

## Position Statement

Subject: **Role of the College**  
Approval Date: July 2011, November 2013, May 2016, May 2018  
Review Date: May 2022  
Review by: Board of Directors  
Number: 2/2011

---

### 1. Overview of the College

The College of Pathologists of Australia was incorporated under the *Companies Act, 1936* on 10 April 1956. In 1970 it received Royal Assent to change its name to the Royal College of Pathologists of Australia. In January 1980 the College became the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia in recognition of the increasing number of Fellows in New Zealand.

The New Zealand Society of Pathologists (NZSP) was founded in 1948 and had strong links with the then Royal College of Pathologists of Australia. Gradually over the years the functions of the two organisations merged and in 1995, by mutual agreement between the two organisations, the Society essentially ceased to exist as a separate organisation and most of its functions were taken over by the College. It was revived in 2011, essentially to look after local issues, in particular political matters that require a spokesman on the ground.

The College operated in accordance with its Memorandum and Articles of Association until 2012 when a vote by the Fellowship accepted a new governance order under a new Constitution. The new governance became fully functional in November 2013.

On 1 July 2015 the College took over RCPA Quality Assurance Programs Pty Ltd (RCPA QAP) and it became a wholly owned subsidiary company. RCPA QAP was founded by the College in 1988, but operated independently until merging with the College in 2015. RCPA QAP provides quality assurance programs to laboratories both in Australia and in overseas markets.

The College is a not-for-profit organisation, RCPA QAP is a commercial enterprise and any profits support the work of the College.

### 2. Governance

The principal governing body of the College is the Board of Directors. In addition, the College comprises the following major committees:

- Council Committee
- Board of Education and Assessment (BEA)
- Board of Professional Practice and Quality (BPPQ)

There are also State and Regional Committees and Discipline Advisory Committees representing the various disciplines of pathology. In addition, there are Faculty Committees, general Committees, Taskforces and Working Parties. The RCPA Foundation has a Board and sub committees.

The College Board of Directors and Committees are assisted by the Management Team which implements the policy directions of the governing committees.

### **3. Role of the College**

The College fulfils a range of roles for its Fellows and Trainees, which can be broadly defined in the following areas:

- 3.1 Education, Training and Examinations
- 3.2 Continuing Professional Development
- 3.3 Standards, Quality and Safety
- 3.4 Workforce
- 3.5 Government Relations
- 3.6 Promoting Pathology.

The College is not an industrial body and only comments on business practice and financial issues if they impact on education and training, standards, quality and safety or workforce issues.

#### **3.1 Education Training and Examinations**

In accordance with Rule 12 of the Constitution, the College Fellowship of the RCPA requires a recognised medical degree, and evidence that the person has satisfied all examinations, assessments, supervision and practical requirements of the Board of Education and Assessment.

The Board of Education and Assessment generally requires 5 years of accredited training (or 4 years in the case of Joint Fellowship with the Royal Australasian College of Physicians, other than Infectious Diseases/Microbiology which requires five years training. Furthermore, the Board of Education and Assessment requires all applicants for Fellowship to undergo a formal examination before being offered Fellowship. There is one exception for overseas trained pathologists whose training and qualifications are deemed to be substantially comparable to the Australian Fellowship (currently only the United Kingdom Royal College of Pathologists in Anatomical Pathology and Chemical Pathology). Fellowship may be granted after a 12 month Peer Assessment process. In other disciplines the Board of Education and Assessment determines, based on previous training and examinations, which RCPA examinations the candidate must undertake.

The College allows training and examination in the following subdisciplines of Pathology:

- Anatomical Pathology
- Chemical Pathology
- Clinical Pathology
- Forensic Pathology
- General Pathology
- Genetics
- Haematology

- Immunopathology
- Microbiology.

In addition, the College offers Post Fellowship Diplomas in Cytopathology, Paediatric Pathology, Forensic Pathology, Neuropathology, Dermatopathology and a Certificate in Forensic Medicine and is developing one in Molecular Pathology. The College also has three Faculties, the Faculty of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology (that includes dentists), the Faculty of Science (that includes scientists), and the Faculty of Clinical Forensic Medicine (medical practitioners with clinical forensic experience).

The College is increasingly developing education programs to assist trainees in attaining their Fellowship. This is complementary to the “apprenticeship style” training provided on the job in accredited training positions.

### ***(a) Site Accreditation for Training***

Training must be undertaken in a laboratory accredited for training by the Board of Education and Assessment.

The College accredits sites for training in Australia, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia and Saudi Arabia.

Training in other sites, such as overseas or research laboratories, is considered on its merits.

The Board of Education and Assessment undertakes site accreditation for training based on the range and quantity of work performed, space, equipment, hospital affiliations, level of staffing, library facilities, laboratory and other equipment, experience available and the adequacy of supervision.

Site visits will be undertaken periodically by representatives of the Board of Education and Assessment in conjunction with the National Association of Testing Authorities (NATA) and the International Accreditation New Zealand (IANZ). The visits will include consultation with Trainees, a review of the training facilities and adequacy of supervision.

### ***(b) Assessment of Overseas Trained Specialists (OTS)***

Medical practitioners qualified as specialist pathologists in a country other than Australia or New Zealand, and who are not Fellows of the Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia, may apply for specialist pathologist recognition.

#### **Australia**

Applicants who fulfil the criteria as detailed on the websites of the Australian Medical Council and the College apply directly to the College.

A panel of Fellows within Australia interviews the applicants in Australia, in person or via video conference, and the Board of Education and Assessment makes the final decision about Australian comparability, additional training and examinations required to obtain Fellowship.

If an overseas trained pathologist is assessed as requiring additional experience, they will be required to enter the RCPA training scheme under the same conditions that apply to all other Trainees. If the applicant is only required to sit an

RCPA examination, they will be required to apply for examination in the usual way. Please note the Peer Assessment Pathology to Fellowship mentioned previously.

### **New Zealand**

The Medical Council of New Zealand(MCNZ) will assess the eligibility of doctors who have qualified and practised as specialists overseas for vocational registration in recognised branches.

Applicants must apply initially to the Medical Council of New Zealand.

However, the previous interview process is carried out by the OTS Subcommittee in Australia and a recommendation sent to MCNZ regarding their suitability for vocational registration in New Zealand.

## **3.2 Continuing Professional Development**

The College has since formation played a major role in assisting Fellows to continually develop their knowledge and skills in relation to the professional practice of pathology.

While CPD is compulsory for all Fellows, it is important to stress that the College's role spelled out in the Constitution, is to assist Fellows to participate in continuing education (and the related issues of medical currency and competency) with the primary responsibility for doing so resting with the individual pathologist.

It is also worth noting that currently verification (credentialing) of pathologists after initial registration by a Medical Board/Council is primarily a matter for employers, though the College does provide a Scope of Practice Certificate to Fellows reflecting the discipline area in which they have trained or retrained in.

Bearing these points in mind the College has, for many years, provided support to Fellows to maintain currency by providing:

- education sessions
- an annual update meeting
- various courses
- a College journal
- a network of colleagues to exchange ideas and developments, and
- elective training modules and lectures.
- A wide range of resources accessed through the College website

The need for all specialist medical practitioners to keep up-to-date with developments in their specialty and to maintain their skills is greater today than ever with the growth in technical and scientific processes. Whilst the majority of members have used College activities to enhance their skills and education, there has been pressure for this activity to be formally documented and quantified.

To respond to this need and assist Fellows with this requirement, the College has a Continuing Professional Development Program (CPDP). The program is based on self-directed learning through the documentation of educational activities. Internal Quality Assurance Frameworks are being introduced in each discipline. It is compulsory for all Fellows to participate in the CPD program and to provide evidence of 10 hours peer review activity per year.

Increasingly Medical Regulatory Authorities are requiring the College to play a more active role in assisting them to identify practitioners not fulfilling CPD requirements. In November 2017 the Constitution of the College was amended to allow the College to report non-compliant Fellows to medical regulatory authorities.

### **3.3 Standards Quality and Safety**

A major role for the College is setting standards for professional practice and ensuring that pathology is practised in a high quality, safe manner. The College ensures this via a large number of activities, some of which the College drives itself, others where the College works with other bodies to achieve the desired outcome. Some of the areas that fall within the College's areas of interest include:

- Regulations as they pertain to safety and quality and professional issues
- Standards
- Supervision requirements
- Laboratory Accreditation
- Internal and External Quality Assurance requirements
- Incident monitoring (including critical incidents)
- TGA regulatory requirements
- Scope of Practice
- Clinical Privileging
- Clinical Governance
- Complaints handling
- Disaster planning
- Risk Management
- OH&S – including safe working hours/ workloads

#### **Specific issues include:**

##### ***(a) Pathology Laboratory Accreditation (Test Performance)***

The College is actively involved in assisting in the setting of standards for laboratory practice and providing Fellows with a means to test the quality of their practice.

Within Australia, the College is an active participant with three nominees on the Ministerially appointed National Pathology Accreditation Advisory Council (NPAAC).

NPAAC advises the Commonwealth, State and Territory Health Ministers on matters relating to the accreditation of pathology laboratories. NPAAC plays a key role in ensuring the quality of Australian pathology services and is responsible for the development and maintenance of standards and guidelines for pathology practices. NPAAC is made up of representatives from all States and Territories,

nominees from peak professional bodies, such as the College and the Department of Health and Aged Care.

While NPAAC provides the standards for laboratory practice, the actual accreditation process is carried out by NATA/RCPA a joint initiative between the College and the National Association of Testing Authorities. The NATA/RCPA laboratory testing program is conducted under a Memorandum of Understanding between the two organisations. NATA provides the organisational support, coordination and professional surveyors, whilst the College provides advice to NATA on interpretation of professional practice issues including whether pathologists supervising hold the appropriate qualifications and experience to supervise a particular laboratory, and provides Fellows on a voluntary basis to provide peer review assessment at the time of the review.

In Australia, to obtain a Medicare Benefit for pathology, the laboratory must be accredited under the NATA/RCPA scheme.

In accordance with the NPAAC Standards mentioned above, 'Laboratories must be enrolled, participate and remain in an external Quality Assurance Program (QAP) complying with NPAAC criteria'. The RCPA QAP Pty Ltd programs comply with the criteria.

The College has been active in developing external Quality Programs in Pathology for over 40 years. In 1988 the College handed the management of these external Quality Programs to RCPA Quality Assurance Pty Ltd. New programs are developed in association with the College's Quality Assurance Scientific and Education Committee.

#### ***(b) College involvement with Accreditation within New Zealand***

Accreditation is compulsory in New Zealand if a laboratory is funded by the New Zealand government.

Part of the IANZ (International Accreditation New Zealand) requirements is for laboratories to participate in external quality assurance programs such as the RCPA/QAP or equivalent.

Unlike Australia, the IANZ sets the standards for accreditation as well as undertaking the inspections. The IANZ has a Medical Testing Professional Advisory Committee which provides advice on professional issues in relation to standards and accreditation. The College has one representative on this Committee.

#### ***(c) Other Professional Practice Issues***

The College is regularly asked to comment on documents, policies and guidelines from a scientific and professional practice perspective. The College consults with appropriate experts within its membership and compiles composite responses to the organisation requiring advice. The organisations are usually government departments, professional associations, laboratories, health care organisations.

On occasions the College will provide assistance to Medical Boards or employing agencies in assessing the professional practice performance of a Fellow.

### **3.4 Workforce**

The College plays a major role in overseeing workforce requirements for pathologists scientists and clinical forensic medicine specialists.

Workforce issues in which the College is involved include:

- The structure, balance and geographic distribution of the pathology workforce in Australasia
- The number and distribution within pathology disciplines of existing trainee positions
- The number and distribution of training places needed to meet future demand as suggested by patterns of supply, population health status, practice developments and changing models of health care; and
- The number of specialist pathologist, and senior scientist positions required to provide high quality pathology services in all disciplines of pathology in all geographical locations
- Appropriate Workload Levels
- Adequate time to participate in such activities as CPDP, teaching, quality assurance, professional practice issues and research
- Lobbying for training positions and pathologist positions when deficiencies are identified and
- Setting standards in relation to workforce and workloads.

### 3.4 **Government Relations**

The College has a role in relation to liaising with governments on issues relating to the professional practice, medical economic and other medico-political issues.

#### **Australia**

In Australia the College has a working relationship with the Commonwealth Department of Health. In addition to NPAAC mentioned above, there are forums for discussion and collaboration. The College works with Federal and State governments to ensure high quality pathology services are provided for the Australian community. Issues such as safety and quality and appropriate workforce are the key issues the College targets. The College will become involved in funding issues if the lack of funding impacts on these issues.

#### **New Zealand**

The College provides advice in New Zealand in relation to competency via the Medical Council of NZ (MCNZ) and the Ministry of Health in relation to issues of training Fellows via consultation with Health Workforce NZ on matters related to training specifications for training positions and the number of training posts required.

The College more recently has been asked to provide professional advice on how pathology should be practised and funded in New Zealand.

The College has a Memorandum of Understanding with the New Zealand Society of Pathologists who have a stronger role in the political sphere in New Zealand than the College.

### **3.5 Promoting Pathology in the Community**

The College is involved in promoting pathology and the role of pathologists in the community and actively seeks opportunities to educate other medical practitioners, employing agencies, medical and high school students and the general public.

The College is engaged in a number of activities:

- The RCPA website [www.rcpa.edu.au](http://www.rcpa.edu.au)
- 'The Manual' for Use and Interpretation of Pathology Tests (available on the website)
- A joint initiative with Reed Publishing to produce "Common Sense Pathology" directed at educating GP's (with government funding)
- Vodcasts and Brochures with career and general information (by discipline)
- ePathWay online magazine
- Captive audience advertising campaigns
- Attendance at Career Expos and other Career promotional activities
- Media relations
- Joint initiatives for promotion with other pathology organisations
- International Pathology Day events
- Facebook, Twitter, Blog presence