

Dear Colleague

Thank you for your enquiry concerning the College's Refraction Certificate Examination.

I enclose copies of the current:

- Registration Information
- Admission Procedure
- Candidate code of conduct
- Policy on Allegations of Cheating in Examinations
- Appeals procedure
- Language Requirements
- Preparing for Examinations
- Examination Timetable
- Examination Structure
- Standard Setting
- Examination Syllabus

Candidates must hold a medical qualification approved by the General Medical Council of the United Kingdom or of Ireland for the purpose of registration.

Please note candidates who are yet to enter the Refraction Certificate examination are required to submit an attested copy of their medical degree in evidence of their eligibility to sit this examination. Medical degree certificates may be attested by a Fellow or Member of *this* College, the British Council or your embassy, a solicitor or the university issuing the certificate. Candidates who are registered with the General Medical Council (GMC) are not required to submit an attested copy of their medical degree but should include their GMC number in the appropriate place on the application form for verification and candidates with the Irish Medical Council (IMC) should do the same with their IMC number.

No previous experience in ophthalmology is necessary for candidates to sit the Refraction Certificate but trainees in Ophthalmic Specialist Training are required to pass this examination before they enter into the **fourth** year of specialist training. Please note that from 1 August 2013, candidates are permitted a maximum of six attempts in which to pass this examination. Examination attempts prior to August 2013 do not count towards the number of attempts available.

Candidates are unlikely to pass this assessment if they have not undertaken a large number of clinical refractions in the clinical settings of either the hospital workplace or in optometric establishments.

The above information has been agreed by the Council of The Royal College of Ophthalmologists. I would add that this information is subject to variation at the discretion of the Council.

Dylan Costello
Head of the Examinations Department

REGISTRATION INFORMATION

Candidates wishing to confirm the eligibility of their medical degree for the purpose of registration with the General Medical Council may do so by the following means:

You can access the World Directory of Medical Schools at the below link:

<https://search.wdoms.org/>

Candidates who have yet to enter the Refraction Certificate examination are required to submit an attested copy of their medical degree or details of their GMC registration in evidence of their eligibility to sit this examination.

Regulations

The following notes on the regulations concerning applications for admission to the examinations are published for the guidance of candidates:

1. Completed applications for admission to an examination must reach the Examinations Department **no later than 5.00pm on the closing date**, normally approximately **ten weeks** before the exam is held. It is not possible to accept applications received after the closing date.
2. The applications must be accompanied by the fee and such certification as is required by the regulations. If you cannot supply all the relevant certification you must contact the Examinations Department or supply a covering letter as to the reasons why. All outstanding certification must be received **BEFORE** the closing date, otherwise the candidate will be withdrawn from the examination and forfeit their examination fee. Applications submitted without the required fee will not be accepted.
3. Upon receipt of an application the Examinations Department will send all candidates a written receipt. Detailed instructions including written and clinical examination dates will be dispatched to all candidates within ten days after the closing date for receipt of applications.
4. Applicants wishing to withdraw their entry for an examination must notify the Examinations Department in writing by 5.00pm on the closing date for receipt of applications. Fees cannot be refunded after this time.
5. Applicants must apply for entry visas for the United Kingdom in good time prior to the date of the examination. In exceptional circumstances, if written evidence of the refusal of a visa is provided, the Examinations Committee will consider requests for candidates to withdraw their examination entry, subject to the receipt of a 20% administration charge.
6. Candidates unable to attend an examination will forfeit their examination fee. In exceptional circumstances, the Examinations Committee will consider requests to refund following withdrawal of a candidate's entry from the examination sitting subject to receipt of written supplementary evidence (e.g. a detailed medical certificate, a death certificate for a close family member) and subject to a 20% administration charge. **Please note that lack of preparation is not considered a suitable reason to withdraw from an examination.**
7. All candidates will receive feedback regarding their individual performance in the examinations.
8. Results are posted by First Class Mail with the Pass List being displayed on the College Website. Results are only released upon approval of the Senior Examiner. We regret that examination results are not available by telephone or email.

Practical Examination Procedures

1. Unless notified, candidates are **not permitted** to use calculators in any section of the examinations.
2. Candidates are only allowed to bring their own clinical equipment into the examination in a clear plastic pencil case or plastic bag.
3. Candidates are forbidden to communicate in any way with, seek assistance from, give assistance to, or interfere with the work of other candidates or the invigilators in the examination room or elsewhere during the period of the examination, or indulge in any other form of unfair practice.
4. The Senior Invigilator has the power to expel a candidate from the examination.
5. Candidates are advised to read the Code of Conduct for candidates and applicants, and Policy on Allegations of Cheating and Misconduct in Examinations.
6. Photographic identification (such as a passport or photographic driver's licence) will be checked before candidates are admitted to the examination.
7. For clinical examinations, candidates are required to present themselves in good time and are required to wear name badges throughout the examination period (these will be supplied by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists). The start of the examination cannot be delayed for candidates arriving late.
8. For clinical exams candidates must be appropriately dressed and should follow the Department of Health 'Bare Below the Elbows' guidelines.
9. No books, written material (including passports) or electronic equipment may be consulted during the examination and are not permitted on a candidate's person.
10. Candidates are advised that **no extra time** will be given to complete their mark sheets once the end of the OSCE station has been signalled.

Eligibility

A medically qualified candidate will be eligible to sit the examination provided that he/she:

- a) holds a medical qualification approved by the General Medical Council for the purpose of registration

Candidates who have yet to enter the Refraction Certificate examination are required to submit proof of their primary medical qualification. Candidates who are registered with the General Medical Council (GMC) should include their GMC number in the appropriate place on the application form for verification and candidates with the Irish Medical Council (IMC) should do the same with their IMC number. All other candidates are required to submit an attested copy of their medical degree in evidence of their eligibility to sit this examination. Medical degree certificates may be attested by a Fellow or Member of *this* College, the British Council or your embassy, a solicitor or the university issuing the certificate.

Condition of the Examination

No previous experience in ophthalmology is necessary for candidates to sit the Refraction Certificate but candidates are unlikely to pass this assessment if they have not undertaken a large number of clinical refractions in the clinical settings of either the hospital workplace or in optometric establishments. Feedback from successful candidates indicates that between 50 and 100 full refractions were completed in preparation for the examination.

Candidates in OST will be required to pass this examination before they enter into the **fourth** year of ophthalmic specialist training.

The examination can be taken before the candidate enters the relevant GMC-approved training programme or when they are on a break in the programme.

The pass will be considered current as long as the candidate enters or re-enters the programme within seven years of passing the examination and satisfies any other currency requirements.

A pass in an examination taken after completing a run-through or higher training programme will not be acceptable for a certificate of completion of training. In that situation, doctors may be able to demonstrate equivalence via the CESR or CEGPR process.

Exemption

Candidates who have been registered with the General Optical Council as an optometrist in the last five years are exempt from this certificate. Candidates intending to apply for exemption should therefore ensure that they do so within this period. Candidates in ophthalmic specialist training are advised to apply for exemption before the end of year 3.

In order to apply for exemption from this certificate, candidates must submit details of their GOC registration together with a covering letter to the Head of the Examinations Department formally requesting exemption.

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR EXAMINATION APPLICANTS AND CANDIDATES

The College's code of conduct can be found on our website, at the following link:

<https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/Code-of-Conduct-Examination-candidates-and-applicants-20170404.pdf>

ALLEGATIONS OF CHEATING AND MISCONDUCT IN EXAMINATIONS

Further information regarding the College's Policy on Allegations of Cheating and Misconduct in Examinations can be found on our website, at the following link:

<https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Policy-on-Allegations-of-Cheating-and-Misconduct-20181008.pdf>

Appeals Procedure

The College's appeal procedure is available online at www.rcophth.ac.uk/examinations/appeals-procedure/

Language Requirements

All examinations run by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists are conducted in English.

Although candidates are not expected to undertake examinations such as IELTS or PLAB it is expected that candidates should be equivalent to IELTS Level 7.

Preparing for the examinations

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists recommend that candidates preparing for this examination should:

- Read the appropriate text, syllabi and curriculum for the relevant examination.
- Gain retinoscopy experience in hospitals or optometric practices
- Attend courses – A list of courses for examinations can be found on the College website (the College does not run or endorse any of the listed courses: <https://www.rcophth.ac.uk/events-and-courses/non-rcophth-events/>).
- Ensure they are familiar with principles and values of the General Medical Council's Good Medical Practice (<http://www.gmc-uk.org>).
- Candidates may also find useful information from the National Advice Centre for Postgraduate Education. (<http://www.nhscareers.nhs.uk/nacpme/>)

**REFRACTION CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION
TIMETABLE 2021**

May 2021

Opening Date for Receipt of Applications: 11 January 2021

Closing Date for Receipt of Applications: 8 March 2021

Exam date: Tues 4 – Fri 7 May 2021 London

July 2021

Opening Date for Receipt of Applications: 22 March 2021

Closing Date for Receipt of Applications: 17 May 2021

Exam Date: Mon 12 - Thurs 15 July 2021 Birmingham

December 2021

Opening Date for Receipt of Applications: 23 August 2021

Closing Date for Receipt of Applications: 18 October 2021

Mon 13 Thurs 16 December 2021 London

There will be a limited number of examination spaces available per examination. Should the number of applications exceed the examination spaces available the Examinations Committee have agreed the following criteria will be applied:

- Priority will be awarded, in the first instance, to applicants in years 2-3 of Ophthalmic Specialist Training (OST) OR years 5-6 of Medical Ophthalmology training
 - Should additional spaces be available, second priority will then be awarded to candidates who have previously applied but not been allocated a place
 - All remaining places will be awarded on a first come first served basis
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The RCOphth position on Refraction and the Refraction Certificate 2021.

The RCOphth is frequently asked to provide a rationale for including a Refraction Certificate examination and assessing refraction techniques as part of the Fellowship assessment. The following statements and paragraphs make the case for the College's position, which will of course continue to be subject to review by members of the Examinations Committee and College Officers as and when required.

1. Refractive error is the leading cause of poor vision in the world.
2. As leaders in eye-care provision it is felt to be very important that ophthalmologists have and maintain an in-depth understanding of and appreciation for the processes of refraction.
3. The understanding of refraction is a fundamental aspect of ophthalmology and it is the learning of this skill which is important as an understanding of the process and the difficulties that can occur is crucial and cannot just be read from a book. Given that the role of the eye is to refract light to be able to see and our most common operation is a refractive procedure most lay-people would be amazed if they felt the experts they were seeing did not have an understanding of a fundamental ophthalmic process.
4. Ophthalmologists use refractive techniques in their general practice and whilst the techniques may be argued to be more immediately relevant to sub-specialty disciplines such as; paediatrics, cornea and refractive disease, a significant proportion of ophthalmologists still practice cataract surgery for which a primary outcome measure is post-operative refraction.
5. Ophthalmologists, perhaps without always realising, use a variety of refractive techniques and principles to assess the vision of many patients, particularly those presenting with unexplained visual loss e.g. in the eye emergency room. Being unacquainted with the principles, techniques and tricks of refraction under such circumstances is likely to be a significant impediment to thorough patient assessment.
6. The College takes the view that it is important to understand refraction and that as it is a practice skill, an examination remains the best method of assessment.
7. It is perhaps only with time and experience that the benefits of a thorough understanding of refraction, its usefulness and applications in practise can be fully appreciated.
8. In medicine generally and in ophthalmology, there has been a realisation that sub-specialisation whilst beneficial in some regards may be detrimental in others. It is therefore important that general skills relating to the discipline should be maintained and not cast aside without thorough scrutiny.

Whilst reflection and scrutiny of any educational framework is to be encouraged, the scenario whereby an organisation is repeatedly asked to justify its position by stakeholders with potentially temporally vested interests in altering this position, is not reasonable. We have set out the reasoning behind the College's stance regarding the assessment of refraction and unless there are material / substantial alterations to clinical practise in the UK / Eire this is unlikely to change.

Arguments based purely upon the frequency of such requests (usually) from stakeholders with these temporally vested interests, and without evidence to justify any contrary argument, are unsound, might be viewed as coercion, and will be dismissed.

Some question the College's motives for these decisions. What's in it of the College? Examinations don't make money. There is nothing material in insisting upon a refractive assessment for Fellows for the College. So why do we continue to insist upon these assessments? Simply that we wish to ensure that those of you that follow us do not lose out on something we know to be of critical worth.

Stephen Hawking:

In what was Stephen's last writings for the popular audience he says this of science and I'd like to draw the analogy to that of the Refraction for Ophthalmologists:

Read: "people" as **ophthalmologists**, "science" as **refraction**, and I think you'll get the point.

When I was growing up it was still acceptable – not to me but in social terms – to say that one was not interested in science and did not see the point in bothering with it. This is no longer the case. Let me be clear. I am not promoting the idea that all young people should grow up to be scientists. I do not see that this is an ideal situation, as the world needs people with a wide variety of skills. But I am advocating that all young people should be familiar and confident around scientific subjects, whatever they choose to do.

Brief Answers to Big Questions

A general comment regarding any "once past the post" decision:

It is of significant concern and must be fully appreciated by all, including stakeholders with interests, what the implications and ramifications would be should a decision ever be made to remove the assessment of refractive principles and skills from the Fellowship examinations. These include the very real likelihood that any such decision will almost certainly never be reviewed nor reversed because the will to do so will almost certainly not exist. Any decision of this sort will therefore almost certainly be permanent and will affect the education and abilities of future UK and Eire ophthalmologists for generations. We will do our best to ensure that this does not happen.

A comment about pass marks.

We receive a lot of comments and questions related to pass marks and close fail marks.

It is crucial that candidates appreciate the value and use of pass marks and we hope that the following statements clarify our position regarding standard setting and marking:

1. Our standard setting procedures are rigorous and robust, they generate a mark that equates with the minimum acceptable standard for which we will agree that a candidate has successfully completed the assessment and is allowed onward progression.
2. We emphasise the wording minimum acceptable standard as we feel that this standard should neither be challenged nor undermined.
3. Candidates should not be aiming, nor perhaps be particularly satisfied by only obtaining the minimum standard and whilst arguable, candidates who only just obtain this minimum standard may be better resitting and ensuring that their skill / knowledge base is in excess of the minimum.
4. We encourage all candidates to work hard to ensure that as far as practically possible they clearly measure above the standard for their own, their patients and society's benefit.
5. Standards remain the cornerstone of professions and professional behaviours, direct or indirect criticism of professional standards seeks to undermine the very bedrock of what we collectively need to protect. In a world of instant gratification and criticism – standards are paramount. We do our best to be fair, open and to facilitate the passage of candidates where we can. If a candidate fails there's reason and whilst we will provide feedback, most candidates will be a good judge as to why.