



## A message from the chair

### A Year of Achievements and Challenges

2019-2020 was a year that saw OCANZ achieve much in its role of helping to protect the eye health of the public in Australia and New Zealand. It was also a year during which the impact of COVID-19 challenged us, as it did organisations and individuals across the world.

#### Achievements

- OCANZ signed new agreements with the Optometry Board of Australia (OBA) and the Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board New Zealand (ODOB) to provide accreditation functions until 30 June 2024. We are delighted to continue the collaborative relationship we enjoy with both boards.

Optometry Graduates Surveyed

Changes to OCANZ Examinations Successful

Overseas Credentials Assessment Validated

Health Professionals Collaborative Forum

Health Ministers Accept Accreditation Review

Meet our Accreditation Committee Chair

- We published research into a best practice framework for the development of entry-to-health professional practice competencies <https://ocanz.org/accreditation/professional-standards/>
- We administered the first surveys undertaken to enable optometry graduates and their employers to comment on the extent to which optometry courses are preparing graduates for the workforce. Survey results are reported later in this newsletter.
- The first annual workplan for the Board's Indigenous Strategy Taskforce was approved. This included:
  - Providing funding to explore establishing a Leaders in Indigenous Optometry Education Network; and
  - Commissioning advice on the development of a Māori Optometry Health Curriculum Framework.
- Completing a paper demonstrating the validity of the written component of the Competency in Optometry Examination and presenting a poster on the topic at the 2019 American Academy of Optometry annual meeting.
- Adopting our second three-year forward succession plan to support the renewal of OCANZ Directors, Committee members and staff; and
- Approving a new communications strategy.

### COVID-19 Response

Responding positively to the challenges posed by COVID-19 has been a priority in 2020. Our response included:

- Closing the Melbourne office from the end of March 2020. Staff are continuing to work from home until further notice



Alex Gentle - Chair, OCANZ Board

- Board approval of a business continuity plan in April 2020, which will operate for the course of the pandemic
- Updating our Risk Plan, also in April 2020
- Rapidly adapting key aspects of our core business including:
  - in April 2020 implementing a streamlined method for education providers to report material changes to education optometry programs.
  - Developing an online Competency in Optometry written examination which was trialled in August 2020, using live remote proctoring.

OCANZ has been impressed by, and appreciative of, the adaptability shown by optometry education providers, students, exam candidates and our other partners and contractors in responding to COVID-19. We look forward to furthering our collegial relationships with all those involved in delivering OCANZ accreditation functions in 2021.

The year's achievements are a testament to the professionalism, commitment and passion of OCANZ staff, OCANZ Members, Directors and the many education, and optometry professionals who support the Council's work. I thank them all for their dedication to supporting the eye health of the communities we serve.

# Optometry Graduates are Work Ready

2020 was the first year that a series of questions developed by OCANZ about optometry education were added to the Australian Government's Graduate Outcomes Survey (GOS). All graduates in Australia are asked to complete this survey four to six months after they have completed their course and the feedback obtained is used to improve course development and outcomes for students. The questions developed by OCANZ asked about specific areas of optometric practice and work-readiness.

The response rate for optometry for the GOS was high at of 50.4%, which was higher than the overall national level (42.3%) and higher than

graduates from the health services and support study area (49.0%). The majority (97%) of students who participated were working as optometrists when surveyed.

113 graduates from five institutions, Deakin University, Flinders University, Queensland University of Technology, the University of Melbourne and the University of New South Wales, responded to the questions developed by OCANZ. Overall high levels of work preparedness were reported, with two-thirds of respondents reporting that they believed their education had prepared them for most aspects of their work. All respondents reported that they were prepared for using evidence-based

practice to develop treatment plans, managing patients with diabetes, and keeping accurate patient records.

Three-quarters of the 113 graduates identified that they faced at least one challenge in transitioning from study to work, with the remainder not commenting on any challenges. Time management was the most common challenge and was identified by 24.2% of graduates who commented.

OCANZ plans to administer this survey over multiple years, using the results to inform course evaluation and improvement.

## Overseas Trained Optometrist Exams a Resounding Success

**COVID-19 restrictions meant that OCANZ needed to conduct written examinations differently in 2020.**

Examinations were conducted on 10 and 11 August as planned. However, 14 candidates from eight countries—New Zealand, Australia, Hong Kong, Canada, the UK, South Africa, the USA and Malaysia— sat their exams in their homes, offices or other locations, simultaneously (5pm AEST) but across 10 different time zones. Exams were conducted under examination conditions, with a proctor reviewing each candidate's work remotely.

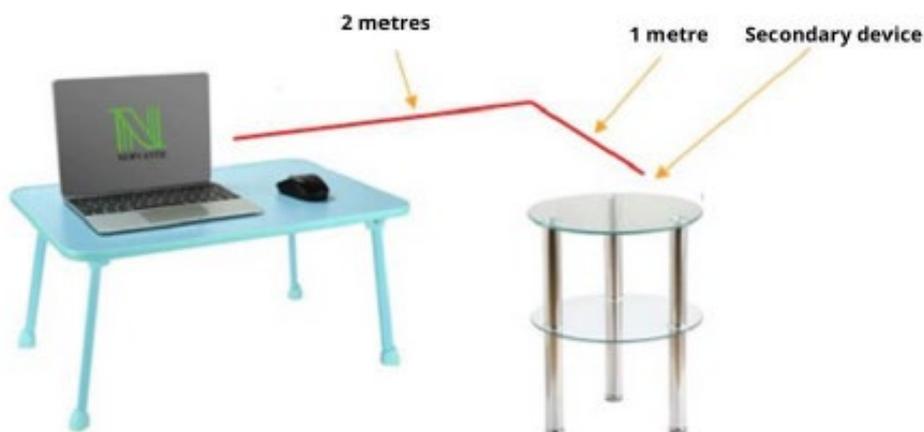
All candidates were given:

- A familiarisation session a week before the exams, which detailed the way the exams would be run; and

- A Candidate Information Guide and a Candidate Systems Guide.

All candidates were surveyed at the conclusion of the examination and 13 out of the 14 indicated their preference for sitting exams in this way.

Pleased with the success of online exams this year, the Board has agreed to run the next offering of the examination in this format.



## Top Marks for Overseas Optometrist Assessment

Assessing overseas optometrists credentials to determine whether they can practice in Australia or New Zealand includes a written examination. There are two parts to the written assessment—a multiple choice and short answer paper— candidates must pass both, before progressing to their clinical examination. OCANZ evaluated this process using assessment results from 2014 to 2017.



## Evaluation

The validity of the written examination is determined using:

- Kane's framework for scoring—generalisation, extrapolation, and implications
- A competency-based blueprint to guide question selection, with the number of items weighted towards key competencies
- A standard setting exercise to determine the minimum standard for both written exams; and
- Item response theory (Rasch) to analyse exams, produce reliability metrics, apply consistent standards to the results, calibrate difficulty across exams, and to score candidates.



## Results

Evaluation of results from 2014-2019 showed that ninety-one (47.2%) candidates passed both the multiple choice and short answer (MCQ and SAQ) components of their exams on their first attempt. The MCQ exam displayed consistently high reliability (0.71 to 0.93, average 0.88) across all 12 administrations conducted since 2014. Prior to September 2017, the SAQ had a set cutscore of 50%, and the difficulty of the exam was variable. Since the introduction of Rasch analysis to calibrate

difficulty across both components, the reliability and power of the SAQ exam has been consistently high (separation index range 0.82 to 0.93, average 0.86).

## Conclusions

The findings support the validity of the written components (both MCQ and SAQ) for assessing the credentials of overseas-educated optometrists to practice in Australia and New Zealand.

# Health Professions Accreditation Authorities Collaborate for Quality

The Forum's fifteen member organisations of which OCANZ is one, all operating under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS), work together with their stakeholders to improve the quality of accreditation and assessment across their professions.

Bronwyn Clark (Forum Chair) and Michael Shobbrook AM (Deputy Chair) presented an overview of Forum's work at the August meeting of the OCANZ Board.

Their presentation included a report on the following key achievements and activities:

- **COVID-19 Pandemic** — the heavy toll the pandemic is taking across the health professions and the community as a whole was acknowledged. Forum members have all expressed their appreciation for the way

health professionals are supporting each other and the community during the pandemic, while continuing to make sure that new graduates entering the health professions continue to meet the standards needed for safe and effective care.

- **Monitoring Accredited Programs during COVID** — all accreditation authorities have adapted their accreditation processes in response to requirements of managing the pandemic. This has been done in consultation with governments, education representatives and regulatory authorities. The Forum has also written to the Federal Minister for Education the Hon Dan Tehan MP, advising him of the work the professions have achieved in adapting processes due to COVID-19.

**The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Project** — the Forum continues its work to strengthen the role accreditation plays in improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island and Māori health outcomes.

- **The Safe and Effective Use of Medicines Project** — a common framework for all entry level registered health professions, developed by a Forum working group, was unanimously endorsed by Forum members at its February meeting. It has been endorsed by OCANZ for use during the next review of optometry accreditation standards.



## Accreditation Systems Review Sets Course for Improvement

**In February 2020 Australian Health Ministers responded to the Independent Accreditation Systems Review's Final Report which was completed in 2017.**

Health Ministers rejected three of the key recommendations -

1. To form a new health accreditation statutory entity

2. To remove accreditation functions from National Boards; and

3. To formally separate Boards and accreditation authorities

and accepted most of the remaining recommendations. See [http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Portals/0/Final\\_Communique\\_ASR\\_Issued%20120220.pdf](http://www.coaghealthcouncil.gov.au/Portals/0/Final_Communique_ASR_Issued%20120220.pdf)

The OCANZ Board appreciates the Ministers' decision and looks forward to seeing the improvements to accrediting and assessing optometry programs that will result as the Review's approved recommendations are put into practice.

## Meet our Accreditation Committee Chair



**Emeritus Professor Joyce KIRK**

Professor Kirk has been a member of OCANZ's Accreditation Committee since mid-2018 and its Chair since January 2020. She has extensive expertise in course accreditation and program design in Australia and overseas. On top of that she has a longstanding interest in accreditation processes and their importance in ensuring quality in professional practice. She is the first non-optometrist appointed to the role.

The Committee accredits optometry courses against the standards required for registration to practice optometry in Australia and New Zealand.

"Maintaining standards and ensuring the quality of optometry education is vitally important to the profession and to the eye and vision health of the community. I've long been fascinated with the potential for excellence in the accreditation of professional education programs to enhance highly competent professional practitioners," Professor Kirk said.

"The assessment team that we, as a Committee and with the approval of the OCANZ Board, establish to review each course ensures that its curriculum, assessment processes, teaching staff, equipment and facilities all contribute to achieving learning outcomes that the standards require of every registered practitioner in Australia and New Zealand. Each team is composed of four leading academics and experts in the aspects of optometry practice most relevant to the course we are reviewing."

In addition to accrediting specific courses, the Committee is involved in broader accreditation issues, such as cultural safety and benchmarking and reporting findings to the OCANZ Board.

"I'm delighted to be able to contribute my expertise and knowledge of program accreditation towards creating and sustaining high quality optometry practice in Australia and New Zealand," Professor Kirk said.