

Anaesthetic Technician Scope of Practice Review – Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the Council undertaking this review?

- The Council must be focused on its primary responsibility which is protecting the health and safety of the Aotearoa New Zealand public. The Council must therefore ensure the scope of practice is fit for purpose and enables a flexible and responsive workforce.
- Since Anaesthetic Technicians were regulated in 2012, there has been one review of the scope of practice. This was undertaken in 2017-2018, but it did not result in any significant changes. Clinical practice has changed, and it is important to ensure the scope is contemporary and both flexible and broad enough to deal with the changing demands of health care and people receiving care, while at the same time, ensuring practitioners are safe and competent to practise.
- The prescribed qualification for Anaesthetic Technicians has now transitioned to a degree level qualification: the Bachelor of Health Science Perioperative Practice. Graduates from the degree will enter the workforce with all the skills of previous graduates.
- The Council has been part of a wider group that has considered the important work of anaesthetic technicians, over a number of years. This has included discussions with Technical Advisory Services in 2019 regarding changes to the prescribed qualification and regular meetings with key stakeholders.

What is the process that needs to occur?

- The Council needs to consider the feedback that it receives following this consultation. This will occur at a Council meeting. After this consideration, and if the Council agrees to proceed with changes to the scope, the Registrar will be asked to gazette the new scope of practice notice. Once it is gazetted there is a time period before it comes into effect. The Council will communicate with all practitioners following the consultation.

Will there be an implementation process?

- Yes, the Council will communicate this after the outcome so that all practitioners and employers are aware of any changes and the timing of those changes.

When will this come into effect?

- Any changes will come into effect after the Council has received and thoroughly considered all feedback from the consultation.

Who have you engaged with about the scope of practice prior to this consultation?

- The Council liaised with a number of key stakeholder groups prior to consultation. Liaison included but was not limited to the following organisations: New Zealand Anaesthetic Technicians' Society, New Zealand Nurses Organisation, the Nursing Council, Auckland University of Technology, Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists, New Zealand Society of Anaesthetists, New Zealand Private Surgical Hospitals Association, and Manatū Hauora.

Why has the new scope removed the concept of “expanded practice”?

- The new degree programme will provide students with a wider foundation from which they will be able to practise. Practitioners who are already in the workforce may also work in these areas if they want to as they will be included in the scope definition. However, in order to do so they will be expected to undergo appropriate continuing education.

Is the Council proposing a completely new scope of practice?

- No, the review of the scope of practice is aimed at ensuring that work currently undertaken by anaesthetic technicians that is described as expanded practice is included within the definition of the scope. Students of the perioperative practice programme learn these tasks and skills as part of their programme of education and the proposed scope of practice is about broadening opportunities for all practitioners who may with appropriate education, insert PICC lines, work in theatre in scrub, circulating and traditional anaesthetic technician roles as well as provide pre-operative and PACU care.

What is the scope of practice?

- The proposed title that would be gazetted is “Perioperative Practitioner”. However, proposed working titles that practitioners may use include Perioperative Practitioner, Perioperative Practitioner - Anaesthetics, Anaesthetic Technician, Operating Department Practitioner. The Council acknowledges that there are several names that anaesthetic technology practitioners may use and we want to make sure this consultation captures all of these.

What does this mean for Anaesthetic Technicians already registered with the Council?

- There is no change. All practitioners who are already registered may continue to practise as they have been. These practitioners may, with appropriate education, work across the perioperative space.

Do I need to apply for registration again if there are changes to the scope of practice following this consultation?

- No. If you are already registered, there will be no changes to your registration status and no need to reapply.

Will internationally qualified ATs be restricted from practising in what are currently called “expanded practice” areas?

- Practitioners must ensure they always practice within their area of skill, education and competence. All practitioners must complete appropriate education to ensure they may safely practice across the perioperative space. If a practitioner completes appropriate ongoing education, they may work in other perioperative practice areas.

Do I have to practise across the perioperative space?

- No. All practitioners should ensure they practise within their area of skill, education, and competence. If a practitioner completes appropriate ongoing education, they may work in other perioperative practice areas.

If in the future I can scrub and circulate in the perioperative environment, will I also be expected to provide anaesthetic assistance for the same procedure?

- This will ultimately be determined by whether it is safe to do so. Practitioners must ensure their practice is safe, and that they are working within their area of competence and education.

Will a new scope for perioperative practitioners prevent nurses working as anaesthetic assistants?

- No. Practitioners registered with the Nursing Council of New Zealand may continue to work as they have been.

If the scope of practice broadens, who will review salaries and terms and conditions to reflect these changes?

- Questions regarding terms and conditions of employment including remuneration are best directed to your union, professional association or employer.

I do not have the perioperative degree qualification; can I work in PACU or will I be expected to be able to work in PACU if the scope of practice changes to include this?

- The change will mean all practitioners have the potential to work in all areas across the perioperative space. However, practitioners can only work in areas where they have knowledge and skills. To be able to do so will require practitioners to complete a programme of education that ensures they have the competencies for that area of practice.

I was educated in the UK as an Operating Department Practitioner (ODP). Will practitioners still be eligible for registration without further assessment?

- At this time UK ODPs are still eligible for registration without assessment. With the change in qualification that leads to entry to the register all overseas qualifications will be reviewed to ensure they meet the Aotearoa | New Zealand standards.

What do these changes mean for internationally qualified practitioners seeking registration in Aotearoa?

- The changes do not alter the registration requirements for internationally qualified practitioners. Internationally qualified practitioners must continue to meet one of the registration pathways set out in the Council's Gazette Notice. They must show they meet the necessary entry level requirements all applicants are subject to.

What does the change mean for other practitioners seeking registration in Aotearoa New Zealand?

- The Council currently has registration pathways for practitioners who do not hold a prescribed qualification. This includes a registration pathway for New Zealand registered and enrolled nurses. This pathway will remain in place.
- The consultation document also includes a proposal to consider registration for applicants who hold a New Zealand degree in a relevant human health science linked to perioperative practice or anaesthesia. The proposal is to consider allowing applicants to sit an online perioperative examination that will test whether the applicant has the necessary understanding expected of all practitioners. These practitioners would also be subject to reasonable supervision to ensure they were fit for practice. This pathway may help to address the current workforce issues.

If the changes in the proposal are implemented, can I gain registration if I have completed a Diploma in Applied Science (Anaesthetic Technology)?

- The Council recognises that current students enrolled in the Diploma in Applied Science (Anaesthetic Technology) will be able to seek registration if they complete all requirements. There is a time limit for which registration can occur.

What about students who are completing the diploma?

- The Council has ensured there is a grand-parenting provision that means it will be able to continue to recognise those completing the diploma qualification who are not yet registered.
 - A grand-parenting pathway is a transitional pathway that allows certain practitioners to register and continue to practise their profession before implementation of new rules and regulations take full effect. This is informed by Section 13(b) of the HPCA Act which states that in the prescribing of qualifications “the qualifications may not unnecessarily restrict the registration of persons as health practitioners.”
- ATs who have been educated through the Diploma pathway can engage in ongoing education which means they can develop the skills and competencies to work in areas such as PACU.

What does the new degree mean for practitioners?

- The degree programme (Bachelor of Health Sciences – Perioperative Practice) will give practitioners a wider and better base from which to develop their practice to meet the demands of expanding operating theatre services. The degree opens up opportunities for practitioners to undertake higher level education from universities which they cannot always do at this time. The degree, and this scope review, will also be a significant step in opening up opportunities and career progression that does not currently exist. While there is a new qualification, practitioners will continue to practise in the same professional manner they always have.

Will the degree programme and these new requirements create a two-tiered system?

- No, all practitioners must work within their area of education, skill and competence. The Council is very conscious that this may be a concern and has taken great care to ensure all practitioners may, with education and support, work in all areas of perioperative practice.
- The proposed scope could have more of a perioperative focus rather than a narrow anaesthesia one. This will enable practitioners with appropriate education, to work across all perioperative areas such as PACU, hospital transfers, scrub, circulating, and pre-assessment clinics.

Will the new graduates be registered straight away?

- When a person graduates from the Perioperative Practice degree, they will be eligible for registration. They will not be required to sit a further practical examination as has previously been the case.

Will newly registered practitioners be required to practice under supervision?

- The Council is proposing that all newly registered practitioners will be required to work under supervision for a minimum of three (3) months. This includes Aotearoa New Zealand graduates and also those internationally qualified practitioners who gain registration here.

How long is the period of supervision that is being proposed?

- At the point of their initial registration, practitioners will normally be required to complete a minimum period of three (3) months of supervised practice. The period of supervised practice may be longer than three months and will be determined in accordance with the Council's registration policies. Supervision is a formal process of professional support and teaching to enable the practitioner to build on their knowledge, skills, and professional attributes within the Aotearoa New Zealand medical environment.

Why supervision?

- A period of supervision will apply to all newly registered practitioners because it is important to ensure recent graduates develop their confidence in a safe environment. The supervision will help support newly registered practitioners into practice.

What is supervision?

- For the purposes of regulation, supervision is defined in the HPCA Act (2003) as the monitoring of, and reporting on, the performance of a health practitioner by the professional peer.

Who will supervise newly registered practitioners?

- Suitably experienced Anaesthetic Technicians.

What do the new practitioners need to do?

- The newly registered practitioner will be required to identify a suitable supervisor to work with. A supervision agreement between the supervisee and supervisor will set clear expectations about what should be covered.

What else is required to support new practitioners?

- Ultimately, a robust period of orientation is required. The Council will work with employers to ensure they have appropriate orientation programmes.

In the proposal, could a newly registered practitioner be employed as a locum or similar?

- Newly registered practitioners will be required to complete a minimum of three (3) months' supervision. Anyone practising under supervision cannot work as a locum.

Is there any reporting to the Council?

- Supervision is about ensuring recent graduates develop their confidence in a safe environment. It is about supporting newly registered practitioners into practice. Once the period of supervision has been completed, the supervisor will provide a summary of the supervision to the Council. Both the supervisor and the newly registered practitioner may comment on the summary. The summary may also provide practitioners with a way to reflect, to build on their knowledge, skills and professional attributes required for ongoing practise.

What are the requirements for cultural safety?

- The requirements for cultural safety are outlined in the Council's existing policy, which can be found [here](#). Cultural safety, Te Tiriti o Waitangi and Māori health are aspects of practice that are reflected in the Council's standards and competencies and for which Aotearoa New Zealand graduates are educated to meet during their programme of education. As part of the continued process to provide culturally safe practice, practitioners must reflect on their own cultural identity, and then understand the impact this has on their professional practice. This is a requirement for all practitioners.

What will the workforce look like in ten years' time?

- Theatre work will be the day-to-day reality, however perioperative practitioners may be found in many areas across the hospital space for example in Emergency departments or interventional radiology.