

Chair's Report

Just over a year has passed since the introduction of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme and I am confident that most of the transition difficulties experienced by some of you have been resolved.

AHPRA will start sending out registration renewal notices later in September. The quickest and easiest way for you to renew your registration is through [online services on the AHPRA website](#).

If you haven't already done so register your email with AHPRA. AHPRA will send you registration renewal reminders directly to this address and the Board will send you a [newsletter](#) a couple of times a year to keep you updated on the registration requirements for optometrists and other matters that the Board is considering.

The Board has over recent months endeavoured to communicate with as many registrants as possible about issues that concern you by attending the Optometrists Association conferences and ODMA. This has been a great opportunity for Board members and AHPRA staff to listen to your concerns directly.

The most common questions have been around [CPD](#) and recency of practice requirements. This newsletter is focusing on these two issues. I would like to encourage all optometrists to carefully plan their CPD programs to continually develop their skills in key areas of interest and to ensure that they maximise knowledge in all areas of our rapidly developing and changing profession. It is every professional's responsibility to their patients to maintain currency and competency across all scopes of their practice.

The newsletter also focuses on the [current consultation](#) that the Board has open on proposed changes that will see therapeutic qualifications become a requirement for general registration. The Board believes that these changes will prepare the profession to meet the increasing primary health care needs of the Australian population. These matters are further explained in this newsletter and I encourage you to communicate your views to the Board to enable us to consider all points of view on the matter.

Colin Waldron
Chair

Registration renewal Some key points

- All optometrists are due to renew their registration by 30 November 2011.
- Individual practitioners are responsible for renewing their registration on time. The job of the Board – with AHPRA – is to make this as simple and straightforward as possible.
- AHPRA will start sending renewal notices out later in September
- Optometrists in ACT and WA who renewed their registration on 30 June are due to renew on 30 November also. They only paid for 5 months up until 30 November not the full year.
- The easiest and quickest way to renew the registration is online at www.ahpra.gov.au
- You need to make a series of declarations to say you have met requirements for CPD, recency of practice, criminal history and professional indemnity insurance and other matters during the previous registration period (i.e. from 1 December 2010 to 30 November 2011)
- Make sure you read the information carefully on the renewal form to help you answer the questions. You should also check the Board's registration standards and guidelines on the Board's website to help you. (www.optometryboard.gov.au)
- It is so very important that you make true declarations as the Board will commence audits in 2012 that will ask optometrists to provide evidence to support the declaration (the next newsletter will focus on this audit process)
- If you declare that you have not met the requirements don't worry. Your application for renewal will be reviewed by AHPRA and the Board. You are able to keep practising while your application is reviewed



Renewing your registration

1. Know your registration renewal date: 30 November

From 30 November 2011 onwards, the annual renewal date for all optometrists is 30 November.

Look out for your reminder letter or email from AHPRA six to eight weeks before you are due to renew, but remember: renewing on time is your responsibility.

2. Get in line for reminders: provide your contact details

Make sure AHPRA has your email address so you can receive important information such as registration reminders, changes to policies and guidelines, and notifications about current consultations.

To update your contact details go to www.ahpra.gov.au/login.aspx (or follow the link on the top right hand corner of the AHPRA home page) and use your AHPRA user ID and pass code to log in. Then follow the prompts.

If you do not have your user ID, go to www.ahpra.gov.au/about-ahpra/contact-us/make-an-enquiry.aspx to complete an online enquiry form. Select user ID as the enquiry type and you will be contacted with your user ID and password.

3. Renew online, on time

- The easiest way to renew your registration is online and on time at www.optometryboard.gov.au. If you miss the deadline (and official late period) you will need to submit a new application for registration if you want to keep practising.

Recency of Practice

One of the registration standards that the Board has developed is for recency of practice. Under the standard every optometrist is required to complete 150 hours of practice a year or 450 hours over three years. The registration standard contains the definition of practice. Practice isn't restricted to direct clinical care.

The standard applies to all optometrists renewing their general registration. It also applies in circumstances if an optometrist was previously registered but let their registration lapse, those moving from non-practising registration back to general registration and those optometrists who have had a break from practice.

How many hours do I need?

When renewing their registration optometrists will need to declare that they have met the 150 hrs minimum practice hours from 1 December 2010 to 30 November 2011.

What if I haven't met the hours?

If an optometrist hasn't completed the minimum number of hours they will need to tick NO to the question on the renewal form.

There is space on the form to write down why they haven't met the hours. If an optometrist has practiced throughout the year but has not completed the required minimum requirements then they should tick 'no' to the question and provide the number of hours that they have completed in the space provided. The Board will then consider the application for renewal.

The length of time the optometrist is away from any practice at all will determine what other information they need to attach with the renewal application form. This is described in requirement #3 of the registration standard.

1. For breaks of practice of up to twelve months: no additional requirements or information to attach.
2. For breaks of practice of between one and three years: attach evidence of completion of the 12 months' quota of CPD relevant to the area of practice when next renewing registration.
3. For breaks greater than three years: attach a plan for professional development and for re-entry to practice

Any applications for renewal where the optometrist declares they haven't met the requirements because of a break in practice of more than twelve months will be considered by the Board.

Where can I get help?

The Board has published an information sheet on its website to help optometrists formulate a professional development and re-entry to practice plan. This and the registration standard provide the necessary background on how the Board will make any decisions on these matters. If there are still questions optometrists should complete the online enquiry form on the AHPRA website.

General vs non-practising registration

If an optometrist is going to have an extended break from practice (or is going to practise overseas for an extended time) they may consider moving to non-practising registration. Optometrists who hold non-practising registration do not need to meet the CPD, professional indemnity insurance requirements or any recency of practice requirements when they renew their non-practising registration. They will need to meet these requirements though if they move back to general registration. All the application forms to move to non-practising registration or back to general registration are available on the Board's website.

Overseas practice

Optometrists may wish to practise overseas for a long or short period of time. Any practice that an optometrist undertakes in one of the countries listed in the Board's English language skills registration standard can count towards the 150 hours annual recency of practice requirement. This includes Canada, New Zealand, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, United Kingdom and the United States of America.

Case study

combines recency of practice and CPD

I'm a 35 year old optometrist and am pregnant with my second child. I plan to not practise for at least twelve months whilst on parental leave. What will I have to do when I want to start practising again?

What you need to do will depend on how long a break from practice. You will need to still renew your registration by 30 November every year. When you renew you need to declare if you have met the recency of practice hours. There is space on the form to outline your own circumstances if you haven't met the requirements.

If your break from practice is up to 12 months declare this on the form when you renew. You do not have to complete any CPD requirements for this length of time you are not practising. If you commence parental leave during a registration period (1 December – 30 November) you should complete the pro rata requirement of practice hours and CPD points for the time you are practising.

If your break is between one and three years you will need to attach evidence that you have completed the 12 months quota of CPD relevant to your area of practice when you next renew your registration.

If you do not practise for over three years you will need to develop a professional development and re-entry to practice plan for the Board to consider before you start practising again.

An extended break from practice doesn't necessarily grant you a break from CPD. The Board's CPD registration standard allow for an exemption from the requirements if you don't practise for up to a year. The [CPD guidelines](#) ask that you need to let the Board know this. You can do this by emailing the Board at CPD_optometry@ahpra.gov.au. Once the exemption is confirmed by the Board then you can tick 'yes' to the CPD question on the renewal form as the exemption does not need further assessment.

If you have a break from practice longer than 12 months and you hold general registration you will still need to meet the CPD and professional indemnity insurance requirements each year. If you are going to have an extended break you may want to consider moving to non-practising registration.

Continuing Professional Development

CPD requirements have been a part of professional optometry practice for a number of years through Optometrists Association Australia. With the introduction of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, the completion of the CPD requirements is now linked to an optometrist's registration with the Board.

Consumers of optometry services have the right to expect that optometrists will provide services in a safe, competent, ethical and contemporary manner that meets best practice standards. CPD is an important component in the continued provision of safe and effective services.

The [requirements](#) are outlined in the Board's registration standard. The continuing professional development policy describes the Board's intent in setting the requirements. The Guidelines provide endorsed and non-endorsed optometrists with information on how to meet the requirements of the standard and information for providers on the accreditation of activities.

Can I meet the requirements over two registration periods?

You can now. The Board has amended its [CPD policy](#) to allow for the accumulation of the CPD points over a two year period (two registration renewals). The registration period for optometry runs from 1 December to 30 November. When renewing their registration optometrists will be able to declare that they have either met the CPD requirements in the registration period since 30 November of the prior year *or* they have a plan in place to complete two years requirements by the end of the next registration period. This means optometrists must accumulate 80 points over no more than two registration periods starting from 1 December 2010. This declaration is subject to audit by the Board. This change applies to the upcoming 2011 registration renewal for optometrists. The Board will be consulting on proposed amendments to its CPD registration standard in 2012 that will seek to allow for this provision for future years.

Accredited and non-accredited activities

The Board has outlined a very broad education framework through which optometrists can choose a range of activities to meet the CPD requirements. The requirements can be met through face-to-face clinical learning, self-directed clinical learning and nonclinical learning. There are minimum requirements for face to face activity.

The framework contained in the registration standard and guidelines outlines the types of activities that fall under these broader categories.

Optometrists are able to meet the CPD requirements by undertaking accredited or non-accredited CPD activities.

Accredited CPD activities are those that have been approved for the purposes of this standard as meeting the criteria in Appendix A of the [Guidelines](#).

A list of accredited activities with the associated points is published on [Optometrists Association Australia's website](#) under the CPD Calendar. This calendar is available in the public section of the Association's website. Accredited activities will be advertised with the number of points available for completing the activity. The Board has developed a logo to indicate the number of points available under a CPD activity for providers to use in different publications. This logo will replace the OAA CPD logo. This logo will appear on accredited activities in coming months.

If an optometrist undertakes an accredited CPD activity then the provider will forward the optometrist's details to Optometrists Association Australia to be added to member's CPD record. This record keeping service is a membership service of the Association and not the responsibility of the Board. Optometrists still have a responsibility to ensure that their own records are correct.

Optometrists may choose to undertake **non-accredited activities** that may sit under any of the CPD groups. An optometrist undertaking non-accredited activities is responsible for allocating the points applicable to this activity using the criteria listed in Table 1 of the Registration Standard. This may include activity from any of the listed activity groups listed including face to face. There is a limit on the number of points that can be claimed for some non-accredited activities. These are listed in Group 6.

When deciding what CPD activities to undertake, optometrists first need to consider their personal CPD needs and desired outcomes and undertake CPD activities to meet these needs. *You do not need to get prior approval* from the Board before undertaking non-accredited activities however you need to maintain records of any activities in accordance with the registration standard requirements. The Board has published some templates to help optometrists keep track of their CPD activities – see the **CPD section** of the [Board's website](#).

You do not need to provide evidence that you have completed the activities when you renew your registration – you will only ever need to show this to the Board in the event of a random audit by the Board. This will commence in 2012.

If in the event of an audit, any of the non-accredited activities undertaken in good faith would be assessed. If any deficiencies were identified in this assessment then the Board would work with you to develop a plan to meet these gaps. This would not have any effect on the optometrist's ability to practise.

Exemptions

The Board's [CPD registration standard and guidelines](#) provide for exemptions from CPD in certain circumstances.

Optometrists who completed their professional entry degree within one year of the upcoming renewal are exempt from CPD requirements. Though this exemption is available the Board would strongly encourage newly graduated optometrists to undertake CPD in the first year to assist them in the transition to professional practice. Optometrists who this applies to tick 'yes' to the CPD question on the renewal form as the exemption does not need further assessment.

Optometrists who registered in Australia for less than 12 months are required to complete a pro-rata quota of CPD points. Optometrists who this applies to tick 'yes' to the CPD question on the renewal form as the exemption does not need further assessment. In the event of an audit these optometrists would need to provide evidence to support the CPD activities completed.

For optometrists who have an absence from practice for up to 12 months then (e.g. parental leave, or prolonged illness) there is no CPD requirement. These optometrists should let the Board know *before they renew their registration* that they are having this absence from practice by emailing CPD_optometry@ahpra.gov.au. Once the exemption is confirmed by the Board then these optometrists can tick 'yes' to the CPD question on the renewal form as the exemption does not need further assessment.

Item 2.2 of the [Guidelines](#) outlines the process for applying for exemption for hardship and other circumstances.

The types of exceptional circumstances that may justify the granting of an exemption to the CPD requirements will be limited and would only be considered where there is compelling evidence that the circumstances have created a significant obstacle to the practitioner's ability to complete the Board's CPD requirements. Each case would be considered on its merits and depending on the particular circumstances, the Board may allow a full or partial exemption.

As a general principle, financial hardship or remote location are not adequate grounds for a partial exemption.

It is important that before any exemption is made that you consider alternatives including the capacity to accumulate the points over two registration periods and undertaking the full range of activities available to meet the requirements.

For consideration of any exemptions in the first instance, please email CPD_optometry@ahpra.gov.au.

All applications for exemption must be made within time for consideration before renewal of registration. They should reach the Board no later than 1 October.

This application will be considered by the Board and once confirmed the optometrist can tick 'yes' to the CPD question on the renewal form as the exemption does not need further assessment.

Information

The Board has developed a [CPD section](#) on its website. This contains all the relevant CPD documents including a set of FAQs. These were revised and reformatted in August. Optometrists should review this information before contacting the AHPRA or the Board for further information.

Consultation on requirements for therapeutic qualifications for general registration

The Optometry Board of Australia has released a consultation paper outlining the Board's proposed changes to requirements for initial general registration i.e. first-time applications for general registration. Practitioners and community members are encouraged to provide feedback on the consultation paper which is published on the

Board's website under 'current consultations'.
(www.optometryboard.gov.au).

This is the second phase of a consultation that began in February 2011, and is open to written feedback by organisations or individuals until close of business on **Monday 3 October 2011**.

The consultation paper is seeking responses to a proposed change in initial registration requirements whereby all applicants will need to be eligible for a scheduled medicines endorsement.

It is proposed that the changes will come into effect from 1 December 2014 when all graduates of approved programs of study will be therapeutically qualified. The changes would at this time only apply to initial applications for general registration and not renewal of general registration.

After considering the submissions received, the Board will forward the proposed changes to the Australian Health Workforce Ministerial Council for approval.

How would these proposed changes affect optometrists?

From 2014

There would be no change for optometrists who already hold an endorsement for scheduled medicines. It is proposed that optometrists without an endorsement would have a notation on their registration stating that they are not qualified for endorsement for scheduled medicines.

All graduates from approved programs of study will be qualified to apply for general registration and endorsement for scheduled medicines.

Overseas-trained optometrists, on passing the Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand's (OCANZ) Competency in Optometry Examination, would be able to apply for limited registration for post-graduate training or supervised practice with the requirement that they complete an approved therapeutic qualification within 2 years.

From 2019

Optometrists renewing their general registration without an approved therapeutic qualification at this time would have a condition that they need to complete the qualification by 2029.

New applications from overseas-trained optometrists would be required to pass the Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand's (OCANZ) Competency in Optometry examination which will by this time incorporate an assessment of competence for therapeutic practice.

By 2029

On current indications, the Board expects that all applicants for initial applications and applications for renewal of general registration would be eligible for to prescribe scheduled medicines.

The consultation document provides the background to these proposals as well as details on how to make a submission.

Who's who in the world of optometry?

There has been confusion in the minds of some optometrists with the move to national registration over who to contact for different questions.

The list below outlines the key functions of the each of the main organisations.

Optometry Board of Australia

www.optometryboard.gov.au

- Registers optometrists so that they can practise the profession and to protect the public
- Sets the registration requirements and standards for all optometrist
- Functions are defined under the National Law

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency

www.ahpra.gov.au

- Manages all registration and notification matters on behalf of the Board and nine other National Boards
- Manages the registration renewal process for optometry
- *Optometrists who have a query about their registration should contact AHPRA*

OCANZ

The Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand

www.ocanz.org

- Accredits programs of study that lead to registration or endorsement
- Submits accredited programs of study to the Board for approval so graduates can be registered or endorsed
- Assesses overseas trained optometrists who wish to apply for registration in Australia

OAA

(www.optometrists.asn.au)

- Is the peak professional body for the optometrists
- It represents optometrists and their interests to government and other bodies
- It develops and shares information regarding
 - vision standards
 - Medicare guidelines
 - practice management
 - financial, marketing and legal services
- *Optometrists should contact the OAA on professional matters not related to their registration*

Registration renewal: what happens if you miss the date?

| At or before 30 November | |
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| <p>Renewing on time: You can keep practising as long as AHPRA has received your application by 30 Nov. You can check your application has been received at www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Renewal-Received-Confirmation.aspx.</p> | <p>You pay the renewal <u>fee</u> only</p> |
| 1 December to 30 December | |
| <p>Renewing during the late period: You can renew your registration during the late period but a late fee applies. You can keep practising as long as AHPRA has received your application by 30 December 2011. Please note that all State and Territory offices will be closed on Monday 26 December, Tuesday 27 December 2011 and Monday 2 January 2012 for public holidays.</p> | <p>You pay the <u>renewal fee + the late fee</u></p> |
| 1 Jan to 31 January | |
| <p>Lapsed registration (failure to renew on time or during the late period) Once the late period has expired (that is, one month from the registration expiry date), your name will be removed from the register and you will no longer be able to practise. To keep practising, you must lodge a new application for registration. A <u>Fast Track application process</u> is available for four weeks after expiry of the late period, but additional fees apply. The fast-track process is not available for practitioners who have not previously held registration in the National Scheme, and is a streamlined process of re-registration, which takes approximately two weeks. You will not be able to practise until your registration has been successfully processed.</p> | <p>You pay the <u>renewal fee + the late fee + the fast-track processing fee</u>.</p> |
| 1 February onwards | |
| <p>Registering from scratch: From 1 February onwards you will need to lodge a new application for registration. <u>Processing times</u> for new applications depends on many factors, including whether the documentation submitted by the applicant is complete and whether the applicant makes disclosures relating to health or criminal history. You may not practise in Australia until your registration has been successfully processed, and your name has been published on the National Register of Practitioners at www.ahpra.gov.au.</p> | <p>You pay the <u>application fee + registration fee</u>.</p> |

Updated website launched: easier navigation and search

The Board has, updated its website to make it easier to navigate and find important information.

The Board's website features clearer menus and intuitive architecture, better access to online services and more information tailored to the optometry profession. The new site also includes information about the National Scheme and links to AHPRA.

Online services

The Board's website is your best information resource on becoming and being a registered optometrist. Sometimes there are changes to policies and guidelines which affect your profession, so check back regularly to make sure you understand your obligations.

The website includes information on:

- applying for registration for the first time
- renewing registration (see overleaf)
- meeting the registration requirements
- continuing professional development (CPD)
- English language skills
- professional indemnity insurance
- recency of practice
- criminal history
- endorsement for scheduled medicines
- viewing your entry on the National Register and other online services
- what to do if your renewal of registration is late or lapsed

www.optometryboard.gov.au

Contacting the Board

The Optometry Board of Australia and AHPRA may be contacted by telephone on 1300 419 495. More information on the Board is available at www.optometryboard.gov.au and more information on AHPRA is available at www.ahpra.gov.au. An online enquiry form is available on both websites under Contact Us. Mail correspondence can be addressed to: Colin Waldron, Chair, Optometry Board of Australia, GPO Box 9958, Melbourne Vic 3001.

