



RECERTIFICATION PROGRAMME FOR CONTINUING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF OPTOMETRISTS

Background

The principal purpose of the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (Act) is to protect public health and safety by ensuring health practitioners are competent and fit to practise. The Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board (the Board) is charged with ensuring that optometrists are competent and fit to practise when they apply for registration and on an ongoing basis.

The Act requires the Board to have evidence that each optometrist is competent in the following aspects of practice before it can issue an annual practising certificate (APC):

- clinical competence
- cultural competence
- ethical conduct.

What is a recertification programme?

A recertification programme is a programme set or recognised by the Board to ensure that optometrists are competent to practise within their scope of practice. The Board has set the following recertification programme under the provisions of section 41 of the Act.

Policy

The Board's view is that one of the key elements contributing to the maintenance of an individual optometrist's competence is participation in CPD activities. For the purposes of ensuring that optometrists are competent to practise, the Board has historically required all practising optometrists to:

- obtain the required number of CPD credits on a biennial basis;
- complete a CPD deficit audit in the event that the required number of CPD credits have not been obtained.

Where there was no other information to indicate the contrary, compliance with the Board's CPD requirements, combined with the satisfactory completion of a CPD deficit or random audit if required, has been regarded as sufficient to assure the Board that the optometrist is competent to practise.

The Board has adopted these CPD requirements, under section 41(3)(f) of the Act, as a CPD recertification programme for all optometrists who hold a current practising certificate. The full requirements of the CPD recertification programme are set out below.

If an optometrist does not satisfy the biennial requirements of the recertification programme, the Board may consider taking steps under section 43 of the Act including limiting the optometrist's scope of practice, or, in some circumstances, suspending the optometrist's registration.

Compliance with the requirements of the recertification programme will also be relevant to renewal of an optometrist's APC. The Board must not decide to issue an APC unless it is satisfied that the applicant meets the required standard of competence. Failure to satisfy the requirements of the recertification programme may be viewed by the Board as a failure to maintain the required standard of competence, and this may impact on the Board's willingness or otherwise to issue an APC.

The recertification programme is an ongoing requirement for all optometrists holding a practising certificate.

Recertification programme

CPD requirements

All practising optometrists are required to obtain a minimum of 40 CPD credits every two years to 31 October, including 20 clinical diagnostic (CD) credits. Optometrists are expected to acquire these credits at appropriate intervals throughout the two year cycle, rather than in a brief timeframe within the cycle.

An educational activity will attract CD credits when it primarily deals with the differential diagnosis and management of sight or health threatening conditions that carry the risk of serious or permanent harm.

The Board expects optometrists to choose a wide variety of CPD activities relevant to their individual practice, and covering:

- clinical competence
- cultural competence
- ethical conduct.

For the recertification cycle commencing 1 November 2020, a new requirement has been introduced which requires optometrists to undertake a minimum of 1 CPD credit per cycle (and a maximum of 5 credits) on a cultural CPD activity and a minimum of 1 CPD credit per cycle (and a maximum of 5 credits) on an ethical CPD activity.

Credit requirements for optometrists who obtain an APC part way through a recertification cycle

The number of CPD credits an optometrist is required to obtain by 31 October depends on the month that the first APC is issued. CPD credits required at the time of APC issue are:

Month APC issued (Year 1)	Total credits required	CD credits required
November - April	40	20
May – October	30	15
Month APC issued (Year 2)	Credits required	CD credits required
November	20	10
December	20	10
January	18	9
February	16	8
March	14	7
April	12	6
May	10	5
June	8	4
July	6	3

August	4	2
September	2	1
October	0	0

CD credits can be used towards the general CPD credit requirements if not used as CD credits. Optometrists may not be credited for the same CPD activity if repeated within two years. At the start of each new CPD cycle (on 1 November every even-numbered year), any excess CD credits will be converted to general credits, and any excess general credits will then be carried over to the next cycle at a rate of 50 percent, to a maximum of 45 credits.

Recording CPD credits

Optometrists record and manage their CPD via the Board's online practitioner portal. This is the same portal used for the annual renewal of their practising status and is activated upon registration with the Board.

For information on how to use the online CPD portal, please refer to the *Step-By-Step CPD Portal Guide* available on the Competence Assurance page of the Board's website.

Enquiries about CPD-recording should be directed to the Board's Recertification Officer whose contact details can be found on the Board's website.

For information on the accreditation of activities for CPD credits, please refer to the Board's *Policy on Accreditation of Continuing Professional Development Activities for Optometrists*.

CPD Deficit Audit requirements

Where an optometrist has failed to demonstrate that he/she has obtained the required number of CPD credits, the optometrist will be required to provide the Board with a proposed plan for addressing the deficit, and to complete a CPD Deficit Audit. This audit differs from a random self audit that an optometrist may be asked to complete from time to time. For information on random self audits, please refer to the Board's website.

CPD Deficit Audit - Process

Optometrists required to complete a CPD Deficit Audit are asked by the Board to complete a questionnaire about their practice, to provide examples of cases they have managed, and to demonstrate their understanding of and compliance with the Board's:

- *Standards of Clinical Competence*
- *Standards of Cultural Competence*
- *Standards of Ethical Conduct.*

The information in the CPD Deficit Audit is assessed by the Board to identify whether there are any areas of practice indicating wider competence concerns, and/or to assure the Board of the optometrist's competence. The Board will contact the optometrist if further information is required, or if the Board seeks an explanation on one or more parts of the CPD Deficit Audit.

CPD Deficit Audit results

If the Board makes a preliminary finding that the CPD Deficit Audit results indicate wider concerns about the optometrist's competence, the Board will write to the optometrist with the particulars of its concerns, and invite the optometrist to provide any further information they deem relevant for the Board's consideration. Such information may include but is not limited to:

- examples of cases managed to demonstrate that the area of concern is an exception to the optometrist's usual practice
- further information on the reasons that the optometrist chose the particular course of action in the matter of concern
- information on steps taken by the optometrist to make changes to their practice as a result of the issues raised by the Board
- details of any recent education the optometrist has undertaken in the area(s) of concern.

Upon receipt and consideration of the required information, the Board will make a final decision on whether the optometrist has met the requirements of the CPD recertification programme, having regard to the totality of the information relating to the optometrist, including but not limited to:

- the size of the deficit in CPD credits
- the adequacy of the optometrist's proposed plan to address the CPD deficit
- the CPD Deficit Audit results
- whether the optometrist was in CPD deficit at the completion of the previous recertification cycle
- any other information submitted by the optometrist.

Notification of satisfactory compliance with Recertification programme

Where the Board finds that an optometrist has satisfied the requirements of the CPD recertification programme, the optometrist will be advised in writing within 10 working days of the Board's decision.

Failure to satisfy recertification requirements

Where an optometrist fails to demonstrate that he/she has met the requirements of the recertification programme, the Board may make an order (in accordance with section 43 of the Act) to:

- alter the optometrist's scope of practice:
 - by changing any health services that the optometrist is permitted to perform; or
 - by including any condition or conditions that the Board considers appropriate;
- suspend the optometrist's registration.

Conditions that may be included in the optometrist's scope of practice under section 43 include, but are not limited to:

- a requirement to undertake education in the area(s) of concern, as specified by the Board
- a requirement to work under the clinical supervision of a Board nominated optometrist for a period specified by the Board. The Board nominated optometrist must have been registered for at least two years in at least an equivalent scope of practice and must hold a current APC.

Before deciding whether any of the above orders are to be made, the Board will give the optometrist:

- notice of the reasons that it is considering making such an order
- a copy of any information on which the Board is relying in its proposal
- the opportunity to make written submissions and/or be heard on the matter.

Upon receipt and consideration of submissions (if any) the Board will make a final decision on whether to make any orders under section 43. Any orders made remain in effect until the optometrist has satisfied the requirements of the relevant biennial cycle of the CPD recertification programme.

Refusal to complete the recertification programme

If an optometrist refuses to complete the requirements of the recertification programme, including, where necessary, the completion of a CPD Deficit Audit in the event that the required number of CPD credits have not been obtained, or a Random Audit has been requested, this will be deemed by the Board to be a failure to satisfy the requirements of the recertification programme. In those circumstances, the Board may consider making an order under section 43 of the Act.

Exemptions

Under section 41(5) of the Act, the Board may exempt any practitioner or class of practitioner from all or any of the requirements of a recertification programme. The Board has exempted all optometrists who do not hold a current APC (i.e. non practising optometrists) from all requirements of the recertification programme.

On a case by case basis, the Board will consider individual applications for small point reductions, or in very rare circumstances, a full exemption from the CPD requirements of the recertification programme where the optometrist can provide evidence of extenuating circumstances limiting the optometrist's ability to meet the requirements over the previous two years. The Board expects that such point reductions or exemptions would only be granted in exceptional circumstances, but may include such circumstances as parental leave, serious illness or natural disaster (e.g. earthquakes)

In the event that an individual practitioner needs to apply for an exemption, this should be done as soon as the practitioner is aware that he/she may have difficulty meeting requirements. This can be done at any point during the recertification cycle, or by 30 November following the end of the two year cycle (31 October every even-numbered year).

NB: In some cases, the Board may require provision of evidence to support an application, e.g. a medical certificate.

Part time practice

There is no exemption or reduction in requirements for optometrists in part time employment. All optometrists who hold a current APC must demonstrate that they meet the required standard of competence, regardless of the number of hours they work.

Issuing of annual practising certificates

Under section 29 of the Act the Board must not issue an optometrist with an APC unless it is satisfied that the optometrist meets the required standard of competence. As noted above, compliance with the requirements of the recertification programme will be relevant to renewal of an optometrist's APC. Failure to satisfy the requirements of the recertification programme may be viewed by the Board as a failure to maintain the required standard of competence.

Individual optometrists completing a biennial CPD cycle will not be issued with a practising certificate until they have demonstrated that they have satisfied the requirements of the recertification programme.

Where an optometrist has obtained the required number of CPD credits, and where there are no other matters that may impact on the issuing of an APC, a practising certificate will be issued within one month of the application being received by the Board. Where an optometrist is required to complete a CPD Deficit or Random Audit, that optometrist's application for an APC will be referred to the Board for its consideration.

Other provisions

Competence Review

Under section 36(4) of the Act, the Board may at any time review the competence of a practising optometrist, whether or not it has reason to believe that the optometrist's competence may be

deficient. Where concerns about an optometrist's competence are identified by the Board at any point in the recertification cycle the Board may require the optometrist to undertake a competence review in addition to the requirements of the recertification programme.

Risk of Harm

Under section 35 of the Act, whenever the Board has reason to believe that the practice of an optometrist may pose a risk of harm to the public, the Board must promptly give written notice to the ACC, the Director-General of Health, the Health and Disability Commissioner and any person who, to the Board's knowledge, employs the optometrist. The Board will meet its obligations in this regard if, during the recertification process, it forms the view that an optometrist's practice may pose a risk of harm to the public.

Related policies:

- Statement on continuing professional development
- Policy on accreditation of continuing professional development activities for optometrists
- Policy on optometrists rejoining the workforce
- Policy on risk of harm
- Supervision guidelines

*Approved by the Board: 6 October 2010
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The effect of the recertification programme on the APC renewal process

