



POLICY FOR OPTOMETRISTS RETURNING TO PRACTICE IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

1. Policy purpose and background

- 1.1. The Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board (ODOB) is required under the *Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003* (HPCA Act) to ensure that optometrists are competent and fit to practice. Section 27 of the HPCA Act requires that the ODOB apply increased scrutiny when issuing annual practising certificates (APC) to practitioners who have not worked as an optometrist or held a practising certificate in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) within the last 3 years.
- 1.2. The ODOB strives to ensure that the protection of the public is achieved, while also ensuring that unwarranted barriers are not imposed on optometrists who have been out of practice in NZ.
- 1.3. This policy revokes and replaces the ODOB's *Policy on optometrists rejoining the workforce (2009)*.

2. The scope of this policy

- 2.1. This policy applies to applicants wishing to return to practice in NZ after an absence of 3 or more years from practice or holding a practising certificate in NZ.
- 2.2. The policy applies to both applicants who remain on the ODOB register as non-practising, and those who have been removed from the ODOB register and since requested restoration.
- 2.3. The policy applies to practitioners who have not been working, as well as those who have been working as an optometrist overseas.
- 2.4. This policy outlines, in general terms, how the Board/ PSC will apply the above sections of the Act. The Board will consider each application on a case-by-case basis and there may be rare circumstances when its decision is at variance to this policy.

3. Acronyms and abbreviations

- 3.1. The following acronyms and abbreviations are used in this policy:

Annual Practising Certificate	APC
Aotearoa New Zealand	NZ
Competency in Optometry Examination	COE
Continuing professional development	CPD
Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003	HPCA Act
Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal	HPDT
Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand	OCANZ
Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board	ODOB
Professional Standards Committee	PSC
The governing Board of the Optometrist and Dispensing Opticians Board.	Board

4. Definitions and interpretation

4.1. The following definitions and interpretations are used in this policy:

<p>Diagnostic Pharmaceutical Agents (DPAs) recertification programme</p>	<p>Diagnostic Pharmaceutical Agents (DPAs) a technique necessary to assist in examination of the eye and diagnosis of ocular disease. Those that do not hold qualifications or did not complete the recertification requirements (outlined below) to demonstrate DPA competence, cannot practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.</p> <p>Qualifications that did include DPA competence were (not limited to):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> BOptom from the University of Auckland, conferred from 1991. BOptom from the University of Melbourne, conferred from 1984. BOptom from the University of New South Wales, conferred from 1986. BAppSc (Optometry) from the Queensland University of Technology, conferred from 1989. Certificate in Ocular Pharmacology from the University of Auckland. An endorsement from the Department of Optometry and Vision Science, University of Auckland. A pass in the Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand (OCANZ) examination. <p>From 2004 until 31 March 2010, the Board ran a recertification programme requiring all optometrists who did not hold certain qualifications to demonstrate competence in the use of DPAs.</p> <p>Practitioners needing to meet didactic requirements were required to (at their own expense) satisfactorily complete the OCANZ Competency in Optometry Examination (COE).</p> <p>Practitioners needing to meet practical requirements were required to (at their own expense):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Satisfactorily complete the OCANZ Competency in Optometry examination, <u>or</u> satisfactory demonstration of competence in the use of gonioscopy, binocular indirect ophthalmoscopy, and slit lamp fundoscopy, through a completed declaration from a suitably registered and practising specialist ophthalmologist. <p>Practitioners that needed to meet both didactic and practical requirements needed to complete both the above.</p> <p>Exemptions for meeting didactic requirements were provided to some optometrists that held membership with the British College of Optometrists, if they made a written exemption request.</p>
<p>Optometrist</p>	<p>A health practitioner with recognised qualifications registered with the ODOB, under the Optometrist, Provisional Optometrist or Specialist Optometrist scope of practice. An optometrist provides evidence-based comprehensive eye health and vision care in a professional, culturally safe, and ethical manner, in accordance with the HPCA Act and ODOB standards. Optometrists conduct eye examinations, diagnose eye disease or other conditions, and prescribe optical appliances or medications for defects in sight or diseases of the eyes. An optometrist must be registered with the ODOB and hold a current practising certificate to practise in NZ. Optometrists are required to maintain their competence through a recertification programme to be allowed to keep practising.</p>
<p>Returning to practice in NZ</p>	<p>A practitioner who was registered with the ODOB, and held at least one valid practising certificate while registered, but have not been practising for more than 3 years should consider this policy if they wish to return to practice. While registration may be restored, in order to practice, the practitioner's</p>

	application for a practising certificate can be considered by the Registrar (or delegate), the Professional Standards Committee or Board. Additional requirements may be necessitated prior to approval, or a condition on their scope may be imposed, as set out in this policy.
Scope of practice	As defined in the HPCA Act which states a "scope of practice: a) means any health service that forms part of a health profession and that is for the time being described under section 11, and b) in relation to a health practitioner of that profession, means one or more of such health services that the practitioner is, under an authorisation granted under section 21, permitted to perform, subject to any conditions for the time being imposed by the responsible authority."

5. Restoration to the Register

- 5.1. Practitioners who have previously been registered with the ODOB, and their registration was cancelled at their own request (s142 of HPCA Act), or their name was removed from the Register under section 144 revision of the register processes, can apply to restore their name to the Register.
- 5.2. Restoration to the register will allow 'registration' status. However, practitioners must also apply for an APC before they may practise.
- 5.3. If a practitioner is applying for restoration more than 5 years since removal from the register, they must supply:
 - 5.3.1. Proof of identity.
 - 5.3.2. Certified copy of original qualifications used or initial registration.
 - 5.3.3. Any additional relevant qualifications gained since initial registration, for example completion of a therapeutic course.
- 5.4. Practitioners who were removed from the Register prior to 18 September 2004, ruling must submit a new application for registration.
- 5.5. Practitioners who had their registration cancelled due to Health Practitioners Disciplinary Tribunal (HPDT) ruling may re-apply for registration if the HPDT ruling allows. A new registration application is required.
- 5.6. Previous conditions on scope of practice will be re-activated if the restoration is approved. For example, if a practitioner had a condition prohibiting prescribing (due to age of qualification) prior to removal, this same condition will be reinstated. If the practitioner considers the condition is no longer applicable, they may request this be reviewed with provision of evidence for their request.
- 5.7. Where a practitioner's qualification did not include the competence in the use Diagnostic Pharmaceutical Agents (DPAs), they may not practise in Aotearoa New Zealand. They must supply evidence of having completed the DPA recertification programme requirements and/ or written proof of an exemption approval from ODOB for completing the didactic component.
- 5.8. Where a practitioner deregistered with the ODOB, but kept their registration with Ahpra, and wish to return to practice in NZ, they have to apply via TTMR application (and not a restoration to the register application).

6. Applications for annual practising certificates (APC) from optometrists returning to the workforce

- 6.1. Section 27 of the HPCA Act requires that if an optometrist has not held an APC of a kind sought by the applicant, has not lawfully practised the profession within the 3 years immediately preceding the date of application, or there are concerns that they do not meet the required standard of competence, the

Registrar/ Deputy Registrar must submit the application to the Board's Professional Standards Committee (PSC), under delegation, for its consideration. This includes situations where an optometrist:

- 6.1.1. has continued to reside in Aotearoa New Zealand but has not practised in the previous three or more years, or
- 6.1.2. has been practising in a jurisdiction that does not regulate the practice of optometry comparable to NZ and Australia in the past 3 or more years.
- 6.2. Under sections 28 and 29 of the Act the Board may decline an application or include conditions in the optometrist's scope of practice to be satisfied that the optometrist meets the required standard of competence.
- 6.3. Conditions applied under section 29 of the HPCA Act may vary according to the time the optometrist has been out of practice. The optometrist must be able to supply to the ODOB a declaration advising of the last period of work within the scope of practice applied for.

7. Considerations and requirements for optometrists returning to practice in NZ, when applying for an APC

- 7.1. The main factor determining the requirements for an optometrist returning to practice, is the period (years) they were not practising within the profession in NZ.
 - 7.1.1. For an optometrist who has been out of the workforce in NZ for less than 3 years**
 - a) Where no other considerations under section 27 of the Act are relevant, the APC will be issued as if the optometrist holds a current APC. The optometrist will be required to fulfil the usual requirements of the continuing professional development (CPD) recertification programme and may also be required to undergo a self-audit. Any CPD deficit, audit requirement or other outstanding requirement that was in place when the previous APC expired will also need to be fulfilled.
 - b) The number of CPD credits an optometrist is required to obtain by the end of their CPD cycle depends on the month that the first APC is issued during the current recertification cycle. For detailed information on credit requirements where the first APC is issued part way through the recertification cycle, please refer to the Board's *Recertification programme for continuing professional development of optometrists*.
 - 7.1.2. For an optometrist who has been out of the workforce in NZ between 3 and 6 years**
 - a) The Board may require the optometrist to fulfil any one or more of the following conditions:
 - i. Complete the full two-year CPD credit requirement relevant to the optometrist's scope of practice in the first full year back in practice, or in a time frame specified by the Board; AND/OR
 - ii. Complete a self-audit during the course of the first APC period; AND/OR
 - iii. Work under the clinical supervision of a Board nominated optometrist for a period of one month or for another period nominated by the Board. The Board nominated optometrist must be registered for at least 5 years, be in good standing with the Board for this period, in at least an equivalent scope of practice (i.e. with therapeutic prescribing) and hold a current APC.
 - 7.1.3. For an optometrist who has been out of the workforce in NZ between 6 and 9 years**
 - a) The Board may require the optometrist to fulfil one or more of the following conditions:
 - i. complete a course and/or examination, or additional training (re-training) as required by the Board. This may be in the form of:

- the successful completion and pass of the final year of the current Optometry degree at University of Auckland (UoA). This will include a successful pass of the final year optometry practical examination¹ specified by the UoA and Board (if available and agreed by both the UoA and the ODOB).
 - a period of upskilling or theoretical updating via an educational programme as set out by the Board.
 - complete the ODOB-approved therapeutics training; AND/OR
- ii. complete the full 2-year CPD credit requirement in the first full year back in practice; AND/OR
 - iii. work under the clinical supervision of a Board nominated optometrist for a period of one month or other period nominated by the Board. The Board nominated optometrist must be registered for at least 5 years, be in good standing with the Board for the same period in at least an equivalent scope of practice (i.e. with therapeutic prescribing), and hold a current APC.

7.1.4. For an optometrist who has been out of the workforce more than 9 years

- a) The Board may require the optometrist to fulfil one or more of the following conditions:
 - i. successfully complete and pass the final year of the Optometry degree at University of Auckland (UoA). This will include a successful pass of the final year optometry practical examination² specified by the UoA and Board (if available and agreed by both the UoA and the ODOB), and/ or
 - ii. pass the OCANZ Competency in Optometry Examination (COE); AND/OR

7.2. Other requirements as set out by the Board:

- 7.2.1. The Board will consider and assess the practitioner’s application on a case-by-case basis.
- 7.2.2. The Board will assess the practitioner in the areas of clinical competence, ethical conduct, and cultural competence. See Appendix 1 for the matrix used to assess areas for consideration when considering an application for **restoration/ return to practice**.

8. Costs

- 8.1. Any costs involved with training or upskilling, including undergoing refresher courses and a performance assessment, if and when required, will be met by the applicant.

9. Related legislation, policies, and procedures

- 9.1. *Recertification programme for continuing professional development of optometrists.*

Revision history			
Version	Changes	Approval date	Next review
v1	Drafted as a result of the ODOB’s 2022/2023 transformation programme that included a full review of key policies.	January 2024	2027

¹ A type of Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).

² A type of Objective Structured Clinical Examination (OSCE).

APPENDIX 1

MATRIX FOR ASSESSMENT OF RESTORATION/ RETURN TO PRACTICE

This matrix is used to assess areas for consideration when considering an application for restoration/ return to practice. The matrix is not an exhaustive list, but is intended as an aid to ensure that all relevant aspects are considered when making a decision. Users are expected to exercise critical thinking when utilising the list.

Education/ History	
Qualification	What prescribed qualification does the applicant hold? When was the qualification received? Is the applicant an NZ or overseas graduate?
Postgraduate study	Has the applicant undertaken any further study? Is the study relevant to the optometry practice in NZ?
Experience	Has the applicant practiced in NZ? For what time period?
ODOB history	Does the applicant have any history of complaints, disciplinary, competence issues or non-compliance with the ODOB?
Conditions held	Did/ does the applicant have any conditions on their scope of practice or previous APCs which remain relevant?
Break from practice	
Activities undertaken while away from practice	What activities relevant to the optometry practice has the applicant been undertaking? Has the practitioner-maintained links to the profession while away?
Length of time	How long since the applicant has last practiced as an optometrist?
Practising overseas (if relevant)	What country/ies did the applicant work in? Is optometry regulated in this country? For what duration did they practise overseas? Were there any competence or disciplinary issues identified?
Study, research or teaching activities (if any)	Are the study, research or teaching activities undertaken by the applicant relevant to practice as an optometrist in NZ now?
Professional development	Has the applicant undertaken any continuing professional development (CPD) whilst non-practising with the ODOB?
Preparation for return	
Activities undertaken to prepare for return	What preparation has the applicant undertaken to return to practice? (e.g., Seminar attendance, communication with other practitioners, independent study)
Area of practice (if known)	Is the practitioner intending to return to the same or different area of practice (if known)
Competence	Does the practitioner meet the competence requirements? Were any areas of concern identified?
Fitness	Does the applicant meet the fitness to practice requirements as per the fitness policy? Were any areas of concern identified?
Other	Any other relevant considerations?