Welcome to *Footwork*, aiming to keep Orientation and Mobility (O&M) specialists, employers, and other stakeholders informed of developments in the O&M Association of Australasia (OMAA).

# O&M training pathways sorted – Hurrah!

Announcing new O&M qualifications available in 2021 – in both Australia and New Zealand. And our abundant thanks go to the Renwick Centre for offering solid O&M qualifications over the past two decades, and for continuing to offer fresh professional development opportunities into the future.

# New Graduate Diploma in O&M at UNSW, Australia

The University of New South Wales and Guide Dogs NSW/ACT are partnering to offer a new Graduate Diploma in Orientation and Mobility, commencing in Term 2, 2021. The full-time program will combine online learning, face-to-face practical skills, and Work Integrated Learning (WIL). This means that applicants can study from anywhere in Australasia, come together for blocks to do their blindfold work and then complete their WIL placement at an available host agency nearer to home. The program meets requirements for professional certification (COMS), and graduates will be ready to launch in one year.

Unlike many previous O&M programs, this course is open access. Applicants with a three year bachelor’s degree can apply directly to the UNSW from early 2021, pay their own uni fees, and be free to work anywhere after they graduate. The other point of difference is that, although GDNSW/ACT is generously providing the seed funding for this program, the UNSW is directly employing the personnel teaching the program. This shift means that the university will take responsibility for the program into the future.

Congratulations to Kelly Prentice from GDNSW/ACT and the Kelly Gang for their hard work in negotiating this program. And thanks to the UNSW team for their very warm welcome.

For more information, and contact details for the program, check the [UNSW website.](https://www.optometry.unsw.edu.au/graduate-diploma-orientation-and-mobility)
There are also media releases from [UNSW](https://www.optometry.unsw.edu.au/unsw-partners-guide-dogs-offer-postgraduate-qualification) and [GDNSW/ACT](https://www.guidedogs.com.au/news/unsw-guide-dogs-orientation-mobility-diploma/) discussing the announcement.

# O&M Qualifications at Massey University, New Zealand

Starting in 2021, New Zealand will have a qualification pathway for O&M instructors who work with both children and adults. As part of the Specialist Teaching Programme run by Massey University, there will be an option for a Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching Blind and Low Vision with a focus on O&M and a Post Graduate Certificate in Specialist Teaching Blind and Low Vision with a focus on O&M.

Massey’s **Post Graduate Diploma in Specialist Teaching Blind and Low Vision** is for Developmental Orientation and Mobility instructors employed by Blind and Low Vision Education Network New Zealand (BLENNZ) and involves four Massey courses over two years and a co-requisite braille course (taken outside of Massey). In the first year, students will complete:

* Course 1: 249746 Theory and Practice of Blind and Low Vision (via OM route)
* Course 2: 254766 Professional Learning Pathways (with OM and BLV modules)

In the second year, students will complete:

* Course 3: 249752 A practicum in Blind and Low Vision in line with ACVREP requirements
* Course 4: 254767 Community Based Practice (relevant to local community)

Massey’s **Post Graduate Certificate in Specialist Teaching Blind and Low Vision** is a one year option open to those working in an organisation such as Blind Low Vision New Zealand (BLVNZ) as either a child or adult instructor. This one year course consists of:

* Course 1: 249746 Theory and Practice of Blind and Low Vision (via OM route)
* Course 2: 254766 Professional Learning Pathways (with OM and BLV modules)

In order to become a qualified O&M instructor, students will also need to complete an industry based practicum in line with ACVREP (COMS) requirements, which is done outside of Massey.

Entry requirements for both the Post Graduate Diploma and Post Graduate Certificate are as follows:

1. been awarded or qualified for a Bachelor’s degree, or equivalent; and
2. been awarded or qualified for a relevant professional qualification; and
3. have completed at least two years of relevant professional experience.

If you would like further information about these qualification options, please email Nicola McDowell – N.McDowell@massey.ac.nz

# Letter from Greg Leigh, Renwick Centre

For almost 20 years RIDBC Renwick Centre has provided postgraduate education in the field of orientation and mobility. Since 2002 more than 130 professionals have graduated from Renwick Centre postgraduate programs to become O&M specialists. Initially the program comprised a sequence of postgraduate units within the Master of Special Education at the University of Newcastle, and more recently, as a sequence of postgraduate units in the Master of Disability Studies at Macquarie University, as a one year fulltime equivalent program.

Through all of this time the Renwick Centre has collaborated very closely with the administration and staff Guide Dogs NSW/ACT, who provided the necessary expertise to deliver the specialist units in these programs. Under that arrangement prospective students were identified by Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and enrolled in the program as funded students. More recently, Guide Dogs Queensland, Victoria, and South Australia became engaged in the program and supported students to enrol, with some engagement in teaching by professional staff of those various agencies.

For the vast majority of the time that the program was in operation at the Renwick Centre, the specialist O&M theory and practical units were coordinated by Dr Desiree Gallimore, with Guide Dogs professional staff contributing their necessary expertise to enrich the student experience. That contribution included many hours of supervised practicum, which facilitated the development of capabilities that met the demands of the profession and client base across Australia.

With the recent decision to mount a new program in O&M at the University of New South Wales, RIDBC Renwick Centre takes this opportunity to acknowledge the long history of collaboration with Guide Dogs NSW/ACT and to wish the agency and the profession more broadly every success with the implementation of that new course. Our thanks go to the many members of staff of Guide Dogs who enriched our program and who made such an important contribution to the education of beginning O&M practitioners.

Although the Renwick Centre and Macquarie University will not be continuing to offer postgraduate programs in O&M, our commitment to quality professional education in this arena remains strong. The staff of the Centre look forward to continuing to collaborate with the field of O&M, particularly in regard to the provision of continuing professional education events and activities.

Professor Greg Leigh

Director, RIDBC Renwick Centre

# Recruiting into the O&M profession

The real O&M experts are those of you working at the coalface of client work. How can you help to shape the new breed of O&M specialists?

* Pass on the news/URL links to the new O&M qualifications to anyone interested in becoming an O&M specialist – other professionals, student cohorts (Occupational Therapy, Physiotherapy, teaching), social media networks... Bang the drum!
* Can your agency become a WIL host? Supervising a student is a great way to screen the new talent and woo a graduate to work in your patch. Students come with delightful energy and fresh ideas.
* Consider becoming a COMS supervisor. Do your COMS exam and talk with your manager about this opportunity for career enrichment. Supervising a student earns you COMS points towards recertification.
* Offer to mentor a student. Relationships are at the centre of good O&M practice. The OMAA can connect students with experienced O&M professionals to share the learning journey in a way that works for both – phone, zoom, observations, discussing assignments... Contact standards@omaaustralasia.com to volunteer.

# Membership/COMS/ROMSA update

O&M specialists have made good use of isolation and tele-practice this year, swatting for the Certified O&M Specialist (COMS) exam. While Victoria is still in stage 4 lockdown, others have been venturing out to take their exam. We now have:

* 138 ordinary members and 6 associate members in OMAA
* 62 COMS in Australia and 11 COMS in New Zealand (not all OMAA members)
* 46 Registered O&M Specialists in Australasia (ROMSA = OMAA Member + COMS)

So, here’s a plan:

1. Keep your OMAA membership up to date – check your status and profile online.
2. Pass the COMS exam, pop a cork, and send a copy of your COMS certificate to standards@omaaustralasia.com for registration. There is no additional registration fee to go on the OMAA online register and receive a ROMSA certificate in the mail.
3. Add COMS / ROMSA to your email signature and business cards – spruik it!
4. Start plotting ways to earn 100 points towards your COMS Recertification in 5 years.

# Professional Development is your friend!

Here are some ways to earn COMS points: 1 point per hour for conference attendance.

## The OMAA Online Symposium

OMAA’s first day-long zoom-fest on 22 September was a great success with over 100 participants. If you missed the day, you can still access the recorded material and earn 6 COMS points by clicking [here.](https://www.omaaustralasia.com/resources/professional-development/omaa-online-symposium/omaa-online-symposium-self-paced-learning/) This is available until 5pm on Friday 30 October 2020.

Topics included CVI, teaching canes, parenting kids at home during COVID-19, tech for O&M, mental health, self-advocacy, life skills, and barriers to physical activity. Congratulations to Ewa Borkowski, Trudy Smith (Renwick) and the OMAA PD Committee who organised the day. The conversation in the break-out room thrummed between sessions – a meeting of minds and friends.

### OMAA Professional Development Committee Survey

To cater for the OMAA members PD needs in 2021 the Professional Development Committee is releasing a survey. Your opinion is important to us so please take 5 minutes to fill the [OMAA PD Committee Survey 2020](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/LG9BVNG). We would like as many responses as possible!

## SPEVI Conference online – Celebrating Change!

Hosted by the RIDBC Renwick centre, 18-19 January 2021, this event is free for SPEVI members. <https://www.speviconference.org.au/>

## International O&M Online Symposium

Hosted by Kassy Maloney and her team from Allied Independence, 3-5 February 2021 (in Texas, which is 4-6 February 2021 in ANZ). <https://orientationandmobilitysymposium.com/>

## Edited book on spatial cognition

Lil Deverell (O&M specialist) and Ian Stuart (neuropsychologist) are proposing an edited book on spatial dysfunction and O&M, which is a strength of Australian O&M services. You are invited to join the project, along with 13 others who volunteered at the OMAA Symposium. Lil and Ian will host a zoom meeting in November to scope the project and gauge everyone’s possible contribution, then the team will get writing in 2021. Published contributions are worth COMS points: 1-2 points for writing a vignette, 20 points for writing a chapter, or 25 points for editing the whole book. Contact lil@deverell.net to express interest.

# Fruity developments on the OMAA website

Amy has been working successfully on search engine optimisation, and we have been investigating association management software called Wild Apricot. In the next 6 months we plan to transition the OMAA website to make it easier to manage memberships and integrate web information, event promotions/bookings, online payments/receipting, and email lists/news. Our ROMSA register will be prettier and more searchable.

# OMAA Vacancies – more COMS points!

The OMAA AGM is coming up. This is a great time to consider your contribution to the profession. An OMAA office-bearer earns 10 points per year towards COMS recertification. Executive roles that need to be formally nominated then elected at the AGM include:

* OMAA President
* OMAA Secretary
* Communications Committee Chair
* Membership Engagement Committee Chair

Additional roles are defined within OMAA Committees and do not require formal election:

* Professional Development Committee: CPD Event Coordinator, CPD Advisor, Secretary
* Communications Committee: Footwork Compiler, Digital Framework Coordinator
* Professional Standards Committee: Vice-Chair, O&M Program Assessor, COMS Supervisor Coordinator, Research Officer
* Membership Engagement Committee: International Liaison Officer

Email your expression of interest to info@omaaustralasia.com, put up your hand at the AGM, or approach the relevant Committee Chair directly if interested in one of these roles.

# OMAA Annual General Meeting

Where: Join Zoom Meeting <https://zoom.us/j/114144031> Meeting ID: 114 144 031

When: Thursday 5th November 2020, 1pm – 2pm AEDT: NSW/ACT//VIC/TAS

Queensland:   12pm – 1pm AEST

South Australia:  12:30pm – 1:30pm ACDT

Northern Territory:  11:30am – 12:30pm ACST

Western Australia:  10am – 11am AWST

New Zealand:   3pm – 4pm NZDT

Please circulate *Footwork* to anyone who might be interested. If you have queries about OMAA, or would like to subscribe or unsubscribe, please contact info@omaaustralasia.com

Orientation and Mobility Association of Australasia Inc. (Reg. A0039419Z) ABN: 86044510235

info@omaaustralasia.com PO Box 324 Ashburton VIC 3147 Australia [www.omaaustralasia.com](http://www.omaaustralasia.com/)