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 March, June and November.

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 computer based.

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.

Sample questions, as well as screen shots of how questions will be displayed and develop in the examination software can be downloaded from the College website.

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).

It is a GOC requirement that 33% of the questions in the examination are based on glaucoma. The 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

Please bring the following items to the exam:

- 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.

We will have some spare BNFs available on the day of the exam but there is not enough for one for each candidate.

We will provide pencils and paper for you to make any rough notes.

On arrival

When you arrive at the examination centre you should sign in at the College welcome desk. The member of staff will check your ID and your BNF to ensure it does not contain additional notes. You will then be directed to wait in the candidate waiting room.

Candidates in the third session of the day will be required to wait in the candidate holding room for two to three hours in order to prevent cross-over with those candidates who have already sat the examination. Candidates in the third session will also have to hand in their mobile phones and other electronic equipments so they cannot communicate with any candidate who has already completed the examination. Lunch and refreshments will be provided for these candidates.

You will be asked to leave all your belongings in the examination room. Please turn all electronic devices off and leave them in your bag.

You will be given a briefing before you start the exam. This will include a practice test so that you can familiarise yourself with the computer you will be working on.

During the examination

You will complete the examination on a College laptop with a mouse. The examination will be displayed on bespoke software. Examples of how the examination software will look are available on the College website.

You may take notes during the examination if you wish. These notes should be left in the room at the end of the exam. They will not be marked and will be destroyed immediately after the examination. You will be given time announcements throughout the examination to advise how much time is remaining within the session.

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.

If you are attending the first examination session of the day, you must remain for the full 90 minutes of the examination and will not be permitted to leave early.

If you are attending the second or third session of the day, you will not be permitted to leave the examination during the last 30 minutes of the exam.

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.

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 will be released two weeks after the examination. College members will be able to access their result online by logging into the College website. All candidates will receive written confirmation of their results by first class post, including a breakdown of their performance in each of the questions.