



THE COLLEGE OF
OPTOMETRISTS

Independent Prescribing (TCFA)

Information for candidates

Purpose

The purpose of the Therapeutics Common Final Assessment (TCFA) is to ensure that you have the knowledge and skills to enter the specialist register in Independent Prescribing.

Format

The Independent Prescribing exam takes place three times a year, usually in Spring, Summer and Autumn.

The assessment will consist of a key features assessment of multiple choice questions (single best answer or multiple answer), divided into patient-centered scenarios, each made up of between 3 and 6 items. The examination will be made up of 75 established questions and 10 pilot questions.

The 10 pilot questions are newly written questions being trialled for use in future examinations and will be grouped into two or three patient scenarios. Candidates will not be made aware of which scenarios/questions are being piloted. This is because we do not want candidates to answer these questions differently. Candidates' performance in pilot questions will not be taken into account when determining their mark or the pass mark for the examination. Only candidates' performance in the 75 established questions will be taken into account. Candidates will not receive feedback on their performance in pilot questions when they receive their results. The assessment board will analyse all pilot questions to review their performance and suitability for use in live assessments.

The examination will last 102 minutes and will be remote and computer based. Invigilation will be carried out via webcam. You will be invited to a tutorial session with the software provider once you have been confirmed on the examination, to ensure that you have suitable equipment and can run the software.

All questions, including pilot scenarios, are scrutinised by members of the IP question development team, which consists of a mixture of IP-qualified optometrists and ophthalmologists. The examination is then checked and signed off by two external examiners, who are an experienced IP optometrist and a GOC-approved ophthalmologist. The final version of the paper is then signed off by the Chair of the Standards Setting Panel.

The examination is pass/fail and no grades will be awarded.

Content

The College's [Clinical Management Guidelines](#) (CMGs) are used to drive content for the examination. These are guidelines concerning the diagnosis and management of a wide range of eye conditions that present in primary and first contact care. A PDF copy of the CMGS, on which the examination will be based, will be emailed to candidates with the examination place confirmation for ease of revision.

The questions in the examination are written by IP-qualified optometrists and ophthalmologists; the topics are drawn from and are in line with the College CMGs, but are also based on practitioner experience, therefore ensuring candidates can apply their clinical knowledge of the guidelines to real-life scenarios. Therefore, while preparation should certainly involve revising the CMGs, bear in mind that the examination is not simply assessing candidates' knowledge of them, it is testing their ability to apply them in practice, hence the format of the examination being broken into scenarios or individual patient journeys.

Questions relate to the application of clinical knowledge in terms of differential diagnosis, interpreting clinical signs, pharmacological and non-pharmacological management, monitoring, and prescribing safely and professionally (including risk assessment).

There is no longer a GOC requirement that 33% of the questions are based on glaucoma. From May 2021, approximately 10% of the questions in the examination are based on glaucoma. This represents the proportion of glaucoma content in the Clinical Management Guidelines. College's CMGs should form the main basis for revision for all areas of the examination, including glaucoma-related questions. The College does not recommend that candidates solely revise the NICE and/or SIGN guidelines, however, knowing NICE and SIGN guidelines may be beneficial in helping candidates weigh up the most appropriate answer for each question. Please note that no questions in the examination will include information or answer options that may be judged ambiguous or contradictory between the NICE and SIGN guidelines.

Sample questions are available from the [College website](#).

On the day

Format

You will be using an external assessment software TestReach for this examination and will sit the examination remotely. Details of the assessment software and a tutorial will be sent to you prior to the examination. Please have the following items for registration purposes on the day:

Photographic identification such as a driving licence or passport A recent copy of the BNF. There should be no notes written in this. A member of staff will check this on the day.

The remote invigilator will ask you to show the photographic identification, as well as the BNF.

During the examination

You will complete the examination on a your own computer or laptop. You will be required to have a webcam installed for remote invigilation purposes.

You may take notes during the examination if you wish. These notes will have to be shown to the invigilator at the end of the examination and destroyed.

You will see the amount of time available at the top of the screen and will receive a 5 minutes remaining warning.

You are not able to go back to a previous question once an answer is submitted. Therefore, check carefully you are happy with the answer(s) you have provided before clicking 'next'. The software will not allow you to enter too few or too many answers for a question. If you think you have done badly in a question, put it to the back of your mind. The questions development will inform you of the answer(s) we expected so you are put back on track.

At the end of the 102 minutes the test will finish. If you have not finished the exam you will not be able to answer any more questions.

Your marks are stored centrally as you complete each question so your marks are always safe. If you do experience any problems during the examination, alert an examination invigilator. If you have any computer problems we will try to resolve this as quickly as possible. We will ensure that you do not lose any time in these circumstances and that extra time is awarded if required.

Setting the standard

To set the standard of the examination, we use the internationally-recognised Angoff method. This is an absolute method based on judgments about individual test questions (rather than about individual examinees). The Angoff method is relatively easy to use, there is a sizeable body of research to support it, and it is frequently applied in licensing and certifying settings.

The Independent Prescribing Panel made up of optometrist prescribers and ophthalmologists decide the probability that a 'just good enough' professional would answer each question correctly. The median is calculated for each question, so for a difficult question the probability might be 0.3 and for an easy question 0.8. The pass mark for the examination is calculated by adding the Angoff scores for each test item. Using the Angoff method means that the pass mark will change from assessment to assessment depending on the difficulty of the items. This allows for a more reliable assessment process, which is important for a high-stakes examination.

Angoff is about standard-setting but in addition, the Independent Prescribing Panel look at item performance after carrying out the Angoff methodology to pick up if there is anything statistically anomalous. The Panel also investigates any candidate feedback about items following the examination. This enhances the quality assurance process and this is why the pass mark is set after the examination. The Panel are not made aware of individual candidate identity or performance at any stage of this process.

Results

Examination results are stored electronically. Results are normally released approximately two weeks after the examination. College members will be able to access their result online by logging into the College website.