



Below is CEO-ECO's response to questions received about the CACO and changes implemented in 2013 and effective with the October 2013 administration.

Why can't I take the exam in May of my 3rd year not just October at the start of my 4th year? (Since the October sitting is only held in either Waterloo or Montreal, it is difficult for students in the other city to be able to write at this time).

The CACO has and continues to be available to all candidates graduating from an OD program each spring in both Waterloo and Montreal. In addition, CEO-ECO recently formalized a double administration of the CACO written at both Waterloo and Montreal each fall, beginning with the fall 2014 administration (see CACO/Schedule on the CEO-ECO website).

Candidates¹ are permitted to first challenge the CACO written and skills in May of their graduating year. Candidates may also challenge the CACO written by taking advantage of the "advance written" option in October as they enter their 4th year program. They may then complete the CACO skills components the following April or May. Reassessments of any failed components are possible in subsequent administrations, according to the CACO program completion and reassessment policies.

CEO-ECO strives to provide adequate notice of such changes to its stakeholders, which is in keeping with other exam organizations. The policy was approved and notice was provided with the knowledge that candidates graduating in 2014 would have this - information a year ahead to plan for the change. (NB: these were policy clarifications rather than new policy as such, there is no change to who is "eligible" to take the CACO). Regarding this change, in June 2013, CEO-ECO advised the Canadian School Directors and administrative staff of the changes to the *CACO Eligibility – Program Completion* part of the *Eligibility policy*.

From time to time, we review exam policies to ensure they are clear, specific and transparent to all stakeholders, including candidates. From this review, we identified that the program completion policy was not clear about the maximum number of attempts permitted for the CACO written. The program completion policy has to align with the CACO eligibility policy, which states that the maximum number of attempts for each component is three (3) and that candidates from an ACOE-accredited optometry

¹ This information applies primarily to candidates who are students of a ACOE-accredited OD program.



program may challenge the CACO while enrolled or recently graduated, requirements which are set by CEO-ECO's members, the ten provincial regulators.

The opportunity to challenge the written components in advance of graduation is an “*early opportunity*” option that was established at the October 2010 administration to accommodate the unique needs of CEO-ECO's stakeholders in Quebec and that was made available to all candidates in 2011. In the past four years, most candidates who sought the early-written option attended the October administration with only a few candidates requesting to take the written components in May at the end of their third year. Because the original policy language stated that the early written option was available to a candidate entering 4th year of their program it was interpreted to mean the advance written option was available at the end of a student's 3rd year and CEO-ECO allowed those registrations. This allowed candidates to challenge the CACO written *two* times before initially attempting the CACO skills at graduation, at which time they could have challenged the CACO written a *third* time.

However, the basis of the advance opportunity to challenge the CACO written was to provide an (*one*) opportunity for candidates starting fourth year of their OD degree to challenge the written components early, in advance of graduation. The intent was not to provide multiple opportunities. A candidate's initial “attempt” must include completion of 1) the written components and 2) the clinical skills components, whether challenged independently or together.

The CACO and Executive Committees determined that permission to challenge the CACO written components in advance of graduation was to be available to candidates who had commenced fourth (4th) year in September. Since the first administration in the fall after the start of a candidate's fourth year program is in October, this necessarily restricts the advance written option to October only.

Based on this, CEO-ECO updated the program completion policy to state when the CACO written could be taken in advance and the October administration was the most reasonable and feasible administration for the advance-written option.

Why do I have to wait until October to be reassessed?

CEO-ECO respects that candidates have dedicated many years to their education and are eager to begin practice. However CEO-ECO's primary mandate is to deliver defensible assessments in a sustainable manner for profession's regulators, with which candidates must be registered to practice.



A candidate's initial "attempt" of the CACO includes completion of *both* the written and clinical skills components *in totality* before reassessment is permissible. In other words, for graduating students, whether the written components are completed in advance or together with the skills components, together they constitute the first attempt. Whether a candidate takes advantage of the early opportunity to complete the CACO written or completes the CACO written and skills together, the candidate must complete both at least once before being reassessed. For these reasons, it is not possible to retake failed written components until the candidate has completed his/her first attempt of the written components and skills components "in totality."

For example, a candidate who is a fourth-year student and who has completed the CACO written components in October 2013 and then completes the CACO skills components in April or May 2014 has then completed the first attempt. A candidate who has failed a either CACO written or skills components may be reassessed in the failed components at the next administration, which is October. Similarly, a candidate who has elected to complete both the skills and written components of the CACO in May, near or after graduation, and who has failed a component is not eligible for reassessment until the subsequent administration, in October. The policy is applied identically and therefore fairly in each candidate situation.

By having to wait until April or May to write the exam, there is concern about not being able to start practicing until June or July. Why can't we do the written exam whenever we want to? Why can't I take the exam before I graduate so I can finish school, so that I have my exam results and can start to practice upon graduation?

CEO-ECO respects that candidates have dedicated many years to their education and are eager to begin practice. However CEO-ECO's primary mandate is to deliver defensible assessments in a sustainable manner for profession's regulators, with which candidates must be registered to practice.

One of CEO-ECO's goals is to offer assessment services that meet the needs of its stakeholders, including candidates, in a responsible manner. The size of the candidate pool seeking to challenge the CACO dictates the number of feasible CACO administrations each year. The timing of the administrations (spring/fall) and scheduling is based with input from stakeholders and the availability of resources, significantly the availability of clinic sites. CEO-ECO undertook a survey for several years to determine the best timing of the administrations and schedules the spring administration schedule based on that input as well as clinic site availability. Based on this and the current design



of the CACO skills, it is not feasible to offer multiple, on-demand skills administrations throughout the year.

To ensure a defensible exam that is priced responsibly, the CACO written exam can be offered two times a year (May and October). Most candidates successfully complete the CACO written and skills upon graduation. We believe the twice/year offering of the written exam allows all candidates the opportunity to challenge CACO at graduation and for those who are not successful, a second opportunity to challenge a failed component at the next administration.

How is exam content determined and why doesn't it reflect a school's curriculum? Why aren't there more questions about ophthalmic optics on the CACO?

Entry-practice-examinations are based on competency documents that are grounded in the actual landscape of professional practice and not in any specific institutional curriculum. Candidates from 40 institutions attempted the CACO in 2012-13 and it would not be possible to represent the curriculums of all optometry schools in North America.

The CACO is the entry-to-practice exam for the profession of optometry in Canada that is accepted by CEO-ECO's ten Members, the ten provincial regulatory authorities. It is helpful to keep in mind that the purpose of the CACO is not the same as the purpose of a school's educational examination. Whereas educational exam may be designed to assess an individual's level of knowledge and skills in relation to the goals and curriculum of that educational program, the CACO is designed to assess whether an individual is able to demonstrate the required, entry-to-practice knowledge and skills (competence) that the profession determines is essential and most relevant for practice. While the CACO includes in its Synthesis component questions about optics, the nature of these questions may be different from those in an educational examination for optics.

The CACO is based on an exam blueprint that is published as the *CACO Table of Specifications* that is grounded in the Competency Based Performance Standards document (CBPS) which was developed by CEO-ECO with representatives from the profession in 2005. CEO-ECO began to update the competency statement (CBPS) in 2011-12 at the same time that a committee of the optometric regulatory authorities was also exploring a new competency profile to assist with evaluating international candidates. CEO-ECO's Members, the ten regulatory authorities, agreed in September 2012 that efforts would be combined to develop an updated competency statement. An appointed national Steering Committee and CEO-ECO are working on developing a new national competency profile for optometry (NCP-O). This 18-month project includes



representation by two professors from the Canadian optometry schools - Drs. Patricia Hrynchak of the WOVS and Caroline Faucher of the EOUM are valued members of the NCP-O Steering Committee. The Steering Committee wished to have representatives of both of the Canadian schools on the Committee. An 18-month development plan created by the Steering Committee and a funding proposal by CEO-ECO is being considered right now by the federal government. CEO-ECO would be pleased to include the Canadian optometry schools in key milestone updates.

The process of developing an updated Competency Profile will include documenting and validating competencies through a survey of the profession across Canada and the frequency and criticality of all aspects of optometry, such as ophthalmic optics, will be identified. It is expected that once developed, this updated competency profile would be a definitive statement about the nature of Canadian practice and therefore of benefit to the entire profession including educators. It will be the foundation of all of CEO-ECO's future assessments including the CACO; CEO-ECO's Board will determine how and when to update the CACO blueprint as part of its annual strategic planning.