



April 17, 2025

Re: Response and corrections to the Feb. 5, 2025, letter from the Canadian Association of Optometrists

Dear Members of FORAC and Provincial Regulatory Authorities,

The National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEО®) has recently learned that the College of Health and Care Professionals of BC and College of Optometrists of Ontario will no longer accept the NBEО entry-into-the-profession exams for licensure purposes. While we respect both College's decision, we want to ensure that you have factual information. First, we would like to extend an invitation to any member of FORAC to visit us in Charlotte, North Carolina and tour the National Center of Clinical Testing in Optometry (NCCTO®). We would be honored to host you for a day of engagement with our staff and board members. Visiting the NBEО and NCCTO will provide you with valuable information about our mission of public protection as well as insight into our examination process.

In reviewing the February 5, 2025, letter from Martin Spiro, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO), to members of the Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FORAC) and Provincial Regulatory Authorities, we discovered that it included some incorrect information regarding NBEО. Please allow us to correct some of the information contained in Dr. Spiro's letter.

As we detail below, NBEО has gone to great lengths to transparently communicate with the optometric community. NBEО remains committed to ensuring all candidates receive a fair and appropriately rigorous assessment of their readiness to enter the optometric profession. We released a series of announcements this year which are attached and summarized below.

On Friday, January 24, NBEО released results for the 1,866 candidates who took the December 2024 Part II PAM/TMOD examinations. Unfortunately, a data transfer error caused candidates to be presented with scores that did not reflect their true results. The error was a publishing issue, not an issue with the scoring of the exam and was identified and resolved within approximately two hours. NBEО quickly and transparently communicated with all candidates, providing impacted candidates a retake opportunity at

no cost, along with complimentary access to the NBEO Part II PAM/TMOD Practice Items Databank through the next exam administration.

NBEO is in the process of a multi-year modernization process that includes rebuilding our information technology infrastructure and relocating to a new office and testing location in Charlotte, North Carolina. In 2023, we launched a new registration system to enhance the candidate experience by allowing us to serve more concurrent users during peak registration, and we streamlined our payment process.

We have also built a brand-new application for the Part III Patient Encounters and Performance Skills (PEPS[®]) Examination. The new application allows candidates a clean, more modern exam format that balances clinical authenticity with the standardization necessary for a high stakes performance examination. This successful software transition serves as the foundation for improvements to other NBEO examinations. Our new IT system will provide candidates with a more reliable and efficient software throughout the examination process and will create a more automated system for scoring exams and publishing scores.

Over the course of the next two years, NBEO will continue this modernization process. This year we expect to complete the following enhancements:

- Further expansions of the Part III PEPS testing system to allow for twice as many candidates to simultaneously perform the exam
- Improved integration with necessary software programs
- Candidate management system upgrades to simplify our exam registration and score publishing process.

In 2026, we plan to continue this transition with the following improvements:

- Expanding improvements to each of the following exams:
 - Part I Applied Basic Science (ABS[®])
 - Part II Patient Assessment & Management and Treatment and Management of Ocular Disease (PAM[®]/TMOD[®])
 - Injections Skill Examination (ISE[®])
 - Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination (LSPE[®])
 - Online State Law Exams (OSLE[®])
 - Advanced Competence in Medical Optometry (ACMO[®])
- Developing and launching an elevated data portal for candidates, schools and colleges of optometry, and regulatory boards.

Our new office and testing location will double our testing capacity for the Part III PEPS Examination, meaning candidates will have more options to obtain their preferred testing date and time. Additionally, the new location will have a dedicated Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination and Injections Skill Examination suite which can operate simultaneously with the Part III PEPS examination.

As you know, NBEO exams were designed to serve both the Canadian and U.S. regulatory jurisdictions. In fact, the latest Job Task Analysis performed by NBEO in 2023 included responses from optometrists throughout Canada. This survey is utilized to ensure the appropriateness of the content area domains used on the NBEO examination series. Additionally, NBEO currently has multiple Canadian subject matter experts serving in our examination development process.

Thank you for your service towards public protection. All of us at NBEO respect and appreciate the important role you play in promoting, preserving, and protecting the health, safety, and welfare needs of the people of Canada.

Please let us know your availability for a visit to Charlotte and we are happy to coordinate a date and agenda that best suits your schedule.

Sincerely,

The National Board of Examiners in Optometry

Michael W. Ohlson, OD
President

Susy Yu, OD, MBA
Board Member

Gary Y. Chu, OD, MPH
Board Member

James S. Campbell, OD
Vice President

Patrick O'Neill, OD
Board Member

Caroline M. Kolman, PE, MBA
Board Member

Joshua Baker, MS, OD
Secretary-Treasurer

Daniel A. Taylor, OD, EdD,
MS, MBA
Board Member

Jill Bryant, OD, MPH
Executive Director



January 26, 2025

At the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO), we protect the public by developing, administering, scoring, and reporting results of valid examinations that assess competency in optometry. Optometrists help the world see more clearly and lead healthier and more productive lives. We understand the responsibility entrusted to us to ensure those entering this field are fully qualified for this important calling.

At approximately 3:00 p.m. on Friday, January 24, results for the 1,866 candidates who took the December 2024 Part II PAM/TMOD examinations were released. Unfortunately, the scores reported did not reflect candidates' true scores on the exam due to an error in the publication process. This error was the result of an incorrect data transfer between our internal database and our candidate score reporting platform, from which candidates' score reports are generated. The issue was quickly identified, and correct scores were released at approximately 5:00 p.m.

We sincerely regret the confusion and frustration caused by this reporting error. All of us at NBEO recognize the effort, time, and passion candidates commit to when preparing for this exam. We understand this error is particularly frustrating for those candidates who were incorrectly told they received a passing grade. For that reason, NBEO will be reaching out directly to the limited number of these non-passing candidates to provide a retake opportunity at no charge, along with free access to the NBEO Practice Items Databank through the next Part II PAM/TMOD administration.

Just as importantly, NBEO is committed to making sure this never happens again. Even before this incident occurred, we were already undertaking considerable upgrades to our technological infrastructure, in which we have already invested significant time, energy and resources. As part of these plans, NBEO is working to completely transition to a more advanced infrastructure by the end of 2026. In addition, we are asking our external partners in exam development and information technology to assess our policy protocols to ensure greater redundancy and reliability in the score reporting process. We will continue to communicate updates in each of these areas as they occur.

NBEO is committed to increased communication and engagement with candidates and our stakeholders. You can expect to hear from us more frequently in the coming weeks and months. If you have questions or concerns, please direct your communications to: December2024Scoring@optometry.org.

Once again, we deeply regret the frustration this has caused.

Sincerely,

The National Board of Examiners in Optometry

Michael W. Ohlson, OD
President

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Scoring and the Exam Development Process

Released: February 21, 2025

To educate our candidates and stakeholders about NBEO's exam scoring process, we would like to provide insight into how our exams are scored to uphold the high standards of the optometric profession.

NBEO works tirelessly to ensure each exam sets a consistent standard that is fair to candidates and protects the interests of future patients. Prospective optometrists invest significant time, energy, and resources into their future career, and NBEO exams represent a final step to prove to licensing boards across the country that candidates are prepared.

NBEO exams are designed differently than most tests Americans take in school – they must measure whether a candidate achieved a specific level of knowledge or skill, not how they performed relative to others.

For a more in-depth look at how exam content is determined, this [video](#) will provide more information, and this [video](#) will provide an overview of the item development and review process.

Exam Forms

NBEO creates multiple versions, or forms, of each exam to maintain the integrity of the testing process. After all exams are completed, our testing professionals (also referred to as psychometricians) and our panel of experts analyze the results.

Practicing optometrists serve as subject matter experts to ensure exam questions accurately reflect the procedures, scenarios, and elements optometrists will encounter in their work.

Sometimes, different forms of a test may have slightly different levels of difficulty. To address this, the raw scores are equated and scaled to account for these differences.

NBEO does not grade on a curve or guarantee a certain number of candidates pass or fail. Anyone who meets the minimum standard will pass.

To learn more about the process for determining exam passing standards, watch this [video](#).

Equating

NBEO uses equating to ensure that a candidate's score accurately reflects their performance, regardless of the specific form of the exam they took.

Equating is a method used to adjust raw exam scores (the number of correct answers) to account for differences in difficulty across different forms of an exam. This process ensures fairness and consistency in scoring, regardless of which form of the exam a candidate takes.

For a more in-depth look at how NBEO ensures fairness for candidates when using multiple exam forms, watch this [video](#).

Score Scaling and Reporting

The final step in the exam process is to ensure candidates understand if they passed or failed the exam. Before the NBEO publishes exam scores, it converts or “scales” the scores to a scale from 100 to 900. Anything above 300 is a passing score.

Our exam processes coincide with our mission to protect the public by developing, administering, scoring, and reporting results of valid examinations that assess competency in optometry. For more information regarding the NBEO's exams, please visit our [website](#).

About NBEO — Established in 1951, NBEO is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organization whose examinations are universally accepted for optometric licensure in the United States and accepted internationally. NBEO's mission is to protect the public by developing, administering, scoring, and reporting results of valid examinations that assess competency in optometry.



Modernization Efforts at NBEO: Information Technology and New Expanded Testing Center

Released: March 3, 2025

As the optometric profession evolves, the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO®) is committed to maintaining high standards to meet current and future needs. To support this, we are investing significant time and resources to strengthen our technological and physical infrastructure.

Information Technology Modernization

This transition began in 2022, when we performed a thorough review of our systems and started planning updates to our information technology infrastructure. Since 2008, NBEO has used a customized Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) software called Optometric Examination Database Information System (OEDIS). As a result of our information technology modernization efforts, we will replace and rebuild OEDIS to provide candidates with a more reliable and efficient software throughout the examination process. This work will also enhance the experience of other stakeholder groups, including regulatory boards, schools and colleges of optometry, and NBEO subject matter experts. As you can imagine, replacing our entire technological backbone is complicated, and cannot be done overnight.

Fortunately, this transition is already under way, and you may have already noticed some improvements. In December 2023, we launched a new registration system to enhance the candidate experience by allowing us to serve more concurrent users during peak registrations, and we also streamlined the payment process. Registration sets the tone for candidates' exam experience, and we felt this was an important place to start.

Additionally, we built a new application for the Part III Patient Encounters and Performance Skills (PEPS®) Examination. This allows candidates to experience a clean, more modern exam format that balances clinical authenticity and the standardization necessary for a high stakes performance examination. The Part III PEPS exam was designed in a custom software solution independent from the OEDIS application. A critical component of our new

application has been making the examination a more true-to-life experience for our candidates. For this reason, we created an electronic health records database reflective of cases that doctors of optometry encounter in real optometric practice. Candidates are tested with cases from this database as part of their examination to diagnose and treat patients. This successful software transition is the foundation for improvements to other NBEO examinations.

Another major benefit of this modernization process will be the creation of a more automated system for scoring exams and publishing scores. As we have recently communicated [here](#), the exam scoring process is thorough and complex. This process is necessary to ensure that every candidate receives a fair assessment of their knowledge, skills, and abilities, no matter when they take their examination. While this commitment to fairness lengthens the scoring process, this new software will create a more efficient score publishing process.

In the coming year, our software solutions will be fully integrated, bringing increased efficiency to our registration and scoring process. In addition, our legacy software, OEDIS, is planned to be decommissioned from all uses by the end of 2026 to make way for more efficient replacement software.

Over the course of the next two years, NBEO will continue this modernization process. This year we expect to complete the following enhancements:

- Further expansions of the Part III PEPS testing system to allow for twice as many candidates to simultaneously perform the exam
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 - Advanced Competence in Medical Optometry (ACMO®)
 - Developing and launching an elevated data portal for candidates, schools and colleges of optometry, and regulatory boards.

We will provide updates as these changes are made so candidates and stakeholders can see and understand how these changes will improve their experience.

Increasing Testing Capacity

Our commitment to modernizing NBEO extends beyond an updated information technology infrastructure. We have secured a new office and testing location in Charlotte that will double our testing capacity for the Part III Patient Encounters and Performance Skills (PEPS) Examination, ensuring more candidates obtain their preferred choice for date and time. In addition, the new location will have a dedicated Laser and Surgical Procedures Examination and Injections Skill Examination suite which can operate simultaneously with the Part III PEPS examination.

NBEO rigorously explored alternate location options, considering other cities and satellite testing locations. All other options, including staying in our current location, would significantly increase costs. In fact, NBEO expects this new location to generate approximately \$4 million in savings over the next decade. Those savings will enable NBEO to contain costs in its examination process.

The new NBEO National Center of Clinical Testing in Optometry will be located at 7910 Microsoft Way, Charlotte, North Carolina 28273 and will begin hosting examination candidates beginning August 2025.

We are excited about the changes ahead for NBEO and the positive impact they will have on candidates and the public we serve. If you have any questions about the information technology updates or our new testing center, please contact us at nbeo@optometry.org.

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