POLICY

Dental Council
Te Kaunihera Tiaki Niho

Registration as an oral health practitioner

Approved: 29 October 2026
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Scope and purpose

1. This policy applies to all applicants for registration as an oral health practitioner in Aotearoa New Zealand, in any scope of practice. Its purpose is to:
   - protect public safety by ensuring the Dental Council (the Council) registers applicants who are qualified, fit and competent to practise in their oral health profession.
   - support the Council to apply a consistent, fair and transparent approach to considering applications for registration as an oral health practitioner.

2. When receiving and considering applications for registration, the Council will comply with its obligations under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the HPCA Act).

Application requirements

3. The Council will consider a complete application for registration as soon as practicable after receiving it.[1] An application for registration is not complete until all the following has been supplied by the applicant:
   - the correct, fully completed application form for the registration pathway the applicant is applying through
   - all supporting documentation required for the application[2]
   - the correct application fee for the registration pathway.

4. Applicants must meet all costs of their application, including (for example) costs relating to:
   - English language testing
   - verification or certification of documents
   - verification of professional status from other regulators
   - official translation of documents that are not in English.

5. If the applicant owes the Council any costs, expenses or fines under the HPCA Act or any previous Act, the Registrar may decline to act on the application for registration until the outstanding monies are paid.

Applying for registration in a dental specialist scope of practice

6. Applicants who wish to register in a dental specialist scope of practice are permitted to apply directly for the relevant specialist scope of practice without first obtaining registration in the general dentist scope of practice.

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[1] Throughout this Policy, 'the Dental Council' Includes any lawful delegate.
[2] For the supporting information referred to throughout this Policy, refer to the '*Required supporting documents list*' for the relevant registration pathway, on the Dental Council's website.

Accuracy of information

7. The applicant must complete their application form - and all relevant declarations - themselves. It is an offence under section 172 of the HPCA Act for an applicant to knowingly provide false or misleading information - oral or written - to the Council. The Council may cancel the registration of any applicant who obtains registration by making a false or misleading representation or was not entitled to be registered.

Registration requirements

8. Sections 15 and 16 of the HPCA Act set out the requirements for registration. An applicant must:
   - have the qualifications prescribed by the Council for registration in that scope of practice (or a qualification recognised by the Council as 'equivalent to or as satisfactory as' a prescribed qualification - see below);
   - be competent to practise in the scope of practice for which they are applying; and
   - be fit for registration as set out in section 16 of the HPCA Act.

Qualifications for registration

9. The Council prescribes qualifications for registration in each scope of practice. The list of prescribed qualifications for each scope of practice can be found on the Council's website.

10. An overview of the registration pathways is set out below:

Pathway	Eligibility
New Zealand prescribed qualification	The applicant qualified from a New Zealand oral health training programme accredited by the Council.
Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition Act	The applicant holds current registration with the Dental Board of Australia/Ahpra (any conditions will be transferred). **Note:** Post-registration requirements apply – see below.
Competent authority - qualification[i]	The applicant: ▪ holds a qualification (which may include an approved examination and registration) accredited by a Council-recognised competent authority. **Note:** There are additional qualification requirements for applicants in the oral medicine and oral and maxillofacial surgery scope of practice. **Note:** Post-registration requirements apply - see below.

Competent authority -- registration[ii]	The applicant: ▪ holds current full/unrestricted/unconditional registration appropriate for practice in the scope applied for; and ▪ (if a dental specialist applicant) has clinical practice as specialist in the recognised competent authority(s) for at least 24 months (working 20 hours or more per week) in the past five years, including 12 months within the last 18 months immediately prior to application ▪ (if any other applicant type) has clinical practice experience in that authority, and in the relevant scope of practice for at least 33 months (working 20 hours or more per week) during the 48 months immediately prior to application. **Note**: post-registration requirements apply - see below. **Note:** this pathway is not available to oral and maxillofacial surgery and oral medicine applicants.
Comparable health system[iii] (dentist applicants only)	The applicant: ▪ Holds current full/unrestricted/unconditional registration in general dentistry; and ▪ Has clinical practice experience in the relevant scope of practice in one or more of the recognised comparable health system(s) (which may also include experience in a competent authority) for at least 33 months (working 20 hours or more per week) during the 48 months immediately prior to the application. **Note:** post-registration requirements apply - see below.
Examination	The applicant has a qualification appropriate to the scope applied for and has successfully passed the relevant New Zealand Dental Council examination **Note:** post-registration requirements apply - see below
Individual assessment	Individual consideration of an applicant's qualification, training and experience to identify whether the applicant's qualification is 'equivalent to or as satisfactory as a prescribed qualification.' **Note:** post-registration requirements may apply - see below.
Teaching and research (limited registration)[iv]	The applicant: ▪ holds current registration with a recognised overseas oral health registering or licensing body that allows the practitioner to conduct oral

▪ Permanent supervision ▪ Independent clinical practice not permitted.	health research and/or teaching relevant to the oral health profession.; and ▪ an offer of employment with a Dental Council accredited New Zealand tertiary education provider to teach or do research. **Note:** post-registration requirements apply - see below.

Applications for individual assessment

11. If an applicant with an overseas qualification does not meet the criteria to apply for registration under either the competent or comparable authority pathways, they may apply for individual assessment of their qualification under section 15(2) of the HPCA Act.[3]

12. An applicant for individual assessment must:
    - provide information about their qualification(s), curriculum (including academic and clinical teaching and instruction), and assessment methodologies; and
    - submit case examples of their own independent work within the scope of practice applied for to demonstrate their:
        i. current competence through practical examples covering the range of clinical skills within the scope of practice applied for;
        ii. application of critical and scientific thinking to manage oral health conditions within the scope of practice applied for;
        iii. competence across all professional domains.

13. An individual assessment includes:
    - review of the applicant's overseas qualification, training and experience by assessors with relevant knowledge of the prescribed qualifications for the scope of practice in which the applicant has applied
    - preparation of a written report by the assessors, providing their views (and reasons for their views) on whether, in their opinion:
        - the applicant's overseas qualification is equivalent to or as satisfactory as a prescribed qualification, and
        - the applicant is competent to practise within the scope of practice applied for.

14. The Council will consider the application and the results of the assessment before deciding how to proceed with the application (see Council *consideration of applications for registration* below).

Competence for registration

15. The Council accredits and monitors training institutions that deliver prescribed qualifications for registration in New Zealand. Because it oversees the quality of this

[3] There is a higher application fee and longer processing time for this application type, given the resources required for individual assessment of the applicant's qualifications, training and experience.

training, the Council generally accepts that a new graduate from an accredited programme will meet the required standard of competence for registration.

16. Applicants who are not new graduates, or who trained overseas, will need to demonstrate that they meet the required standard of competence for the scope of practice for which they have applied (refer to relevant Required Supporting Documents List).

17. When considering whether an applicant is competent for registration, the Council will consider the totality of the application. Relevant information includes, but is not limited to:
    - the applicant's overall training, experience and formal qualifications
    - whether the applicant has practised continuously in a regulated environment since qualifying, or can otherwise demonstrate that they have maintained their skills at a level appropriate for the scope of practice applied for
    - whether the nature of the work in the jurisdiction(s) that the applicant has worked can be considered comparable to contemporary practice in New Zealand
    - evidence of appropriate continuing professional development within the last 3 years
    - referee and assessor reports.

Fitness for registration

18. The Council requires each applicant for registration to provide declarations and supporting material to satisfy the Council that they are fit for registration, as set out below.

Ability to communicate effectively in English

19. Applicants must demonstrate that they can understand and communicate in English effectively to protect the health and safety of the public. An inability to do so impacts the practitioner's ability to engage clearly with patients, whanau and colleagues.

20. English language requirements are normally considered to be met if the applicant can satisfy the Council that they meet at least one of the following requirements:

Orthodontic auxiliary registration applicants	
a.	The applicant successfully completed: • The Certificate of Orthodontic Assisting, New Zealand Association of Orthodontists: Orthodontic Auxiliary Training Programme OR • The Graduate Certificate of Orthodontic Assisting, Academy of Orthodontic Assisting, and possession of a dental therapy, dental hygiene or dentistry qualification and approved experience in the provision of orthodontic auxiliary services under the direction and supervision of a dentist or dental specialist who can attest to competency AND

	• English is the applicant's first language, and the applicant has completed their secondary schooling in New Zealand, Australia, United Kingdom, United States of America, Republic of Ireland, or Canada where English was the sole language of instruction and assessment. Evidence of this may be required from the applicant.
All other applicants	
b.	The applicant is applying for registration as a graduate of a Council accredited programme.
c.	The applicant is applying for registration as a graduate of a Dental Board of Australia approved programme.
d.	English is the applicant's first language AND The applicant completed their dental training in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Republic of Ireland or Canada where English was the sole language of instruction and assessment. Evidence of this may be required from the applicant.
e.	English is not the applicant's first language BUT The applicant has worked as a registered oral health practitioner in a practice where English is the primary language of communication with patients and colleagues, for at least 2 years within the 5 years immediately prior to application, in one of the following countries: • United Kingdom • United States of America • Australia • Republic of Ireland • Canada. AND Attestation to the applicant's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English in an oral health setting with patients and professional colleagues is given by two practitioners who: • are registered in a similar oral health profession • speak English as their first language • have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months within the last 5 years in the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Republic of Ireland or Canada. This option may only be used in the absence of any existing questions or concerns about the applicant's ability to comprehend and communicate effectively in English.
f.	If none of the above applies:

	The applicant must sit and pass a Council approved English language test to the required level, as set out in **Appendix 1** of this Policy.

Criminal convictions

21. Having a criminal conviction in New Zealand or elsewhere will not necessarily prevent an applicant from being registered. However, if an applicant has been convicted of an offence punishable by imprisonment for a term of 3 months or longer, they will need to satisfy the Council that this does not reflect adversely on their fitness to practise.

22. All applicants must declare in their application for registration whether they have been convicted in New Zealand or overseas of any offence punishable by 3 or more months in prison.[4] Applicants who have a conviction that meets this threshold will also be required to submit relevant supporting documentation (refer to relevant *Required supporting documents list*).

23. The Council will consider any disclosure of criminal convictions on a case-by-case basis.

Health (fitness to practise)

24. Having a health condition does not necessarily prevent an applicant from being registered. However, the Council must be satisfied that a health condition does not impact on the applicant's ability to perform the required functions of their chosen profession.

25. Oral health practice includes performing exposure-prone procedures. All applicants for registration must provide the following laboratory results to confirm their health status in relation to the following blood borne viruses:
    - Hepatitis B
    - Hepatitis C
    - HIV.

26. All applicants must also declare any physical or mental health conditions (including drug or alcohol addictions and other dependencies) that may impact on their ability to perform the required functions of their chosen profession. If an applicant has a health condition and is unsure of its impact on their ability to practise, the Council recommends that they seek medical advice from their treating practitioner, and/or declare the condition to the Council.

27. Every applicant who discloses a health condition will be required to submit supporting documentation (refer to relevant *Required supporting documents list*).

28. The Council will consider any health disclosures on a case-by-case basis.

Professional and disciplinary history

[4] It is not necessary for the applicant to have been imprisoned; it is sufficient that the offence was punishable by imprisonment for 3 months or longer.

29. Having a disciplinary history will not necessarily prevent an applicant from being registered. However, the Council will need to be satisfied that the applicant's disciplinary history does not reflect adversely on their fitness to practise.

30. All applicants for registration must declare whether - in New Zealand or another country - they are:
    - currently or have previously been the subject of any professional disciplinary proceedings
    - subject to any orders of a professional disciplinary tribunal
    - the subject of any investigations that may be the subject of professional disciplinary proceedings.

31. The applicant must also declare if they are subject to any order by the educational institution that delivered the qualification they are relying on for their application.

32. All applicants will be required to submit supporting documentation to confirm their registration record in every jurisdiction where they have practised as a health practitioner. Applicants who have disclosed a disciplinary history – whether in New Zealand or another country - will need to provide further information (refer to relevant *Required supporting documents list*).

33. The Council will consider any disciplinary disclosures on a case-by-case basis.

Endangerment to the health or safety of the public

34. The Council may refuse to register an applicant if it has reason to believe the applicant may endanger the health or safety of the public. If the Council has information about an applicant for registration that causes it to believe that the applicant may endanger public health or safety, the Council may propose to decline an application for registration on this basis.

Any other information

35. The Council may ask for any other information it thinks fit to assist it in deciding an application. Information may be sought from the applicant or any other person. If the Council intends to approach another person about the applicant's application, it will first tell the applicant who it intends to question and the nature of the questions it intends to ask.

36. The Council may require an applicant to sit and pass an examination or assessment that is recognised or set by the Council, to be satisfied that the applicant is competent to practise in the scope of practice applied for. Any such examination or assessment forms part of the consideration of the application and is not a decision to decline the application.

Council consideration of applications for registration

37. When considering a completed application for registration, the Council will have regard to the totality of the information supporting the application before deciding whether to:
    - register the applicant in the relevant scope of practice
    - propose to register the applicant in the relevant scope of practice subject to conditions to ensure the competent practice of the applicant
    - propose to register the applicant to provide limited health services only
    - propose to decline the application.

38. If varying a prescribed qualification, the Council must be satisfied that the varied qualification is adequate for the provision of the permitted health services, and for the protection of the public.

39. The Council will tell an applicant for registration if it proposes to:
    - register the applicant to provide limited health services
    - include conditions in the applicant's scope of practice
    - decline an application for registration.

40. The applicant will be told why the Council is making the proposal, and will be given a reasonable opportunity to make submissions and/or be heard on the matter.

41. A final decision on the application will be made by the Council after considering submissions made by the applicant (if any).

Post-registration requirements

Oversight and supervision[5]

42. Registrants who register under the following pathways must practise under oversight or supervision for an initial period:
    - Competent authority - registration
    - Comparable health system
    - Individual assessment (where Council considers this appropriate).

43. Oversight and supervision are intended as safeguards to support new registrants who did not train in New Zealand as they enter its unique practice environment.

44. Registrants through the 'competent authority - registration pathway' must practise under a condition of *oversight* by a Council-approved practitioner for at least six months after commencing practice in New Zealand. Oversight is defined in the HPCA Act as professional support and assistance provided to a health practitioner by a professional peer for the purposes of professional development.

[5] See also Oversight and Supervision Policy *[yet to be developed]*

45. Registrants through the 'comparable authority - registration pathway' must practise under a condition of *direct (onsite) supervision* by a Council-approved practitioner for at least 12 months after commencing practice in New Zealand. Supervision is defined in the HPCA Act as monitoring and reporting on the performance of a health practitioner by a professional peer.

46. Each practitioner required to practise under oversight or supervision must nominate a practitioner to provide the oversight or supervision. Nominated practitioners must:
    - be registered in the same or a related scope of practice as the supervisee
    - have been continually registered for a minimum of five years
    - hold a current practising certificate
    - be in good standing with the Council.

47. A new registrant with a condition of oversight or supervision will work under a Council-approved oversight or supervision protocol (protocol). They must not start practising until their protocol has been approved by the Council. Each protocol will be individualised to the practitioner, and will usually include:
    - the supervisor or oversight provider's details
    - any specified workplace
    - scope and duration of oversight or supervision
    - any specific assessments required
    - roles and responsibilities of each party to the protocol
    - frequency of reporting to the Council
    - information and documentation required when applying for removal of the condition of oversight or supervision
    - any other relevant information.

48. If a practitioner's oversight provider or supervisor withdraws their support, the practitioner must stand down from practice until a new arrangement is approved.

49. When the registrant believes they have completed all requirements, including the required period of oversight or supervision and any required training, they can apply to the Council for removal of the condition. They will need to supply all required documentation to support their application.

50. The registrant must not practise independently until the Council has told them that it has removed the condition from their scope of practice and they have been issued a practising certificate with the condition removed

Completion of training - New Zealand practising conditions

51. All registrants who register with a qualification obtained outside of New Zealand (including via the Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition pathway) must complete training set by the Council on practising in New Zealand which includes:
    - New Zealand health system and legislation (such as HPCA Act, HDC, ACC, Medicines Act etc)

- Dental Council standards framework: ethical principles, professional standards and practice standards
- obligations on annual recertification and practising certificate renewal
- cultural competence to deliver culturally safe care.

52. The pathway through which new overseas qualified registrants must complete these requirements will depend on their registration pathway:
    - Registrants who are required to practise under oversight or supervision will have a requirement for completion included in their oversight or supervision protocol.
    - All other overseas qualified registrants will be required to complete the same training through a "new registrant recertification programme."

53. Evidence of successful completion of all training requirements must be provided to the Council within the timeframe set by the Council.

Practising certificate required to practise

54. To practise in New Zealand, a practitioner must hold both registration and a practising certificate. Once registration has been approved, an applicant will be issued an invoice to apply for a practising certificate. New registrants must not start practising in New Zealand until their first practising certificate has been issued. Practising without a current practising certificate is an offence under the HPCA Act and grounds for professional discipline in New Zealand.

55. Practising certificates are renewed annually; a first practising certificate may be issued for a shorter period to enable the registrant to join the annual renewal cycle.

Removal from and restoration to the register

56. Individuals can apply for restoration to the Register if their registration was cancelled:
    - following a statutory revision of the Register, the Registrar cancels the registrant's entry in the Register.
    - following a notification to the Council of the registrant's death (made in error) by a Registrar under the Births, Deaths, Marriages and Relationships Registration Act 2021.

57. The Council must restore the applicant to the register unless:
    - they do not meet the fitness for registration requirements (s 16); and/or
    - they are subject to a pending disciplinary proceeding or to an order made by the HPDT to cancel their registration.

58. If an applicant is restored to the Register, any conditions that applied when their registration was cancelled will be reinstated until the conditions are varied or cancelled by the Council.

59. If a person's registration has been cancelled for any other reason (e.g. on their written request or by order of the HPDT), and they wish to be registered again, they must submit a full, fresh application for registration and pay the relevant application fee.

Administration

Related policies

1. Examinations Policy
2. Health (fitness to practise) Policy
3. Policy of Risk of Harm and Risk of Serious Harm
4. Recertification Policy
5. Oversight and Supervision Policy

Version control

Policies replaced or rescinded by this policy	
COM002	Competence to practise
HAF001	English competence and English tests policy
HAF002	Fitness to practise and Fitness for Registration (see also Health Policy)
REG002	Notification to relevant responsible authorities (see also Notifications Policy)
REG003	Registration as an oral health practitioner in New Zealand
REG003S	Registration information for dental students convicted of any offences
REG004	Restoration to the Register

Appendix 1: Approved English language tests and required pass rates

1. Results must be obtained in one sitting.
2. Results are valid for two years from the date of examination.
3. The Council will verify all results with the examining body.

International English Language Testing (IELTS)

Profession	Level of proficiency
Orthodontic Auxiliaries	Applicants are required to: a) sit the IELTS Academic test; and b) score at least 6 in each of the four individual components of listening, reading, writing, and speaking.
Dental Technicians	Applicants are required to: a) sit the IELTS Academic test; and b) gain an average score of 7 or more across the four individual components of listening, reading, writing, and speaking.
All other applicants: ▪ Clinical dental technicians ▪ Dental hygienists ▪ Dental therapists ▪ Dentists and dental specialists ▪ Oral health therapists	Applicants are required to: i. sit the IELTS Academic test; and i. score at least 7 in each of the four individual components of listening, reading, writing and speaking.

Occupational English Test (OET)

Profession	Level of proficiency
Orthodontic auxiliaries	A pass with a minimum score of 250 in each of the four components[6]
All other applicants: ▪ Clinical dental technicians ▪ Dental hygienists ▪ Dental technicians ▪ Dental therapists ▪ Dentists and dental specialists ▪ Oral health therapists	A pass with A or B grades in each of the four components.

End notes

[i] **Competent Authority**

A competent authority has an equivalent regulatory system to New Zealand, including systems for:

- accreditation
- setting professional standards
- competence assessment and registration

[6] This includes a grade of A, B and a minimum score of 250 in the C band, in each of the four components

- ensuring ongoing competence and fitness to practise.

Currently Council recognises the following dental competent authorities:

- General Dental Council (GDC) (United Kingdom)
- Commission on Dental Accreditation of Canada (CDAC) and dental regulators in each province (Canada)
- National Dental Examining Board of Canada (NDEB)
- Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) and State Dental Boards (USA)
- Dental Council of Ireland (DCI) (Republic of Ireland).
- Dental Board of Australia (DBA) and the Australian health practitioner regulation agency (Ahpra) (the applicant may also apply via Trans-Tasman Mutual Recognition pathway above.

[ii] See above.

[iii] **Comparable health systems**

Comparable health systems are countries with comparable health system infrastructure, population health outcomes, and health regulatory frameworks. Currently Council recognises the following countries as having comparable health systems to that of New Zealand:

- Austria
- Belgium
- Hong Kong
- Czechia
- Denmark
- Finland
- France
- Germany
- Greece
- Iceland
- Israel
- Italy
- Japan
- Netherlands
- Norway
- Portugal
- Republic of Korea
- Singapore
- Spain
- Sweden
- Switzerland

[iv] **Teaching and research scope of practice**

The teaching and research scope of practice does not lead to independent and unconditional registration; supervision is a permanent feature of the scope of practice. To practise independently, a practitioner would need to apply for registration via a pathway that leads to unconditional registration.

Practitioners registered in the teaching and research scope of practice need to ensure that they are transparent as to their registration status, and must not use any protected titles under the Act. For example, a practitioner registered under the teaching and research scope of practice cannot state that they are an endodontic specialist in the context of oral health teaching or research being undertaken in New Zealand, as they are not registered in the scope of practice for endodontic specialists.