

Guide for Applicants to the New Zealand Training Program 2019

Introduction

Applicants are directed to the current edition of the Vocational Training Program (VTP) handbook for a general guide to the functions of The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists (RANZCO), the application process and pre-requisites.

New Zealand

The start date is typically the second Monday of December. Vocational training posts are provided for the full four years of training. In their 5th year most New Zealand trainees get experience overseas, however, there are several posts suitable for 5th years in Auckland, Christchurch, Hamilton and Wellington.

The New Zealand program has developed over recent years to

1. provide exposure to all areas of ophthalmology to be a comprehensive ophthalmologist
2. support trainees in their preparation for exams
3. broaden their experience to different styles of Ophthalmic practice in the New Zealand health system

Trainees should expect to be rotated through two of the main centres of Auckland, Hamilton, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin for 12-24 months each and one or two provincial centres (e.g. 6 months each). Provincial centres include Rotorua, Tauranga, Palmerston North, Nelson and Hawkes Bay.

Selection Process

CVs and referee reports are assessed and candidates selected for interview. Both the CV grading and interview are based around a weighted interpretation of the 7 CanMed criteria as outlined in the VTP handbook.

Advice to prospective applicants

The selection panel is dedicated to find the most suitable doctors for training who will eventually contribute to the New Zealand Ophthalmic community. There is no expectation that applicants complete higher degrees prior to applying. (For those interested, the College can advise of pathways for completing higher degrees whilst in the VTP.)

The selection panel is made up of Ophthalmologists from all the employing District Health Boards (DHB) that have training posts. In New Zealand, the DHBs receive funding for training doctors via Health Workforce New Zealand (HWNZ). HWNZ has recently discontinued funding for trainee registrars who are not New Zealand citizens or Permanent Residents. Therefore, DHBs have a financial incentive to consider New Zealanders before other nationals. Exceptions are possible; the DHB must apply for this. For example, a doctor who has nearly completed the requisite 2 years of residence in New Zealand towards becoming a permanent resident and made commitments to continue their career in New Zealand at the end of training.

Key areas that continue to be an issue for DHBs, Medical Council New Zealand (MCNZ) and Ophthalmologists are supply of Ophthalmologists to areas outside of the main cities and facilitating doctors to become Ophthalmologists who are more likely to contribute to improving healthcare for Maori and Pasifika.

The selection process is only a part of the bigger picture, but current evidence shows that doctors that grew up in provincial New Zealand are more likely to be the ones that work in provincial New Zealand. Following the de-identified processing of your CV, suitable applicants will be sent a further application form prior to determining the shortlist for interview for the New Zealand selection committee.

Ophthalmology training is popular in New Zealand and many more applicants apply than there are positions available, competition is therefore inevitable.

The selection panel has the following considerations for applicants to New Zealand.

1. New Zealand registrars are expected to be able to manage acute and emergency ophthalmic conditions in their first year and be able to immediately start their surgical training, so prior ophthalmic experience is favourable e.g. 6-12 months of acute clinic work and hands-on supervised procedures or clinics.
2. Clinical work in other specialties, even up to registrar level, are not a disadvantage.
3. A keen interest in Ophthalmology might be expected to be evident in the CV e.g.
4. collaborative research or audit projects that are published or presented at meetings, undergraduate electives or summer studentships.
5. Higher degrees or the Masters of Ophthalmic Science are not necessary for entry into the New Zealand program. However, their components may be considered to contribute to 1 or 3 above.

Factors assessed in order of importance are:

1. Employment history
2. References
3. Commitment to Ophthalmology evidenced by clinical and research work
4. Evidence of prior academic performance

Referees should know you well and think favourably of you. Negative comments from referees detract seriously from applications. You should approach potential referees early to discuss your career ambitions – they may have constructive advice. Referees should preferably be consultants or senior staff familiar with the requirements and demands of the VTP.

The interview questions are classifiable under the 7 CanMed capabilities. It may have a semi- OSCE style format to give candidates more opportunities to present themselves and still cover a good range of topics. Detailed individual feedback following selection is not provided.

The timing of the college selection process means that many of the other junior doctor posts are appointed before you will know the outcome of RANZCO selection. Applicants should carefully consider their 'plan B' with this in mind should they not be successful.

Repeat applications are assessed without prejudice, but the high standard of applications from year to year will mean that it will be just as competitive. The application process is not a queue. Doctors early in their career may be recruited ahead of very good applicants who have applied on multiple occasions.

The selection committee is takes seriously its obligations to potential trainees, the College, the New Zealand healthcare system and the New Zealand public to ensure that its processes are robust and fair in seeking to appoint the most suitable candidates for specialist Ophthalmic training. Its members are acutely aware of the huge talent of applicants but that there will unavoidably be disappointment for the majority of applicants for what is currently a very popular program.

Dr Michael Merriman
Chair, New Zealand Qualification and Education Committee

Dr Sam Kain
Chair, New Zealand Selection Committee

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