

Applying for COMS



Becoming a Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist

The Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia (OMAA) is the peak professional body that sets the industry standards for O&M Specialists in Australia and New Zealand. The O&M industry is too small to develop and sustain an independently proctored certification program, so in 2013 the OMAA adopted the COMS program as part of the OMAA quality framework. COMS is required for OMAA Registration.

Why COMS?

The COMS program provides an international benchmark for the academic standards, body of knowledge, and workplace experience required for entry-level O&M Specialists, as well as professional development requirements to recertify every five years. There are many pathways to becoming an O&M Specialist, with more than 20 professional training programs available in Australia and New Zealand from 1971-2020 (see page 2). These programs have all now been evaluated against the COMS standards and found comprehensive.

ACVREP

The COMS program is administered by the Academy for the Certification of Vision Rehabilitation and Education Professionals (ACVREP) in the USA. The ACVREP Board is committed to making the COMS program internationally accessible and so there are representatives from Australia and New Zealand on the COMS Subject Matter Expert Committee. OMAA has worked with ACVREP to interpret the COMS Handbook and clarify eligibility requirements for applicants outside the USA and Canada, including those from Australia and New Zealand. The COMS handbook can be downloaded from <https://www.acvrep.org/certifications/coms>

Applying for COMS

A COMS application is a three-stage process and there are fees for each stage:

1. Eligibility application.

Set up an account through the ACVREP website. A COMS applicant from Australia or New Zealand needs to apply through Category 2 Path B, submit evidence of O&M qualifications and workplace experience (see pages 3-4) and pay fees online. We cannot apply through Category 1 because our training programs have not been formally assessed through the US based National Association of Credential Evaluation Services (<https://www.naces.org/>).

2. The COMS Exam.

Once eligibility is approved by ACVREP, the applicant can take the online, multiple choice COMS exam at a local venue.

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Printed FAQ02 v1.1 Published: April 22 Author: LD (PSC) Approval: Executive

3. The COMS Certificate.

After passing the COMS exam, evidence of certification arrives in the mail. This evidence is needed to apply for OMAA Registration.

O&M Personnel Preparation Programs in ANZ, 1971-2020

Victoria

1971-1991 Royal Guide Dogs (RGDAA), Kew VIC
Associations of Australia Certificate / Graduate Diploma in O&M

1981-1983 Victoria College, Burwood VIC Certificate in O&M

1985 Victoria College, Burwood VIC Diploma in O&M

1985-1987 Victoria College, Burwood VIC Bachelor of Arts (Disability Studies, O&M)

1992-1997 La Trobe University, VIC Graduate Diploma in O&M 1998-2006 La Trobe
University, VIC Bachelor of Health Sciences (O&M) Graduate Diploma in O&M

2001-2006 Royal Victorian Institute for the Certificate IV in Vision Impairment Support
Blind (RVIB), VIC (O&M)

2008-2011 La Trobe University, VIC Graduate Diploma in O&M 2008-2010 Vision
Australia, Kensington Graduate Certificate in Vision Impairment (O&M)

2011-2013 Vision Australia, NSW/VIC Graduate Certificate in Vision Impairment (O&M)

2014-2017 Vision Australia, VIC Graduate Diploma of O&M **New South**

Wales

1988-1996 Guide Dogs NSW/ACT Agency certificate

1994 University of Western Sydney Certificate in O&M; Grad Diploma in Special
Ed (itinerant teachers)

1998-1999 University of Sydney Graduate Diploma of Health Science (Vision
Impairment)

2000-2018 Renwick Centre, University of Master of Special Education (\pm Sensory
Newcastle, NSW Impairment/Disability)

2018-2020 Renwick Centre/Macquarie Master of Disability Studies (Sensory
University, NSW Disability)

Queensland

1998-2016 Griffith University, QLD Master of Human Services (O&M) **South**

Australia

2001 Flinders University, SA Master of Special Education (O&M) Graduate Certificate in
Education (O&M)

Graduate Certificate in Disability Studies

New Zealand

1990-2008 Massey University, NZ Postgraduate Diploma in Rehabilitation (with
Distinction in Rehabilitation of the
Visually Impaired)

2016 University of Pittsburgh / Blind Vision Studies - Certificate in O&M
Foundation NZ

2018 Massey University, NZ Postgraduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching: Blind
and Low Vision

O&M Qualifications

A COMS application requires a bachelor's degree or higher, or a national government approved O&M personnel preparation program (e.g., Vocational Education and Training sector in Australia). Additionally, the OMAA recommends 80+ hours experience in community travel and activities of daily living with low vision/blindness to consolidate embodied O&M knowledge. The programs listed on page 2 have been reviewed by OMAA against the COMS body of knowledge and deemed comprehensive.

Two kinds of evidence of qualifications are required for a COMS eligibility application:

1. Transcript.

An official university transcript (listing subjects and results) needs to show successful completion of a comprehensive O&M qualification at bachelor level or higher. The transcript can be sent electronically, directly from the university to ACVREP, OR a hard copy original with security features (watermark, logo, etc) can be scanned and uploaded with the COMS application, and then a certified hard copy posted to ACVREP in the mail.

If a university transcript is unavailable, then upload a university/college testamur (the wall certificate with university seal, received at graduation), then send a certified hard copy to ACVREP in the mail, OR send a signed letter, statement or certificate from the program provider on letterhead, declaring satisfactory completion of the program, AND/OR an unofficial transcript of subjects undertaken and results (e.g., semester print-out).

If the O&M qualification was a less than bachelor's degree, then also submit evidence of a degree or highest qualification in another discipline (e.g., transcript or testamur).

2. OMAA-branded core domain area chart.

This document shows that the applicant's O&M qualification has been reviewed by OMAA and has addressed all areas of the COMS body of knowledge. Graduates from an Australasian O&M program (see page 2) can request the relevant OMAA-branded core domain area chart for their program from the OMAA Professional Standards Committee.

COMS applicants who trained outside Australia or New Zealand can work with an OMAA standards advisor to review their program content, determine whether it is comprehensive, and then create a customized, OMAA-branded core domain area chart to support the COMS application. This process might identify gaps in the initial training program that need to be addressed before applying for COMS.

Sometimes the COMS body of knowledge has been pieced together from different training programs. Again, an OMAA Standards advisor can help the applicant to evaluate evidence of sufficient training, including transcripts showing satisfactory completion of relevant subjects, to develop a customised, OMAA-branded core domain area chart.

Contact standards@omaaustralasia.com for more information.

Internship / Workplace Experience

A COMS applicant needs to have completed at least 350 hours work placement/internship, supervised by a COMS. This COMS-supervised placement can be undertaken as part of an O&M qualification and/or after graduation as part of early employment.

At least 250 hours of the placement must be direct client work (e.g., planning, assessment, teaching, case conferences, file notes) rather than general O&M duties (e.g., driving, team meetings, professional development sessions).

The usual evidence for this requirement is a completed, COMS-signed Applied/Clinical Competency Evaluation Form (see COMS Handbook).

If the immediate supervisor is not a COMS, then arrangements can be made for an off-site COMS to oversee the placement, working in a three-way relationship with the COMS applicant and local non-COMS supervisor. Off-site COMS supervision needs to be approved by ACVREP before the placement commences – see the COMS Handbook for the application paperwork.

1. Alternatives to a COMS-supervised internship

The ACVREP recognises that although O&M Specialists who qualified in Australasia before 2020 usually completed at least 350 hours internship, few were supervised by a COMS and do not have the required Applied/Clinical Competency Evaluation Form as evidence. Thus, alternative ways for experienced applicants to demonstrate workplace competence have been approved by ACVREP.

1. Hours of experience.

A form on letterhead (See COMS Handbook Appendix for template) signed by a workplace supervisor stating completion of 3200 hours professional practice in the most recent 3 years – this method suits recent graduates – OR a curriculum vitae showing at least 3 years of O&M employment, roles, responsibilities, and full-time equivalence – this method suits applicants who qualified more than three years ago.

2. Quality of service.

A signed letter of recommendation from a workplace supervisor (on letterhead) stating that the applicant satisfactorily implements the full body of knowledge in the workplace.

COMS Exam

Once evidence of eligibility has been reviewed and approved by ACVREP, the applicant can apply for and take the online COMS exam at a local Kryterion exam centre. The multiple choice exam has 140-150 questions assessing the COMS Body of Knowledge and Code of Ethics.

- The COMS Handbook gives information about the proportion of questions allocated to each domain in the Body of Knowledge.
- A COMS study guide is available for sale through ACVREP.
- There are practice questions in the Quizlet app.
- Consider joining up with a study buddy to prepare for the exam.

- An applicant finds out immediately whether he/she has passed the exam – most ANZ applicants pass first time because our applicants are well qualified!

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An applicant can have two attempts at the exam for one exam fee. Those who feel anxious about the exam can treat the first attempt as a trial run to see what it is like and either pass first time or find out the areas that need more study.

