

The Royal College of Ophthalmologists Certificate in Laser and Refractive Surgery (CertLRS)

Candidate information pack 2026

Contents

Click the section title to go directly to that section.

1. Introduction	2
2. At a glance	2
3. Eligibility and attempts	2
4. Applications	3
5. Regulations, policies and conduct	3
6. Examination structure	4
7. MCQ component	4
8. Structured viva component	5
9. Candidate quarantine and examination security	6
10. Marking, results, feedback and appeals	6
11. Examination syllabus	7
12. Preparing for the examination	7
13. Required reading and useful resources	7

1. Introduction

The Certificate in Laser and Refractive Surgery (CertLRS) is an RCOphth examination for ophthalmologists who wish to demonstrate knowledge and professional judgement in laser and lens based refractive surgery. It is a knowledge-based assessment and is not part of the FRCOphth examination pathway.

Candidates for CertLRS are often experienced ophthalmologists, including established consultants. This pack has therefore been written as a practical briefing rather than as a trainee handbook: it summarises what to expect, what to prepare, and where to find the definitive College policies that apply to the examination.

Successful candidates may use the post-nominals CertLRS. The examination may support evidence of theoretical knowledge in refractive surgery and may be relevant to appraisal, revalidation and professional practice. It should not be described as a legal licence to practise refractive surgery.

2. At a glance

Component	Format	What candidates should know
MCQ	100 single best answer / multiple choice questions; open-book; delivered online.	Taken on a computer or laptop. The confirmed date, start time and examination instructions are sent by email.
Structured Viva	Five 10-minute viva stations. Each station has two examiners.	Stations cover Good Medical Practice/audit, pre-op assessment, laser treatments, non-laser procedures, and post-op assessment/complications.

3. Eligibility and attempts

3.1 Who can sit the exam?

There are two routes of eligibility to take the CertLRS assessment:

1. Applicants on the GMC Specialist Register for Ophthalmology.
2. Applicants without specialist registration in ophthalmology who can provide evidence of substantive experience in ophthalmology through an eligible qualification.

Eligible qualifications listed for the second route are:

- FRCOphth
- MRCOphth awarded from 1 January 1997 to 31 December 2008
- FRCSEd (Ophth)
- FRCSI (Ophth)
- FRCSGlas (Ophth)
- FEBO
- FICO
- FRANZCO

Candidates must provide evidence of relevant postgraduate certificates or specialist registration as part of the application process. The Examinations Department may request further supporting evidence where eligibility is unclear.

3.2 Attempts

For the CertLRS examination, the maximum number of attempts is six. Candidates who have reached the permitted number of attempts should consult the [College guidance on additional examination attempts](#) before applying again.

4. Applications

4.1 Booking and confirmation

- Applications are made online through the College booking route. First-time RCOphth applicants will need to [create an account](#) and submit the necessary documents if applicable. Eligible candidates who have previously taken FRCOphth exams should book through [My RCOphth](#).
- Applications must be submitted by the published closing date and accompanied by the correct fee.
- Candidate confirmation emails are normally sent within 10 working days after the closing date, to the email address used for registration.
- Candidates who have not received confirmation after this period should contact the Examinations Department promptly.

4.2 Fees, withdrawals and visas

Examination fees are reviewed annually. Candidates should consult the current fees page at the time of booking. Withdrawal, refund and visa related requests are handled under the [College examination terms, conditions and policies](#) in force for the sitting.

5. Regulations, policies and conduct

5.1 Examination conditions

- Candidates must comply with the College Code of Conduct, misconduct policy and any examination-specific instructions.
- Candidates must not communicate with, seek help from, give help to, or share examination content with another candidate during the examination period.
- Candidates must not discuss, publish or otherwise share material encountered in the examination, including after the sitting.
- For the in-person viva, mobile phones, smart watches and other electronic devices must be switched off and must not be kept on the candidate's person unless the Examinations team has given specific instructions.
- Aggressive, inappropriate or unsafe professional behaviour may be escalated and may affect the candidate's result.

5.2 Language

All College examinations are conducted in English. Candidates are expected to be able to communicate at a level appropriate for safe professional practice and assessment.

5.3 Fit to sit

By presenting for the examination, candidates are normally deemed fit to sit. Candidates who believe they are unfit to sit should follow the relevant College policy and contact the Examinations Department before the examination where possible.

6. Examination structure

The CertLRS examination has two components: an online MCQ and an in-person structured viva.

Component	Stations/questions	Duration	Main focus
MCQ	100 questions	2 hours and 30 minutes	Theoretical knowledge across the CertLRS syllabus.
Structured viva	5 stations	10 minutes per station	Consultant-level discussion, clinical judgement, professional responsibilities and application of evidence.

7. MCQ component

7.1 Purpose and format

The MCQ assesses theoretical knowledge of commonly encountered refractive scenarios. It is open book and delivered online at a pre-agreed date and time. Candidates may use resources during the MCQ but must not communicate with other people or share examination material. The duration of the exam is 2 hours and 30 minutes.

7.2 Examination delivery

Candidates receive detailed joining instructions before the examination. Following the closing date, candidates are sent confirmation of their examination place together with their candidate number, examination date and time, computer requirements and examination regulations. Candidates should check their equipment and follow the technical instructions provided before the examination.

For more information, read the [CertLRS MCQ Online Written Exam FAQs](#) and [Important Information for CertLRS online MCQ Examination](#).

7.3 MCQ blueprint

The MCQ is drawn from the CertLRS syllabus:

- Audit
- Basic anatomy, physiology and optics
- Cataract / Lens surgery and intra-operative complications
- Correction of Regular and Irregular Astigmatism
- Good Medical Practice
- High Ametropia
- LASIK
- Phakic IOLs
- Post operative complications of laser based refractive surgery
- Post operative complications of lens based refractive surgery
- Pre-op Assessment for Cataract and Refractive Surgery
- Presbyopia
- PRK/LASEK/Epi-LASIK (surface ablations)
- Refractive surgery for keratoconus
- Retreatments
- SMILE/Lenticule Extraction
- Technology and theory of lens based refractive surgery
- Theory of Laser Refractive Surgery

8. Structured viva component

8.1 Purpose and format

The structured viva is designed to allow in-depth discussion of refractive surgery practice. It gives examiners the opportunity to explore reasoning, seek clarification and assess analytical skills that cannot easily be assessed in an MCQ.

Station	Area	Duration	Focus
1	Good Medical Practice / audit	10 minutes	Professional responsibilities, audit, clinical governance, evidence-based practice and patient safety.
2	Pre-op assessment		Assessment, suitability, investigations, consent and risk evaluation.
3	Laser treatments		Laser refractive procedures, decision making, complications and retreatment considerations.
4	Non-laser procedures		Lens based refractive surgery, phakic IOLs, refractive lens exchange and related complications.
5	Post-op assessment / complications		Post-operative review, recognition and management of complications, outcomes and audit.

8.2 Admission to the viva venue

Candidates must report to the registration point at the time stated in their candidate confirmation email. Photographic identification, such as a passport or photographic driving licence, will be checked. Candidates will be issued with a candidate badge and directed to a waiting area before the examination begins.

The venue, registration location, reporting time and any quarantine arrangements will be confirmed in the candidate email. Candidates should allow sufficient time for travel and should not assume that late arrival can be accommodated.

8.3 Conduct of the viva

- Each station has two examiners.
- Questions are scripted and agreed in advance by experts in the field.
- Each station is structured into four marking points with a marking guide.
- Examiners work from electronic mark sheets and mark independently.
- The station is timed. Candidates should answer concisely and respond to examiner signposting so that the station can cover all required marking points.
- Early completion of a station should not be interpreted as an indication of performance.

8.4 Professional level expected

Candidates should expect a professional, consultant-level discussion. The examination is designed for doctors with substantial ophthalmology experience and may test nuanced clinical judgement, ethical reasoning, consent, governance, appraisal, outcomes and audit as well as technical refractive knowledge.

8.5 Red flags and unsafe practice

If a candidate's performance gives examiners cause for concern, for example because it suggests unsafe practice or inappropriate professional behaviour, this may be escalated to the Senior Examiner. The concern must be documented clearly on the electronic mark sheet.

9. Candidate quarantine and examination security

Where more than one viva round is used, quarantine arrangements may be required to protect the integrity of the examination. Candidates may be supervised before or after their examination round so that candidates who have completed the examination cannot share information with candidates who have not yet sat.

- The candidate confirmation email should state whether quarantine applies and when candidates are expected to be released.
- Candidates must not communicate with candidates in other rounds or share information about stations, scenarios or questions.
- Electronic devices may be collected or held by the Examinations team until candidates are permitted to leave.
- Candidates who are likely to be held in quarantine should plan travel accordingly and may wish to bring non-electronic reading material.

10. Marking, results, feedback and appeals

10.1 Assessment and marking

Five iPad mark sheets in total are completed for each candidate by the examiners: two examiners per station across five stations. Each Structured Viva is divided into four marking sections judged on a four-point Likert scale: 0, 1, 2 and 3, with 0 representing poor performance and 3 representing good performance. Marking guidance for each Viva section is included for examiners within the structured question. Each examiner awards up to 12 marks per viva station, with each mark counting towards the final overall score. The maximum total score for the Structured Viva is 120.

10.2 Pass mark setting and cross compensation

The MCQ pass mark is set using the Ebel method. The structured viva pass mark is set using the Hofstee method. These standard setting methods are used to maintain a consistent examination standard across sittings.

Candidates are required to pass both components. However, some degree of cross compensation is allowed: if the candidate has reached the combined pass mark and has marginally failed one of the components (within one standard error of measurement – SEM), they will be allowed to pass the exam.

10.3 Feedback

Candidates normally receive result information by email. The College places importance on formative feedback, especially where performance has not met the required standard or where examiners have recorded concerns.

10.4 Results release

- Results are usually released on the dates published on the exams calendar, following verification and exam board processes.
- A pass list is published on the College website.
- Results are not available by telephone.
- Candidates and examiners are not permitted to phone the College for examination results.

10.5 Appeals

A copy of the College's Appeals Procedure is available online through the examinations [policies and procedures](#) area of the College website. The sole ground for appeal is evidence of a procedural irregularity in the conduct or content of the examination or assessment, including administrative error, which has adversely affected the candidate's performance.

Candidates presenting for an examination are deemed to be fit and healthy to do so under the Fit to Sit policy. Appeals will not be accepted on the grounds that a candidate considers their efforts were under-marked, did not understand or was unaware of the Examination or Assessment Regulations, or seeks to question professional or academic judgement.

11. Examination syllabus

The CertLRS syllabus is broad and covers both laser and lens based refractive surgery. It is intended as a guide to the knowledge, judgement and professional behaviours that may be assessed in either component.

[CertLRS Syllabus](#)

12. Preparing for the examination

- Read the CertLRS syllabus and map it against your own current practice.
- Review College guidance, GMC Good Medical Practice and relevant guidance on consent, advertising, complaints, appraisal, revalidation and probity.
- Practise concise viva answers that show judgement rather than lists alone. The viva is timed and examiners must cover all marking points.
- Review your approach to refractive audit and outcomes, including how you define and report safety, efficacy, predictability and stability.
- Before the online MCQ, test your computer, browser, internet connection, power supply and workspace. Do not wait until exam day to resolve technical issues.
- Read all candidate emails and linked instructions thoroughly. The College expects candidates to familiarise themselves with the examination instructions in advance.

12.1 Suggested final checks before the MCQ

- Use a supported computer or laptop, not a tablet or Chromebook.
- Use a stable internet connection and avoid tethering.
- Have power leads connected or available.
- Keep the launch email and keycode instructions available.
- Close unnecessary browser tabs and applications before starting.
- Have permitted reference materials ready, but do not communicate with anyone during the examination.

12.2 Suggested final checks before the viva

- Check the venue, registration time and quarantine/release time in your confirmation email.
- Bring photographic identification.
- Plan travel to arrive in good time.
- Switch off and surrender electronic devices if instructed.
- Answer in a structured way, listen to examiner prompts and move on when signposted.

13. Required reading and useful resources

Candidates should read the following before the examination.

- [CertLRS webpage](#)
- [CertLRS syllabus](#)
- [CertLRS MCQ Online Written Exam FAQs](#)
- [Important Information for CertLRS online MCQ Examination](#)
- [RCOphth Examinations Policies and Procedures](#)
- [GMC Good Medical Practice](#)