



Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand (OCANZ)

Review of OCANZ Accreditation Standards and Evidence Guide for Entry-Level Optometry Programs

Public Consultation Document

September 2026

The Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand respectfully acknowledges the traditional owners and custodians of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders past and present. We extend this respect to te iwi Māori, Tangata Whenua o Aotearoa New Zealand.

Executive Summary

Why are the OCANZ Accreditation Standards being reviewed?

OCANZ is undertaking a review of the *Accreditation Standards and Evidence Guide for Entry-Level Optometry Programs* to ensure the Standards remain contemporary, evidence-informed and fit for purpose for the evolving healthcare, regulatory and educational environment.

The review has been informed by:

- changes in health practitioner regulation and accreditation requirements
- feedback from education providers, regulators and key stakeholders
- developments in optometry practice and higher education, and
- comparison with contemporary accreditation standards in Australia and internationally.

The review aims to maintain an outcomes-based approach while supporting innovation, reducing unnecessary regulatory burden and continuing to protect the public.

Key proposed changes

The proposed revisions retain the existing six-domain structure of the Standards while strengthening expectations in several areas, including:

- Cultural safety throughout the Standards, while retaining Cultural Safety as a standalone Standard.
- Stronger emphasis on person-centred care, anti-racism and equity.
- Contemporary clinical governance and quality improvement.
- Appropriate, ethical and safe use of artificial intelligence in education and clinical practice.
- Preparation of graduates for contemporary practice, including digital health and evolving models of care.
- Interprofessional education and collaborative practice.
- Student wellbeing and support.
- Care for diverse populations, including people with cognitive disability and those affected by family, domestic and sexual violence.
- Greater recognition of curriculum mapping to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori Health Curriculum Frameworks.
- Continued focus on outcomes-based accreditation while reducing duplication and unnecessary administrative burden where possible.

What feedback is OCANZ seeking?

OCANZ welcomes feedback on whether the proposed Standards:

- appropriately protect the public while remaining flexible and outcomes-focused,
- are clear, relevant and practical to implement,
- reflect contemporary optometry education and practice,
- appropriately balance regulatory requirements and administrative burden, and
- include any important concepts that should be added, removed or clarified.

Feedback is also sought on the proposed evidence requirements and any implementation issues or costs.

Consultation period

The consultation is open until **3 November 2026**.

Following consultation, all submissions will be considered by the Reference Group before the revised Accreditation Standards are finalised and submitted for approval.

The contact details for providing feedback and/or receiving further information are:

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1. Introduction

The Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand (OCANZ) is the accreditation authority for optometry education and training programs delivered in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as for examination of the skills of overseas trained optometrists seeking to migrate to Australia or Aotearoa New Zealand. Its functions include accrediting programs of study designed to produce graduates who are suitable for registration as Optometrists in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. OCANZ's recommendations inform registration decisions made under applicable laws in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand.

Optometry programs are assessed in a peer-review process using accreditation standards developed by OCANZ, approved by the Optometry Board of Australia (OptomBA) and agreed to following consultation with Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board of New Zealand Te Poari Kaitirotiro Whatu, Kaiwhakarato Mōhiti (ODOB). The accreditation standards enable assessment of whether a program of study, and the education provider that delivers the program of study, provide graduates with the knowledge, skills and professional attributes needed to practise safely as Optometrists.

2. Project to review the current OCANZ Accreditation Standards

The current OCANZ Accreditation Standards comprise six standards (domains):

1. Public safety. Public safety is assured.
2. Cultural safety. The program ensures that students can provide culturally safe care for First Nations Peoples. Note terminology has been updated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Māori in the revised Standards.
3. Academic governance and quality assurance. Academic governance and quality assurance processes are effective.
4. Program of study. Program design, delivery and resourcing enable students to achieve the required professional competencies.
5. The student experience. Students are provided with equitable and timely access to information and support.
6. Program learning outcomes and assessment. Program learning outcomes are specified, consistent with required professional competencies and are validly, reliably and fairly assessed.

Each of the domains contains a set of criteria that collectively relate to meeting the requirements of the overarching standard. In the 2016 revision of the Optometry Accreditation Standards a shift was made to an outcomes-based philosophy consistent with contemporary accreditation practice in Australia. Thus, OCANZ's current standards are intentionally outcomes-focused rather than prescriptive, or input-based.

2.1 Project overview

The current OCANZ entry-level accreditation standards, Accreditation Standards and Evidence Guide for Entry-Level Optometry Programs were approved by the Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand in December 2021 and the Optometry Board of Australia in February 2022. The Accreditation Standards took effect on 1 January 2023 and were updated in December 2023.

The current OCANZ Standards and Evidence Guide are at:

<https://ocanz.org/assets/Accreditation/7c3f0e44fc/OCANZ-Accreditation-Standards.pdf>

The overall goal of this project is to review the Standards and Evidence Guide and recommend such revisions as necessary to:

- Meet the requirements for review of program accreditation standards by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and any additional requirements of the Optometry Board of Australia and the Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board of New Zealand Te Poari o ngā Kaimātai Whatu me ngā Kaiwhakarato Mōhiti, (ODOB) and
- Take account of best practice and relevant recent regulatory changes in the education and health sectors, e.g., the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) requirements, National Health Practitioner Ombudsman (NHPO) requirements, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Australia (TEQSA) and New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) and Universities New Zealand (UNZ) requirements, other health professions' accreditation standards, the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (NSQHSS) and the Royal Commission Public Hearing Report-Education and Training of Health Professionals in relation to people with cognitive disability.

The review of the OCANZ entry-level accreditation standards will address the Ahpra requirements at [Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency - Procedures \(Ahpra.gov.au\)](https://www.ahpra.gov.au) to ensure good regulatory practice and to achieve greater consistency within the national scheme in Australia (for example, by adopting any available template, guidance or good practice approaches used by national scheme bodies) and:

1. Take account of the objectives and guiding principles in the National Law¹
2. Draw on available evidence, including relevant international standards and statements relating to education and training in the profession, and the accreditation standards applied in countries with comparable education and practice standards for the profession
3. Describe how the proposed new or revised accreditation standards support or contribute to:
 - Improving patient safety, effective care and health outcomes, including for priority members of the community and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Māori.
 - Preparing practitioners who have the knowledge, skills and professional attributes to deliver culturally safe health care, as defined in the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy 2020-2025](#); the [Optometry Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework](#); and the [Optometry Māori Health Curriculum Framework](#). It is noted that updated versions of some documents are due for release, possibly during the consultation period.

¹ See section 3(2) and (3) of the National Law

- Preparing practitioners who understand the health system in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand and their roles, responsibilities and ethical conduct when working within the system.
- Embedding interprofessional education and preparing practitioners who have the knowledge, skills and professional attributes to engage in interprofessional collaborative practice.
- Addressing health and workforce priorities such as family, domestic and sexual violence, noting that information about new priorities may be published as they emerge.
- Avoiding duplication and minimising regulatory burden.

2.2 Project governance

An expert reference group and external consultant have been appointed by the OCANZ Board to oversee the review.

The members of the reference group are:

Emeritus Professor Joyce Kirk (Chair)
 Dr Nicola Anstice
 Dr Tim Fricke
 Dr Amanda Douglass
 Mr Neilsen De Souza

External consultant: Dr Lynn Weekes.

2.3 Consultation process and timelines

The consultation process is a staged process to ensure the revised Standards are contemporary, evidence-informed and reflect the perspectives of key stakeholders.

The consultation process includes:

- **Preliminary consultation** with key stakeholders, including OptomBA, ODOB, Ahpra, the OCANZ Indigenous Strategy Taskforce, and Australian and Aotearoa New Zealand optometry education providers, to identify priority issues and emerging areas for consideration.
- **Evidence review and environmental scan**, including consideration of changes in regulation, higher education standards, contemporary health priorities, accreditation standards used by other health professions, and relevant international optometry accreditation frameworks.
- **Development of draft revised Standards and Evidence Guide** by the external consultant and OCANZ Reference Group, informed by stakeholder feedback and the evidence review.
- **Public consultation**, inviting feedback from a wide range of stakeholders including education providers, students and recent graduates, practitioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori representatives, consumers and community representatives, professional bodies, regulators, employers, clinical placement providers, healthcare consumer bodies and other interested stakeholders on the proposed revisions.
- **Review of submissions** by the Reference Group, with further refinement of the draft Standards where appropriate before submission to the OCANZ Board for approval and subsequent consideration by the Optometry Board of Australia.

The consultation timeline is:

- Public consultation will be held over 6 weeks (22nd September – 3rd November 2026).
- Proposed date of effect 01 January 2028.

2.4 Providing feedback

Questions to consider when providing feedback on the OCANZ Accreditation Standards consultation include:

1. Do the proposed revisions appropriately and clearly balance public safety, flexibility and regulatory burden?
2. Do you agree with the specific proposals as incorporated in the draft Standards? Should any of the Standards or Criteria be deleted or reworded?
3. Are there any concepts missing from the proposed revised standards that should be included? What additional information or guidance should be provided?
4. Are the 13 pieces of core evidence outlines in the Standards appropriate, noting one addition to the previous 14 to make mandatory the mapping of curricula to the OCANZ Health Curriculum Frameworks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Māori, as well as two deletions to reduce duplication with the HESF?
5. Do you foresee issues or costs associated with implementation of the proposed revisions to the Standards?

3. Contemporary practice and emerging priorities

The Competency Standards of Optometry Australia and the Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board of New Zealand Te Poari o ngā Kaimātai Whatu me ngā Kaiwhakarato Mōhiti provide guidance to OCANZ on the requirements for safe contemporary practice.

In reviewing the Accreditation Standards published in 2023 several emergent matters were considered in revising the Standards, including:

- Providing care to people with cognitive disability or impairment (as informed by the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability),
- Student mental health (as informed by Ahpra and the approach taken by the councils of other health professions such as Medicine and Psychology),
- Adequacy of guidance on clinical supervision (as informed by Ahpra Guidance on embedding good clinical practice into clinical placements, simulation and virtual learning; OCANZ Accreditation Committee; and recent literature²),
- Providing care to people who have experienced family, domestic and sexual violence as informed by Ahpra and the approach taken by the councils of other health professions. Ahpra's Joint Statement on the subject states, 'We expect that all health practitioners will have the skills and confidence to recognise and respond appropriately to FDSV, within their scope of practice and professional obligations set out in codes of conduct. This includes practising free from bias, discrimination and racism.' <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Resources/Family-domestic-and-sexual-violence/Joint-statement-Building-the-capability-of-the-health-workforce>,
- The impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on contemporary education and optometry practice, and academic integrity (as informed by Ahpra, TEQSA, recent literature³ and the approach taken by the councils of other health professions),

² Penman, Merrolee, et al. "Allied health professions accreditation standards for work integrated learning: A document analysis." *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 20.15 (2023): 6478.

³ Castlereagh Summit. (2026). *The Castlereagh Statement: A cross-sector call to action on Australian education and training in the age of AI*. Sydney, Australia. <https://castlereagh.ai/>

- Environmental sustainability in provision of healthcare (as informed by Ahpra, ACSQHC, the NSQHS Standards and the approach taken by the councils of other health professions).

4. Initial consultation and feedback

At the commencement of this project to revise the OCANZ Accreditation Standards, the organisation wrote to several interested parties, including Ahpra, Optometry Board Australia (OptomBA), ODOB (Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board of New Zealand), the OCANZ Indigenous Strategy Taskforce and schools of Optometry to seek early feedback on the existing Standards and areas requiring consideration. Additional issues raised through this round of feedback included:

- Reference to the independently chaired Accreditation Committee (Ahpra) guidance in the review of Accreditation Standards: the glossary, clinical placement guidance etc. <https://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-Ahpra/Who-We-Are/Ahpra-Board/Accreditation-Committee/Publications.aspx>
- Reference to Common Health Professional Capabilities currently under development by Ahpra
- Strengthening the commitment to cultural safety and anti-racism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Māori
- Updating the terminology used when referring to cultural safety
- Facilitating graduates to practise to the top of their scope of practice in all relevant jurisdictions
- The importance of interprofessional education to support interprofessional collaborative practice
- Reference to clinical training in a range of geographical settings, including regional and rural
- Privacy legislation, data sovereignty, cybersecurity
- Digital health
- Contemporary clinical governance
- Student impairment and fitness to practise
- Alignment between OCANZ accreditation reporting requirements and the reporting requirements under the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) to reduce duplication and administrative burden for Schools
- Changes in legislation, regulation and guidance from relevant agencies.

5. National and international comparators

For the purposes of this review the accreditation standards for Optometry were compared with those for Dentistry⁴, Psychology⁵, Paramedicine⁶ and Podiatry⁷. It should be noted that the Dentistry and Paramedicine Standards are in Consultation Phase. Podiatry is the most

⁴ Australian Dental Council. Accreditation Standards for Dental Practitioner Programs. Revised draft for consultation. December 2025. https://www.adc.org.au/files/consultation/accreditation-standards/ADC_Draft_Accreditation_Standards_for_Dental_Practitioner_Programs.pdf

⁵ Australian Psychology Accreditation Council. Accreditation Standards for Psychology Programs. December 2025. <https://apac.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/APAC-Accreditation-Standards-for-Psychology-Programs-effective-1-December-2025.pdf>

⁶ Paramedicine Accreditation Committee. Accreditation standards: Programs for registered paramedics addressing the requirements for endorsement for the area of practice (paramedic practitioner) and endorsement of scheduled medicines. Draft for Consultation. April 2026. <https://www.paramedicineboard.gov.au/Accreditation/Accreditation-consultation.asp>

⁷ Podiatry Board. Accreditation standards: entry level podiatry programs. Effective January 2026

recently approved new Standard, taking effect January 2026. For specific items, other professions have also been compared where the example may be useful to the Reference Group. Matters considered were

- Consistency of structure and nomenclature for the Accreditation Standards of each profession
- Number and scope of Standards
- Significant variations, additions or deletions to more recent Standards.

Two recent international approaches to accreditation standards in Optometry were selected for comparative purposes:

- General Optical Council (GOC 2021) (UK)⁸
- Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE 2025) (USA).⁹

The UK and the USA are seen as having broadly comparable education and practice standards for the optometry profession and their standards are seen as potentially informative for this review.

The Australian Higher Education Framework¹⁰ was also referenced to ensure consistency and avoid duplication.

6. Summary of recommendations from the review (to date)

6.1 Significant Recommendations

- i. The current structure of the OCANZ Accreditation Standards should be retained
- ii. Cultural Safety should be retained as a separate Standard and better articulated throughout the Accreditation Standards
This will be supported by using person-centred care rather than patient-centred care and by inclusion of concepts such as Cultural Responsiveness and Awareness as relevant throughout the document. A requirement to assess Cultural Safety has been included.
- iii. Racism, discrimination and anti-racism are more explicitly addressed throughout the Standards.
- iv. Clinical governance both as a learning outcome and as practiced by clinical placement providers has been added more specifically.
- v. Mandatory evidence will include mapping of the curriculum, including learning outcomes and assessments to the OCANZ Optometry Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Māori Health Curriculum Frameworks.
- vi. The education, governance and risk management strategies required for appropriate and ethical use of Artificial Intelligence have been added.
- vii. A new sub-section of the Program of Study outlines expectations with respect to preparing students for contemporary practice.

⁸ <https://www.optical.org/en/Education/core-competencies--core-curricula/index.cfm>

⁹ <https://theacoe.org/about-the-acoe>

¹⁰ <https://www.teqsa.gov.au/how-we-regulate/higher-education-standards-framework-2021>

- viii. Expectations regarding student well-being including services to support mental health have been strengthened.
- ix. Education Providers will be encouraged to showcase examples of excellence in co-design where these exist.
- x. More and better examples of interprofessional learning will be encouraged
- xi. Diversity of patients will be expanded to specify people with cognitive disability and victims of family and gender-based violence.
- xii. An understanding of scope of practice is referenced in the recommended changes in association with preparation for contemporary practice and the skills for lifelong learning.
- xiii. In Standard 5, The Student Experience, criteria 5.1 and 5.2 have been deleted as these could be considered to duplicate criteria from the Higher Education Standards Framework. Other criteria in this domain have been retained given they apply specifically to the program of study.

6.2 Potential impacts of the Standards

Implementation of the revised Standards will require education providers to review aspects of governance, curriculum and assessment to ensure ongoing compliance.

6.3 Benefits

The benefits of revising the Standards extend across the healthcare sector and the community. By ensuring the Accreditation Standards remain contemporary and fit for purpose for the evolving healthcare environment graduates are working in, OCANZ is upholding the shared National Scheme goal of protecting public safety.

6.4 Potential implementation costs and issues

OCANZ seeks feedback on potential issues and costs arising from implementation of the recommended changes in this document. See questions for feedback.

7. Contact

For further information contact:

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Further information

The key issues/discussion paper which was considered by the Reference Group and upon which its recommendations are based is available upon request.