

Policy

Medical Laboratory Science Return to Practice

Effective 08 April 2025

Policy Title	MLS Return to Practice Policy
Reference Number	2025-MSC-MLS-Return to Practice
Scope	This policy applies to all medical laboratory science practitioners registered with the Medical Sciences Council looking to return to practice in New Zealand

Associated Policy Documents	
Medical Laboratory Science Scope of Practice	Scope of Practice and Prescribed Qualifications for the Practice of Medical Laboratory Science 2021
Medical Laboratory Science Registration Policy	MLS Registration Policy 2021
English Language Proficiency	English Language Proficiency Policy 2021
Medical Laboratory Science Supervision	Supervision and Direction for Medical Laboratory Science Practitioners 2019

Revision Schedule			
Version Number	Version Date	Approved By	Next Review
One	2014	Medical Sciences Council	2016
Two	June 2019	Medical Sciences Council	2021
Three	April 2021	Medical Sciences Council	2023
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Policy overview

1. This policy sets out the Medical Sciences Council (the Council's) return to practice requirements for registered medical laboratory science practitioners, in accordance with the [Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003](#) (the Act).
2. Under [Section 27](#) of the Act, the Council may decline to issue an annual practicing certificate (APC) if the practitioner has not held an APC of a kind sought by the application within the three years immediately preceding the date of the application.
3. [Section 29](#) enables the Council to consider what conditions it may impose or vary before issuing a practising certificate.

Definitions

4. The Council defines return to practice as occurring when a practitioner has not held an Aotearoa New Zealand practicing certificate in the required scope within the three years prior to the application for a practising certificate or has not practised as a medical laboratory science practitioner within the last three years.
5. Practice is defined as any aspect of healthcare where a practitioner uses their professional knowledge and skills to impact directly or indirectly the care of others. For example, this can include education, research, regulation and management as described in the scope of practice.

Policy

6. The following practitioners must meet the Council's return to practice requirements, demonstrating their competence and fitness to practice safely in Aotearoa New Zealand:
 - a. Practitioners who have not practised in the relevant scope of practice for more than three years immediately preceding the date of their application; or
 - b. Practitioners who have practised outside of Aotearoa New Zealand for more than three years since they were registered or last held a practising certificate in the relevant scope (whichever is most recent); or
 - c. Practitioners who have not held a practising certificate since they were first registered/graduated in Aotearoa New Zealand, and it has been more than three years since registration/graduation.

7. Practitioners returning to practice after a break of less than three years must adhere to the requirements set out in the [Practising Certificate](#) policy.

Practising certificate

8. The issue of a practising certificate requires registered practitioners to provide evidence they are competent to practice within the relevant scope.
9. The scope of practice, as articulated in the current Gazette Notice, provides the broad parameters of medical laboratory science practice.
10. The Council's [Competence Standards](#) for Medical Laboratory Scientists in Aotearoa New Zealand 2018 provide the detail of how registered practitioners are expected to practise and what they must be capable of doing. The competence standards set the minimum threshold required of entry-level practitioners.
11. To ensure public safety, as a minimum, practitioners applying for a practising certificate must be able to work at the level expected of an entry-level practitioner and be able to demonstrate they meet all the competence standards for their registered scope of practice.

Information requirements

12. Where a practitioner has not practiced in Aotearoa New Zealand for more than three years, they will need to complete the following requirements set by the Council to ensure their competence and fitness to practice.

Return to practice documentation requirements

13. The following document requirements apply to all practitioners seeking to return to practice:
 - a. CV/resume
 - b. Two written professional references
 - c. A return to practice plan
 - d. Evidence of any relevant professional development activities that have been completed
 - e. A criminal conviction history check from each country the practitioner has lived in for more than 12 months since they last held a practising certificate/were registered
 - f. Consent to a New Zealand criminal justice check
 - g. Evidence of good standing from any regulatory or professional body they have been practising under since they last held a practising certificate/were registered (including any other New Zealand responsible authority).

Demonstration of competence

14. Practitioners returning to practice must provide evidence that they are competent to resume practising in their registered scope of practice. This evidence may include:
15. Successful completion of a Council-approved assessment of competence
16. Successful passing a Council-approved examination (knowledge-based)
 - a. Providing evidence of relevant continued professional development
 - b. Providing evidence of relevant experience working in the medical laboratory science profession (eg overseas employment)
 - c. Completion of further education.
17. The specific requirements are personalised based on the time away from practice, the activities completed during the time away from practice and any other relevant factors.

Requirements for issue of a practising certificate

18. The Council may declare that the practitioner engages with specific requirements as part of issuing of a practising certificate, for example as a condition or completing a recertification programme.
19. These requirements may include:
 - a. Supervision
 - b. Education
 - c. Other requirements as determined by the Council
20. Any pre-existing requirements imposed at the time of registration (such as a conditions or recertification programme). These will continue to be in place until the requirement is met.

Supervision

21. Practitioners may be required to complete a period of supervised practice as a condition of their return to practice.
22. The supervisor must be a registered health practitioner (under the HPCA Act 2003) with the Council, be in the same profession as the practitioner and hold a current practising certificate issued by the Council.

23. The practitioner will be required to complete between four full time equivalent weeks to 12 full time equivalent months of supervised practice. The specific period or amount of supervision is personalised for the practitioner's situation.
24. Supervision applied as a condition must adhere to the [Supervision and Direction for Medical Laboratory Science Practitioners](#) policy.
25. The level of supervision may be incrementally reduced after the initial minimum period of supervision as mutually agreed by the nominated supervisor and the return-to-practice practitioner.
26. At the end of the period of supervised practice, the supervisor must provide a report to the Council recommending the end of the supervision period as the practitioner can now practice safely independently.
27. The practitioner and nominated supervisor must meet all reporting requirements as specified by the Council.

Education

28. The Council may require that the practitioner complete relevant education that includes specific topics to support safe practice (eg, Health information privacy education). The practitioner must provide evidence of completion within the specified timeframe.

Condition

29. Where there is a specific concern, the Council may apply a personalised condition to the practitioner to ensure the protection of the public.

Return to practice requirements

Return to Practice			
Return to practice category	Return to practice docs	International docs	Further support
Has not held an APC in the scope for more than three years	- CV/resume - Two written professional references - Return to practice plan - Relevant CPD - Criminal conviction history check - COGS if has worked under another RA during that time		- Personalised support based on circumstances: - Period of supervision - Education to prepare for returning to work in NZ
Has not held an APC in the scope for more than three years, and has worked overseas during this time	- CV/resume - Two written professional references - Return to practice plan - Relevant CPD - Criminal conviction history check	- Criminal conviction history check from each country lived in more than 12 months - Certificate of Good standing from each regulatory or professional body practised with	- Personalised support based on circumstances: - Period of supervision - Education to prepare for returning to work in NZ
Has never held an APC in the scope	- CV/resume - Two written professional references - Return to practice plan - Relevant CPD - Criminal conviction history check	Criminal conviction history check from each country	- Personalised support based on circumstances: - Period of supervision - Education to prepare for returning to work in NZ - Greater level of scrutiny required