

# Course Cut for Ocular Therapeutics

**The Australian College** of Optometrists (ACO) will offer just one graduate certificate in ocular therapeutics (COT) course in 2016.

Since accreditation of its COT course in December 2012, the College has run two courses each year. Jolanda de Jong, General Manager Professional Development at ACO said although the course continues to attract strong enrolment, the College has diverted some resources to establish a post-graduate course in glaucoma management.

The study of prescribing therapeutics was integrated into the undergraduate course of optometry in Australia in 2004 but optometrists who graduated prior to this must undertake a post graduate course to acquire therapeutic endorsement.

According to Optometry Board Australia, 2,000 registered optometrists are now endorsed, however almost 3000 optometrists remain unqualified to prescribe therapeutics. At a time when the scope of optometry is expanding, those without therapeutic endorsement are under increasing pressure to attain their qualifications.

The Graduate Certificate in Ocular Therapeutics is available to qualified optometrists via a one-year, part time on-campus course at Queensland University of Technology, and from February 2016, at University of New South Wales via a “redesigned” online distance education program, which includes interactive online webinars, discussion groups, lecture recordings and exercises, supported by a single (two-day) face to face session. The Australian College of Optometry’s one-year course is entirely online.

Michael Macbeth graduated from the ACO with therapeutic endorsement last year, having attained his Bachelor degree in optometry from Queensland University of Technology in 1992.

A locum optometrist, based in Hervey Bay, Queensland, he said therapeutic endorsement was essential to maintain employment. Mr. Macbeth currently works at an ophthalmology



practice and in a private optometry practice. At both practices he works alongside optometrists who have had therapeutic endorsement for about 10 years.

Mr. Macbeth chose to study at ACO because there was no travel required. “Living in Hervey Bay meant travel for any of the other courses available, which really didn’t suit me in my current situation,” he said. “The online lectures and webinars were downloadable and facilitated study by being able to pause and rewind anytime you might not have completely understood what the lecturer had said or just wanted to review a topic. There was also the opportunity to participate with peers doing the course through online forums specifically for each subject. It was a great fit for my current lifestyle”.

Ms. DeJong said the ACO course has appealed to qualified optometrists in Australia, New Zealand and even China. “Everyone is busy, working long hours – so the online structure of the ACO COT offers much more flexibility.”

The 12-month course comprises two parts: Part A focused on the general principals of disease, and Part B on ocular diseases and their therapeutic management. Completion requires students to attend 45 one-hour online lectures in their own time, 15 one-hour webinars and 45 hours of self-learning. All material is recorded and participants are able to watch the lectures and podcasts through CORE – ACO’s Centre for Online Resources and E-learning.

Mr. Macbeth said, “the course was well organised and resourced with a clear, concise summary of the outcomes each candidate should be attaining during each section, a handy thing not having been in an academic/student mode for quite a while... There was some flexibility and recognition by the Course co-ordinators that you had a life going on in parallel with your ACO-COT studies”.

To enrol in the ACO OCT course which commences in April 2016, visit [www.aco.org.au](http://www.aco.org.au)

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