



**June 5, 2020**

**Optometry Qualifying Examination Update**

Dear candidate,

Thank you for your patience and understanding during this difficult time. We want to keep you abreast of our rescheduling of the April sitting of the OEBC's Examination due to COVID-19. We have the new dates for the OEBC written, and OSCE exam are:

**Written:** Thursday, September 24<sup>th</sup>

**Location:** Hamilton and Montreal

**OSCE:** Saturday, September 26<sup>th</sup> & Sunday, September 27<sup>th</sup>

**Location:** David Braley Health Sciences Centre, Hamilton

We have also published a [COVID-19 FAQ](#) for additional information.

We understand and appreciate the challenges related to postponing the exams are having on your ability to complete the registration process to become an optometrist. As the pandemic has been far-reaching, every organization has been impacted to some degree, including the universities, test centres, provincial optometry regulatory authorities (ORAs) and OEBC. Through this communication, we hope to provide some insight into a few key factors that contributed to OEBCs decision to choose the September date, including:

- the health and safety of our candidates, examiners, exam patients, and staff;
- the likelihood that the Health Science Centre (or other suitable centres) will be open;
- implications on related to delaying professional registration;
- challenges to securing sites and recruiting exam personnel for the OSCE; and
- the need to ensure standardization and security of exam processes.

**Overview**

OEBC is the national certification body for the profession of optometry in Canada. We assess candidates' competence at entry-to-practice on behalf of the optometry regulatory authorities (ORAs). The ORAs issue the license to practice to qualified candidates to protect the public.

We postponed the April administration to comply with emergency orders. The Public Health Agency of Canada wanted assurances from exam providers, including OEBC, that it would not be administering its exams during emergency order. The administration of the exam was not deemed to be an essential service.

We appreciate that the delay in registration as an optometrist impacts your ability to practice optometry, secure adequate employment and participate in public health measures as optometry

professionals during the pandemic. OEBC recognizes that there is a need for optometry professionals to deliver quality care during the pandemic.

### **Health and Safety Paramount**

The health and safety of our candidates, examiners, exam patients, and staff is of paramount importance to us. Members of the profession develop and administer our examinations for the profession. Selecting the September date was driven by our ability to safely and effectively administer the exams. We believe this decision is the right thing to do to keep our community safe and healthy. The optometry profession expects nothing less of us.

Legislation in some jurisdictions may provide the authority for the provincial optometry regulatory authority with an alternative pathway to practice until you pass your exams. So have a look at their website, and consult with them.

Administering an OSCE is a complex undertaking. Many factors impact OEBC's ability to hold the exam under the current circumstances. Given the uncertainty around when the pandemic may start to dissipate and when the restrictions around social distancing will begin to ease, OEBC is mindful of the impact of scheduling another administration too soon, which may also need to be cancelled if the pandemic continues. Below are a few of the key considerations as to why OEBC rescheduled the exam in September.

### **Examination Personnel & Sites**

The OSCE relies upon the coordination of large groups of exam personnel and the availability of appropriate sites. Exam personnel include those who prepare and administer the exams, the Standardized Patient (SP) programs, as well as the assessors who come from the profession.

Given the proximity in which candidates and exam personnel are placed, social distancing can not be maintained safely, and Ontario public health guidelines restrict gatherings to five people. We need guidelines to be relaxed to at least 50 people to run the OSCE. It is also challenging to sanitize the stations between candidates, further putting candidates and exam personnel at risk.

OEBC is aware that many exam personnel do not feel comfortable participating if the situation with the pandemic has not improved. Also, OEBC recruits about 60 practising optometrists from across the country as assessors for each exam administration. Due to their presence on the front lines of this pandemic, OEBC could not guarantee that there would be enough assessors to participate if an earlier date was available.

To deliver the exam, OEBC rents space from outside medical facilities. These institutions are currently not permitting any 'non-essential' activities, such as examinations, and these sites are unable to confirm as to when they might be able to allow our exam to take place.

Furthermore, these sites and SP programs are used by different examining bodies, including for medicine and physiotherapy, that already have previously scheduled administrations in the fall, limiting OEBC's ability to administer an earlier exam. We have asked about utilizing other sites to run the exam.



Unfortunately, suitable venues, currently, are also not permitting external exams to run and, even if they did, the issue around personnel described above could not be addressed.

### **Standardization & Security**

OEBC must ensure that each candidate that participates in the OSCE has the same experience regardless of when or where they take the exam. This requires extensive training of all exam personnel, including SPs and assessors. Each primary SP is trained on a single station to ensure that the presentation of the case is consistent across a group of candidates. To ensure that reliable assessments, candidates are assessed in the stations by multiple assessors.

To assist with meeting social distancing guidelines, we considered using one assessor and one SP for each candidate. However, utilizing fewer assessors would make the assessments and results less valid and unreliable. Also, having one SP portray a wide array of roles in a single day is not reasonable.

Given how memorable the stations can be, the OSCE is changed each day it is administered. This minimizes the risk of any candidate breaching exam regulations, as defined in OEBC's [Rules of Conduct](#), and sharing content with colleagues. The need for security and the complexity of performance exams limits OEBC's ability to administer the exam using different modalities. More information is provided on the OEBC website [here](#).

Considering these factors, it is not feasible for OEBC to administer the OSCE before the September exam. Thank you again for your patience and understanding.

Stay healthy, stay safe. Good luck with your exams in September.

Sincerely,

Kim Allen  
Chief Executive Officer