



RANZCO

The Royal Australian
and New Zealand
College of Ophthalmologists

Flexible Training Policy

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1. Introduction

1.1 College Statement

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO) provides specialist ophthalmological training to trainees through the Vocational Training Program (VTP). The objective of the VTP is to produce a specialist ophthalmologist who, on completion of training, is equipped to undertake safe, autonomous, comprehensive, general ophthalmology practice.

RANZCO recognises the importance of providing flexible training options and targeted support to help our trainees adapt to changes in their lives. While recognising that the employer is the final decision-maker in determining whether and how a trainee is able to undertake flexible training and, acknowledging the obligations to other authorities such as the MCNZ and AHPRA, the College is committed to supporting trainees in specified circumstances to train and work flexibly at varying stages of their training.

Our application of this Policy is underpinned by our College vision and mission statements and these values inform our approach. A key aim is to ensure we keep our Ophthalmologist trainees in training and to support them in progressing through their specialist training following any approved periods of absence.

1.2 Policy adoption

The Flexible Training Policy governs all part-time and interrupted training decisions undertaken by the College on and from the date of adoption of this Policy by the Board unless and until formally revoked, amended or repealed.

The Policy replaces the Part-Time and Interrupted Training Policy which will cease operation on **the commencement date of this policy**.

2. Purpose and scope

2.1 Policy purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to establish the leave and interrupted training allowances and provisions of the RANZCO VTP. The provisions have been developed to maintain flexibility whilst ensuring trainees are able to meet their education and clinical requirements.

2.2 Scope

This Policy is designed for trainees seeking to train less than full-time and for those seeking to take leave from their training for more than 12 weeks in a training year. The Policy facilitates trainees to continue their training in a flexible manner for a set period of time.

Trainees will still need to fulfil their five-year VTP within 12 years from the commencement of training.

2.3 Objectives

The Policy sets out provisions for part-time training and interruptions to training and where extensions will be granted, and the application processes and conditions of each.

The policy also outlines the conditions for reinstatement to VTP, including any additional formative assessments which may be required.

3. Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy:

Approved leave means a period of leave approved by RANZCO pursuant to this Policy.

Trainee means a medical practitioner enrolled in the RANZCO Vocational Training Program (VTP) and is not a Temporary Training Registrar (TTR).

Extenuating and unforeseen circumstances are considered on a case by case basis but require circumstances which were unforeseen, outside the trainee's control and which can be shown to have a direct and significant impact on their ability to complete the VTP requirements.

Statutory leave includes parental, sick and carer's leave granted pursuant to the trainee's workplace entitlements under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Commonwealth). **Full-time** training comprises a 38-hour minimum working week, over a minimum of five days per week. Where a training week is not 5 days of at least 38 hours, this will be stipulated by the training centre accreditation process.

Part-time training is calculated pro-rata against the definition of full-time training and must comprise a 19-hour minimum working week, over a minimum of two and a half days per week. **Training year:** satisfactory completion of 12 months accredited training for:

- a) 1st and 2nd year of Basic training
- b) 1st and 2nd year of Advanced training
- c) Final year

College means The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO).

Board means College or RANZCO Board.

Censor-in-Chief (CIC) means the person appointed to oversee all aspects of training and assessment conducted as part of the RANZCO VTP.

Director of Training (DoT) means the person who has overall responsibility for the structure and quality of training in a hospital or department, in line with the College policies and specific arrangements within their training network, and for providing trainees with information and feedback on their progress.

Qualification and Education Committee (QEC) means the governing body chaired by the CIC responsible to the College Board for education and training policy and program management.

Trainee Progression Committee means the sub-committee of the QEC whose purpose is to provide expert advice and support to the CIC on trainee progression matters.

Network QEC means the education network of College Fellows in the region, led by the Network QEC Chair who is also a member of QEC, responsible for monitoring the progress of local trainees. The Network QEC participate in the accreditation of posts for training and are represented on the select committees of hospital employing authorities.

Standards for Training means the documents which outline the Standards required in ophthalmologist education and training. RANZCO is recognised by the Australian Medical Council (AMC) and Medical Council of New Zealand (MCNZ), the profession and the community as the body responsible for developing and maintaining the Standards of training for ophthalmologists in Australia and New Zealand.

4. Pathway requirements

4.1 Duration and structure

RANZCO trainees undertake five years of full-time training under the VTP. The training is divided into three stages: two years of basic training, two years of advanced training and a final year.

The five-year VTP must be completed within 12 years from the commencement of training. Trainees must carefully consider the implications of approaching the maximum limit on training time as detailed in the RANZCO Trainee in Difficulty Policy.

4.2 Training settings and employers

State and territory governments and public health services are the providers of the majority of funded training places. Trainees are usually employees of the state health system. Employers must ensure that access to leave entitlements such as annual leave, personal/carer's leave is maintained for the duration of the placement.

While arrangements will differ between the states and territories, the cost of annual leave for a trainee participating in a VTP rotation is usually met by the hospital employing at the time leave commences. Annual leave credits are usually carried forward from one hospital to another (when rotating between hospitals) and are usually not to accumulate to more than two years' entitlement.

4.3 Extended statutory leave

All leave is subject to the approval of the employing authority.

Prolonged periods away from active training may have a detrimental effect on trainee progress. Therefore, some periods of leave may be sufficient that the trainee should be regarded as having interrupted their training. Trainees must apply for interruption of training if they wish to take more than 12 training weeks in total within one training year.

Please also refer to 5.1 (General principles).

This provision is inclusive of, but not limited to, combined annual, personal, compassionate, parental and carer's and study leave. The Censor-in-Chief (CIC) will likely require that the trainee make up training time for accumulated leave exceeding 12 weeks within one training year.

5. Flexible Training Policy

5.1 General principles

Flexible training options are available for trainees who are unable to train full-time or need to interrupt their training for a consecutive period of more than 28 days. This includes considerations for those who have been affected by extenuating and unforeseen circumstances.

Applications for leave may be made at any time during a trainee's participation on the VTP. Each case is evaluated on its merits and subject to the conditions outlined in this Policy. **Trainees must contact the College prior to taking leave** to discuss their options with each leave request prospectively approved and individually assessed.

While the college may approve in principle and be in a position to advocate on behalf of the trainee, it is an employer's decision regarding granting the leave and keeping the job open.

Trainees who undertake part-time training, or who interrupt their training, will be required to adhere to the training pathway and the timing requirements for progression through the VTP. During periods of approved leave for those who interrupt their training, the trainee's VTP requirements are fully suspended.

Trainees may apply to extend their period of leave but must do so only at the end of the approved leave. Trainees unable to resume participation in the VTP at the end of their approved leave will be terminated from the VTP. Trainees will have the option to re-apply at a later date.

5.2 Maintaining currency

The College recognises that training may need to be interrupted or undertaken on a part-time basis for certain circumstances. Trainees can apply for flexible training at any time and for any duration provided they adhere to the time limits to complete training as specified at 4.1.

In order to maintain the currency and integrity of training, a number of conditions apply:

- a) When returning to training after an interruption of equal to or greater than three continuous months, trainees may be required to complete additional formative assessments.
- b) If returning after an interruption of equal to or greater than 12 continuous months, trainees will be required to complete additional periods of training or other requirements.
- c) Rules of progression for trainees are set out in the RANZCO Trainee Progression Policy.
- d) Returning to training is subject to firstly meeting the currency requirements of APHRA or MCNZ, whichever authority is applicable for the individual's medical registration.

5.3 Unreported absence

Trainees who take leave from training without the prior approval of, or notification to, the College will be considered as having abandoned their post. The College will provide 10 days' notice to the trainee to attend a meeting to consider their continued participation in the VTP.

Should the trainee not respond, or not attend the meeting, the trainee will be reviewed in accordance with the RANZCO Trainee Performance Support Policy.

5.4 Leave types and allowances

5.4.1 Part-Time Training

Part-time training is a period of training undertaken on less than a full-time basis.

The College allows trainees to undertake part-time training capped at a minimum of 0.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) or a training commitment of at least 50% of a full-time trainee in any one training year.

5.4.2 Interrupted Training

Interrupted training is any absence (full-time) from an approved training position in excess of the leave allowed (12 training weeks in one training year). Periods of interrupted training must be taken in three-month blocks.

Any trainee exceeding 12 weeks of leave in one training year is required to make up this deficit with additional training time. Trainees will need to demonstrate currency of skills before returning to active training (see Section 7.1).

5.4.3 Parental Leave

The College is supportive of trainees wishing to take parental leave.

Trainees are eligible to take up to 12 months of parental leave per child - maternity, paternity or adoptive leave - at any time during their training.

5.4.4 Training

The College is supportive of trainees seeking variations in training to undertake dual training, to undertake work in another country or to pursue an academic degree or some other activity as approved by the CIC.

Trainees wishing to do any of these are able to complete deferred training for a maximum of 12 months at a time.

For all leave types (5.4.1-5.4.4 above), trainees will still need to fulfil their five-year VTP within 12 years from the commencement of training.

5.5 Status report

To determine the trainee's curriculum and experience requirements upon resumption of training, *inter alia* taking account of continuity and currency of surgical and clinical skills and knowledge, RANZCO requires the regional DoT and the relevant RANZCO Education Manager to prepare a formal training status report on the trainee – immediately before commencement of the period of part-time training or of interruption, and then again when training is resumed.

6. Guidance

6.1 Trainee responsibilities

A trainee seeking part-time or interrupted training should make a formal proposal to the regional Chair of the Qualification and Education Committee (QEC), as well as to their employer. Based on the responses received, the trainee should refine their proposal before formally applying to RANZCO.

Trainees should be aware that it is their own responsibility to negotiate with the employer(s) to achieve both an acceptable training timetable for themselves and an adequate cover for the service delivery requirements of the employer(s) to whom they are contracted. Realistic fractions of leave may make this task easier.

Trainees should also note that their contract with an employer may be for a specified time period. Employers are generally under no obligation to extend such a contract for a trainee who has undertaken part-time or interrupted training; RANZCO will help facilitate securing an accredited training post for such a trainee on return. However, RANZCO does not employ trainees so it cannot create a post without hospital support.

6.2 Application process

The application to RANZCO should be submitted well in advance or at least six months prior to the proposed commencement of the date of effect, and must include (as applicable):

- a) The date of commencement of part-time or interrupted training
- b) The expected date of returning to full-time training
- c) Details of the clinical and surgical timetable for the time in part-time training, including which sessions will be supervised
- d) A letter from the employer supporting part-time or interrupted employment.

6.3 Conditions for part-time training

Applications for part-time training must have a training commitment of at least 50% of a full-time trainee in any one training year. Requests for part-time training will only be approved in blocks of six months.

Trainees undertaking part-time training are required to:

- a) Meet RANZCO Standards for Training, including adherence to the required number of supervised surgical and clinical sessions, on an FTE pro-rata basis.
- b) Remain a Trainee Associate of RANZCO and pay the full Trainee Associate fee.
- c) Pay pro-rata training fees in accordance with the time spent in part-time training.
- d) Are permitted to sit the RACE exam at the beginning of their second year of advanced training as per the Trainee Progression Policy, acknowledging that means their second year of advanced training time, not their second calendar year.

6.4 Conditions for interrupted training

Trainees who wish to interrupt their training must apply at least six months prior to the commencement of the training year. Trainees applying for interruption due to medical or compassionate reasons may do so at any time if supported by medical evidence. Interruption will not be granted if the trainee has received a notice of dismissal.

Skills and confidence can be lost during periods without training, so trainees will be required to have their skills assessed by the network when they return to work in accordance with 5.2 of this Policy.

During periods of approved leave for those who interrupt their training, the trainee:

- a) Remains a Trainee Associate of RANZCO and pays the full Trainee Associate fee.
- b) Is not required to pay training fees whilst on interrupted training.
- c) Is not permitted to sit examinations whilst on interrupted training with the exception of parental leave.
- d) Has their VTP requirements fully suspended.

7. Reinstatement

7.1 Returning from leave

A trainee who seeks to return to training from a period of absence equal to or greater than three months will require a currency assessment as outlined below. Any trainee deemed not current after three months of oversight will be referred to the Trainee Progression Committee. The Trainee Progression Committee and the relevant RANZCO Education Manager will:

- a) Review the applicant's training status on leaving.
- b) Consider the continuity and relevance of the applicant's medical and surgical experience during the period away from full RANZCO training.
- c) Fully inform themselves of the circumstances through consultation with all relevant parties, including educators and employers in the trainee's former RANZCO Network.
- d) Make a recommendation to the CIC. This is to include recognition of any training and examinations already completed, the period and nature of any further training and experience required (including any examinations the trainee is required to pass) and the outcome of any currency assessment periods (if required).

7.2 Currency assessment

Assessment of an individual's fitness to return to training is fundamentally a risk management process. This process carefully considers all aspects of patient safety whilst assessing what specific training or additional support (if any) is required before the trainee can safely continue to progress through the VTP. However, the individual must first meet the currency requirements of APHRA or MCNZ, whichever authority is applicable for the individual's medical registration.

The DoT, training employer and RANZCO Education Manager may set conditions that require trainees to demonstrate currency through the satisfactory completion of a period of oversight in order to monitor, review and assess trainee currency.

At the end of the oversight period, the trainee's supervisor and DoT, in conjunction with the training employer and RANZCO Education Manager will meet to review the performance demonstrated by the trainee. A further period of oversight may be required.

The trainee may be able to proactively plan this assessment period prior to returning to the training position.

Only when the trainee is considered to have achieved currency can the trainee return to the VTP without additional oversight.

8. Appeals

8.1 Leave outcomes

Any leave approval is at the discretion of the network QEC and employing authority.

8.2 Reinstatement

The decision regarding a trainee's return to the VTP and any associated conditions or requirements are final and shall not be subject to any form of reassessment

9. Guidance documents

9.1 Related policies and other documents

RANZCO VTP Handbook

RANZCO Trainee Progression Policy

RANZCO Examination Policy

RANZCO Trainee Performance Support Policy