

## FACT SHEET



# College of Opticians of British Columbia

## Adoption of the National Licensing Examinations in BC

In 2006, the **College of Opticians of BC** adopted the National Examinations for licensing eyeglass dispensing and contact lens fitting. The National Examinations are set by the National Accreditation Committee of Opticians (NACO) and they are used by nine provincial regulatory bodies as their Opticianry licensing examinations.

- As a regulatory body, the College administers licensing examinations in dispensing and contact lens fitting in order to meet the increased public demands for competence and accountability.
- The College developed its own BC examinations in 1998, and they were certified for their equivalency with other Optician examinations in 2002 by an external review conducted by Dr. Skakun, a professor of psychometrics.
- The main goal in the administration of examinations is to have a defensible and fair examination. To maintain this goal, there needs to be on-going programs to review the validity and reliability of the examination.
- In 2003, the College Board of Directors set up an Examination Committee to review the existing examinations as well as review the National Examination process.
- In 2004, the Examination Committee met with NACO to learn about the National Examinations. Committee members reviewed the National Examinations process and submitted comments and suggestions.
  - The Committee discussed issues related to consistency across Canada, examination costs to the candidate, existence of on-going review programs by NACO for the validity of the examination and the feasibility of reformatting the BC examinations.
- Licensing examinations should be revised every 2 to 3 years: after 5 years, the examinations are in danger of increasing biases. Dr. Marshall, of Applied Research and Evaluation Services, reviewed the BC examinations in 2005 and recommended they were overdue for revision.
- There were two main concerns in revising the existing BC examinations:
  1. **Resources** – Dr. Marshall suggested a minimum cost of \$20,000 to \$50,000, and he was hesitant to suggest a maximum cost. On review, the Board believed the cost to be prohibitive for the College to undertake this task by itself.
  2. **Equivalency and Labour Mobility** – A new set of revised BC examinations would seriously impact the Mutual Recognition Agreement among Optician Regulators (MRA), which was formed as a result of the 1995 Agreement on Internal Trade (AIT).
    - The MRA allows provincial Opticianry regulatory bodies to recognize each other's members, and the AIT includes the labour mobility agreement to remove barriers for professionals who are licensed in one province to have their qualifications recognized in another province in Canada.
    - These agreements depend on the equivalency of licensing examinations, and new BC examinations would force extensive reassessments. This would render the MRA and the AIT inapplicable for BC Opticians because of the need to re-certify and validate the new BC examinations.
- To avoid issues of equivalency and the time and financial costs involved with certifying a new set of BC examinations, the College should adopt the NACO National Examinations.
- In 2005, the Board passed a motion that the NACO National Examinations be adopted as BC's licensing examinations starting from 2006.

## The NACO National Examinations

- The NACO National Examinations consist of the **Eyeglasses Examination** and the **Contact Lens Examination**.
- Both examinations measure competencies through knowledge-based, skills-based, and clinical judgment-based modules. The knowledge-based sections require written answers from candidates. The skills-based sections make use of live models and test case scenarios that require the candidate to demonstrate techniques in equipment usage, ability to develop required data and to base a clinical judgment on the data collected. These competencies were adopted by the College in 2003 for British Columbia.
- Nine provincial regulatory bodies use the National Examinations as a pathway to registration. They are used in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island.

The College is comfortable to adopt NACO's National Examinations for BC Optician candidates:

1. **Rigorous development and revision process:** To ensure validity of the examinations, NACO employed specialists in professional examination development and in Opticianry to assess the examinations and marking criteria.
  - The NACO Competency Matrix is based on the results of a national project of the 10 provincial regulatory bodies and associations, in which a list of tasks, skills and competencies was developed, validated in the field, and adopted as currently reflecting the level of knowledge required to perform as an optician in Canada.
  - The College adopted these national competencies in July 2003 for BC.
  - The examinations are weighed in all five sections, and the examinations are only valid with the completion of all sections. Comprehensive assessments of the National Examinations occur every other year.
2. **Legally defensible pass mark:** The National Examinations are assessed by the Angoff method, which is a standard-setting method of determining the cutoff scores for licensure and certification exams. It uses subject matter experts as raters to assign passing scores on licensure exams using a variety of specified guidelines. Examination assessments by the Angoff method produce a legally defensible pass mark.
3. **Standardized examination process:** In order to ensure uniformity of examination process, NACO sends an Examination Moderator, who is always an optician from outside the host province, to supervise every sitting of a NACO examination.
  - The Moderator functions as a resource person for the local Chief Examiner, makes sure that the examination is administered according to the National Examination Administrative Policies to ensure uniformity, and acts as a mediator for examination candidates.
  - All examination papers are sent from the NACO office to the Examination Moderator who transports them to the examination site, collects them upon completion of the examination and is responsible for returning the examinations to the NACO office for marking. The host province supplies a Chief Examiner as well as invigilators for each exam station.
  - Equipment provided by the examination is standardized, and during the examinations, equipment is randomly assigned to candidates. During the skill-based sections of the exam, questions posed to the candidates are randomly assigned to the examiner to ensure that levels of difficulty in the question and to eliminate any bias.