed across 47 different cases.

Day	Programme Focus
Monday 21 September, 9:30 am–11:30 am	Written Paper 1 – Basic Science, Oncology, and Systemic Diseases (10 questions)
Tuesday 22 September, 9:30 am–11:30 am	Written Paper 2 – Clinical Cases (10 questions)
Wednesday 23 September (Whole Day)	Morning session: Operative Viva (5 computer cases – 30 minutes) Afternoon session: Clinical Vivas, including clinical examination of 6 patients
Thursday 24 September (Whole Day)	Morning session: Operative Viva (5 computer cases – 30 minutes) Afternoon session: Clinical Vivas, including clinical examination of 6 patients
Friday 25 September	Morning session: Computer Cases on Imaging and Investigation (5 computer cases – 30 minutes) Final examiner deliberations, confirmation of results, feedback discussions, closing proceedings, and acknowledgement of candidates, examiners, hospital staff, and partner institutions.

Participants and Examiners

The PIOA Exit Examinations brought together four candidates: Dr Robert Faataga from Samoa, Dr Kevin Lapu from Papua New Guinea, Dr Paul Lomavatu from Fiji, and Dr Manoa Valeniyasana from Fiji. Their participation reflected the collaborative nature of specialist training in the Pacific and the shared commitment to strengthening orthopaedic education across the region.

The candidates were assessed through written papers, operative viva sessions, clinical viva examinations, patient-based assessments, and computer-based imaging and investigation cases. These assessment formats allowed examiners to evaluate the candidates' knowledge, clinical reasoning, decision-making, communication, and readiness for independent orthopaedic practice.

The external examining team included Richard Lander from New Zealand and Andreas Loeffler from Australia. Their involvement provided independent oversight, supported consistency in the assessment process, and helped ensure that the examinations were conducted to a high professional standard.

Local support was provided by the National Referral Hospital, the Ministry of Health Solomon Islands, and the Orthopaedic Department. Their logistical, clinical, and administrative assistance was essential in preparing examination venues, coordinating patients and clinical stations, supporting candidates and examiners, and ensuring that the programme ran smoothly throughout the week.

The National University of Samoa and PIOA also played important roles in supporting the academic and regional training framework for the examinations. Together, these participants and institutions contributed to a professionally coordinated assessment process and to the broader goal of developing a sustainable orthopaedic workforce for the Pacific.



Examination candidates: Paul, Kevin, Robert, and Manoa



Examiners: Richard Lander (New Zealand), Andreas Loeffler (Australia), Stephen Kodovaru (Solomon Islands), and Shaun Mauiliu (Samoa)

Key Outcomes

The successful delivery of the first PIOA Exit Examinations in Honiara produced several important outcomes for the candidates, the National Referral Hospital, the Solomon Islands health system, and the wider Pacific orthopaedic training community.

- **Successful completion of a regional specialist examination:** The examinations were completed over the scheduled five-day period, demonstrating that a structured and comprehensive exit assessment involving 47 different case scenarios could be delivered successfully at NRH.
- **Assessment of candidate readiness:** Four candidates from Samoa, Papua New Guinea, and Fiji were assessed through written papers, operative viva sessions, clinical viva examinations, patient-based assessments, and computer-based imaging and investigation cases.
- **Strengthened regional training standards:** The examination process supported consistency, quality assurance, and professional benchmarking within the PIOA training pathway.
- **Enhanced local examination capacity:** The event demonstrated the ability of the National Referral Hospital and the Solomon Islands Orthopaedic Department to host and support a high-level regional examination.
- **Improved collaboration across institutions:** The examinations strengthened partnerships between PIOA, the National University of Samoa (NUS), the Ministry of Health Solomon Islands, NRH, local clinical teams, and external examiners from New Zealand and Australia.
- **Recognition of Pacific-led specialist training:** The event highlighted the importance of developing training systems within the Pacific that are responsive to local service needs while maintaining strong professional and academic standards.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

As the first PIOA Exit Examinations hosted in Honiara, the programme provided valuable experience in planning and delivering a regional specialist assessment within a Pacific Island health setting. While the examinations were completed successfully, several practical challenges were identified during the week.

- **Logistical coordination:** Organising examination venues, candidate movement, patient availability, equipment, and daily schedules required close communication between the organising team, hospital staff, examiners, and candidates.
- **Patient and case preparation:** Ensuring an appropriate range of clinical cases for assessment required careful planning, early identification of suitable patients, and ongoing coordination with clinical teams.
- **Time management:** The examination programme was intensive, with multiple written, viva, clinical, and computer-based assessment components delivered within one week. Maintaining timing and flow was therefore essential.
- **Administrative support:** Clear documentation, candidate instructions, examiner materials, scoring sheets, and result processes were important for maintaining transparency and consistency throughout the examination.
- **Communication between teams:** Regular briefings and updates were necessary to ensure that all participants understood the programme, assessment requirements, and daily arrangements.

Several important lessons emerged from the inaugural examination week. Early planning, clear allocation of responsibilities, timely communication with patients and candidates, and detailed preparation of examination materials are essential for future examinations. The experience also showed the value of involving local clinicians and administrative staff from the beginning, as their knowledge of the hospital environment and patient pathways was critical to the smooth delivery of the programme.

For future PIOA Exit Examinations, it would be beneficial to develop a standard examination checklist, confirm cases and venues well in advance, provide written briefings for all participants, and maintain a clear communication pathway between the organising committee, examiners, hospital departments, and candidates. These measures would help build on the success of the Honiara examinations and further strengthen the delivery of regional specialist assessments in Pacific Island settings.

Conclusion

The first PIOA Exit Examinations held at the National Referral Hospital in Honiara marked a historic milestone for orthopaedic training in the Solomon Islands and the wider Pacific region. The successful completion of the five-day examination programme demonstrated that a structured, rigorous, and regionally relevant specialist assessment can be delivered effectively within a Pacific Island health setting.

After an intensive week of examinations, three of the four candidates successfully completed and passed the final PIOA Exit Examinations. Congratulations are extended to Dr Paul Lomavatu from Fiji, Dr Manoa Valeniyasana from Fiji, and Dr Robert Faataga from Samoa. PIOA now has 18 graduates.

Beyond the assessment of candidates, the Honiara examinations strengthened local examination capacity, reinforced regional training standards, and highlighted the importance of Pacific-led pathways for developing specialist orthopaedic services. The lessons learned from this inaugural event will provide a valuable foundation for future PIOA Exit Examinations and for continued improvements in planning, coordination, and delivery.

Overall, the inaugural PIOA Exit Examinations in Honiara represented a significant achievement and a strong step forward for sustainable orthopaedic workforce development across the Pacific. The event stands as an important example of regional collaboration, local leadership, and shared commitment to improving surgical care for Pacific communities.



Examiners with the 3 successful candidates.