



Te Kaunihera
Rata o
Aotearoa

**Medical
Council of
New Zealand**

Policy on reference requirements for applications for registration and for practising certificates

Policy statement

With limited exceptions, applications for registration must be accompanied by at least three references regarding a doctor or physician associate's fitness and competence to practise in the scope of practice they are applying for.

To be issued with a practising certificate (PC), some applications for PCs will also need to be accompanied by references regarding a doctor or physician associate's fitness and competence to practise in the scope of practice they hold.

References must be authentic, authoritative and comprehensive, and provided on Council's approved form. At least three references are required. In cases where applicants cannot meet the requirements, Council may consider alternatives which sufficiently demonstrate fitness and competence.

Rationale

Council's principal purpose is to protect the health and safety of members of the public by ensuring that doctors and physician associates are competent and fit to practise.

Authentic, authoritative and comprehensive references are necessary to ensure that Council can make decisions related to the applicant's fitness and competence to practise in New Zealand.

Applicability of this policy

1. This policy applies to applications for registration via the following scopes of practice and pathways:
 - Provisional general (competent authority, comparable health system, Australian and United Kingdom general registrants)
 - General (New Zealand/Australian graduates)
 - Provisional vocational
 - Vocational (in some cases fewer or no references are required for a vocational application when the doctor is also registered in the General scope of practice)
 - Special purpose (locum tenens, teleradiology, postgraduate training, research).
 - Physician associate provisional scope of practice
2. It also applies to applications for practising certificates, in cases where the applicant must provide references.

Requirements

3. There are several core requirements that referees and their reports must meet, regardless of the level of role (for example, consultant or house officer) at which the applicant seeks to work in New Zealand. There are also further requirements depending on the role level and scope of practice applied for.

Core requirements

4. At least three references are required.
5. Referees must be registered doctors, practising in the same or similar area of medicine the applicant is applying for.
6. Referees must have worked closely with, and be familiar with, the applicant's practice.
7. Referees must have worked with the applicant within the last 3 years.
8. At least one referee must have worked with the applicant at their current place of work. If the applicant has only been in their current place of employment for 3 months or less, a reference from that workplace will not be required. However, confirmation of employment details and that the applicant was/is in good standing will be required from the employer (for example by way of a certificate of employment).
9. Referees must be able to comment objectively about the applicant and declare any conflicts of interest. Doctors who have close personal relationships with applicants (for example, a family member) will not be suitable as referees.
10. References must be completed on a referee report form approved by Council. The form must be personally completed by the referee.
11. References must be dated within 6 months of receipt of the applicant's complete application by Council.

Additional requirements for different levels of appointment

Senior medical officer (SMO), specialist, consultant level (including general practitioners), fellow, and medical officer roles

12. Referees must be consultant/specialist doctors, practising in the same or similar area of medicine the applicant is applying for and should hold vocational/specialist registration in the relevant jurisdiction.
13. They must have worked closely with, and be familiar with, the applicant's practice at consultant/specialist/medical officer level (or fellow/senior registrar level, if the applicant has recently completed their specialist training), in the area of medicine the applicant is applying for.
14. They must have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months in the last 3 years.
15. Applicants are recommended to provide a reference from their current clinical director (or equivalent role).

Registrar roles

16. Referees must be consultants/specialists, practising in the same or similar area of medicine as the applicant is applying for and should hold vocational/specialist registration in the relevant jurisdiction.
17. Referees must either:
 - have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months in the last 3 years; or
 - for applicants currently participating in a vocational training programme or in a residency programme and rotating every 3-6 months, have worked with them for the entirety of the rotation, which must have taken place entirely within the last 3 years.

House officer roles

18. Referees must be senior medical colleagues.
19. Referees must either:
 - have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months in the last 3 years; or
 - for applicants currently working as house officers and rotating across different areas of medicine every 3-4 months, have worked with them for the entirety of the rotation, which must have taken place entirely within the last 3 years.
20. The current or most recent referee must be from a senior colleague working on the same attachment as the applicant, at the time the application is submitted.

Physician associate roles

21. Referees must be consultant/specialist doctors, practising in the same or similar area of medicine the applicant is applying for and should hold vocational/specialist registration in the relevant jurisdiction.
22. They must have worked with the applicant for at least 6 months in the last 3 years.

Referee verification

23. Council must be assured that the provided reference is authentic and legitimate.
24. If a doctor is applying for registration or for a practising certificate within either a provisional vocational or a vocational scope of practice, Council will directly contact the referee to verify the report.
25. For all other applications, the employer must make a declaration and provide evidence of verifying the reference to Council¹.

References that do not meet the above requirements

26. If applicants are unable to nominate referees that meet the above requirements, there is limited discretion to consider alternatives, on a case-by-case basis.
27. In considering such cases, Council will need to be satisfied that the applicant is competent to practise within the scope applied for and fit for registration.
28. At least four references will be required, along with a cover letter explaining why these requirements cannot be met.

¹ Evidence can include email confirmation sent directly from the referee to the agent or employer, or use of an electronic signature platform approved by Council.

29. In considering such references, weight will be given to the following factors:

- recency of the professional relationship between the applicant and referee – referees who ceased working with the applicant more than 3 years ago will not be accepted
- the nature of their professional relationship
- length of time the applicant and referee have practised together
- similarity and relevance of the areas of practice by the applicant and referee.

30. References which significantly depart from the above requirements will not be considered suitable.

Version control

Date	Details
October 2009	Approved by Council
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September 2026	Updated with Registrar approval
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