

ECOO European Diploma in Optometry

Candidate Guidelines

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Introduction

The European Council of Optometry and Optics is an organisation of professional associations more than 30 European countries. The European Diploma has been developed with the aim of harmonizing the standards of optometry so as to facilitate further the free movement and establishment of optometrists throughout Europe. Optometrists who succeed in passing all parts of the Diploma will have shown that they have the training and skills necessary to be principal providers of primary eye health care.

Board of Examiners

Throughout this document the term ‘the Board’ is used. This refers to the European Diploma in Optometry Board of Examiners. The Board of Examiners is responsible for the development and administration of the European Diploma in Optometry examinations

Content Outline and Composition of the Examination

The Diploma consists of three Parts

- (A) Optics and Optical Appliances
- (B) Clinical Investigation and Management
- (C) Biological and Medical Sciences

Each of these Parts consists of certain related subject areas.

To gain the European Diploma in Optometry, candidates are required to pass a written multiple choice question examination and Patient Care examination in ALL of the three Parts. Candidates must also present a satisfactory portfolio of clinical experience to be awarded the diploma.

The Patient Care assessment tests the clinical, practical and communication skills of candidates. Candidates need to possess the fundamental knowledge and understanding of the scientific principles upon which optometric practice is built and the ability to apply this knowledge for the prevention, diagnosis/detection, treatment and management of clinical conditions. The Patient Care assessment for each Part includes a station examination.

Administration

All examinations will be available in English, French and German.
The examinations will take place in France, Germany and the Netherlands.
The European Diploma in Optometry Examination Office is based at:

Zentralverband der Augenoptiker

Alexanderstrasse 25a

40210 Düsseldorf

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Any enquiries relating to the European Diploma and applications to take any of the European Diploma examinations should be sent to the Examination Office at the above address.

Entry Requirements including Assessment of Prior Learning

In order to be considered for the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry, potential candidates must either possess a recognised qualification authorising them to practise independently as an optometrist or optician in a member state of the European Economic Area or Switzerland (as determined by ECOO and the relevant national professional organisation); or be in their final year of training leading to entry to the profession.

The examination consists of 3 parts, A, B and C.

Each of these parts consists of a number of related subject areas. In all three parts, written exams are followed by patient care assessments. They serve to test the clinical, practical and communication skills of the candidates.

Candidates are being encouraged to first pass the written exams before sitting the patient care exams. (This arrangement is mandatory for security purposes in the case of Part B and Part C).

Candidates have, depending on the date of their first examination, three years in which to complete the part commenced. For example, a candidate who takes the written exam of part B for the first time in September 2007 must complete that part (theory and practice) by September 2010.

If the candidate tries to pass all the exams at one attempt and fails and then tries to pass part by part, he will be given the remainder of the 3 years for each part.

If the time limit is exceeded, exams that were taken more than three years before have to be retaken. This limit ensures that the candidates for the European Diploma are always tested on the basis of current knowledge.

Furthermore, **all individual examinations have to be completed until the end of 2019.**

The deadline for registration for the individual exams is 31st July 2015.

Before taking the practicals in Parts B and C, in order to ensure the safety of patients in the practical sections of the examinations, **the candidate must submit the required number of case records for inspection and approval by the BoE prior to his attendance in the practicals**, in Competency 18 (Contact lens fitting) for Part B and in Competency 9 (Use of diagnostic drugs) and 11 (Contact tonometry) for Part C (see Portfolio section for details).

Candidates would be required to visit the practical examination facilities prior to the examination.

After successful completion of all the examinations, in order to be awarded the European Diploma, the candidate is required to present a satisfactory Portfolio of Optometric Training and Clinical Experience reviewing patient records from the last two years of practice (you can find more information in the related chapter)

The Board of Examiners of the European Diploma reserves the right to inspect the practice records of any European Diploma candidate under circumstances compatible with patient confidentiality legislation.

ECOO seeks confirmation of candidates' eligibility for entry to its exams by requiring them to complete registration forms for the examination. The form for the first registration specifies that the candidate must provide

- a certified copy of their qualification, indicating the name and address of the institution awarding the qualification and the date of its issue
- or, in the case of a candidate still in training, the name and address of the institution, the head of the institution, and a letter from the institution recommending the candidate as suitable to enter the exams for the Diploma.

It must be stressed that potential candidates are told that the Diploma's exams are difficult to pass and that an optician who has not had adequate training in optometry is highly unlikely to pass them.

Outline of Scheme of Assessment

Learning Outcomes to be assessed

The learning outcomes and the clinical and practical competencies assessed by the exams for the Diploma are defined by ECOO in the syllabus and examination structure.

- * A. Optics and Optical Appliances
- * B. Clinical Investigation and Management
- * C. Biological and Medical Sciences

Each of these parts consists of a number of related subject areas. Written exams in all three parts are followed by patient care assessments. They test the clinical, practical and communication skills of candidates.

ECOO believes that there must be a reasonable balance between candidates' theoretical and practical knowledge of optometry. Because of the variation in standards in national practice, ECOO considers it necessary to examine the candidates' knowledge of basic science, as well as their knowledge of optometry. The two elements of theoretical and practical knowledge are expressed in the examination by candidates being encouraged to first pass the written exams before sitting the patient care exams. (This arrangement is obligatory in the case of Parts B and C).

Candidates must pass all the written and patient care exams of the three parts of the examination and present a satisfactory portfolio of clinical experience to be awarded the Diploma. The details of the marking/scoring scheme are contained in a further chapter. It includes a description of the suitability of the assessment mechanisms for the competencies to be tested.

Assessment Methods

The methods of assessing learning outcomes for the Diploma are objective and varied. They are designed to test different aspects of candidates' knowledge, understanding and skills in relation to optometry. They include:

- a competency-based assessment
- station exams

Currently, one complete exam cycle is held once a year, except for Part C, where practical examinations are only held with sufficient numbers of registration, at least every two years. Normally the written exams are held in September and the practical exams in the following March.

Guidelines for Examinations

Written Examination

The European Diploma written examinations are administered in standard multiple-choice question format. For these examinations, marks are given for each correct answer. Each item receives one mark

if correct or zero if blank or incorrect. There is no negative marking and each correct answer receives one mark. Therefore candidates should answer each test item, marking on the answer sheet the letter for what they regard as the correct response. *Only one* response should be marked for each item. Items that contain two or more marked responses or all blank responses (i.e., an omitted item) are scored as incorrect responses and receive no marks.

During the three days of the written exam 660 questions are to be answered, that is between 140 and 300 MCQs per examination part and per day.

The papers are constructed from a large question bank. Each question is allocated a difficulty factor depending largely on the degree to which the incorrect options relate to the correct response. This is the reason that the percentage pass mark varies between each administration of the examination; i.e. the lower the overall difficulty factor of the paper, the higher the percentage pass mark. This will normally be between 56% - 64%.

There are no pre-determined pass/fail ratios and so there is no “quota” of candidates to pass or fail. All candidates who reach the percentage pass mark will pass the examination.

Success criteria to the examinations leading to the European Diploma in Optometry

- **To receive the European Diploma of Optometry, the candidate has to succeed** in all three Parts, A, B and C of the Examination **until 2019**.
- Every Part, A, B and C consists of a theoretical and a practical examination.
- Every Part is made up of a number of modules or stations.

Practical examinations

- Part A consists of Stations of practical skills only, all concerned with ophthalmic dispensing.
- Parts B and C are made up of Stations of practical skills.
- The candidate has to reach at least 60% of the total points to pass Part A, B or C.
- In Parts B and C, the candidate also has to obtain all the points of the critical skills and at least 50% of the points not related to the critical skills. Thus, **failing a critical skill** in any Station **will fail the candidate** in that Station.
- A passed Station will remain valid for that Part for up to three years and will not have to be retaken provided the candidate can show (with sufficient patients' records) that he has regularly practiced those succeeded skills in the meantime.

Theoretical examinations

- These examinations are made up of MCQs.
- In order to pass a Part, the candidate needs to pass every Module of that Part. Therefore, he has to reach the required mark for this Module's examination (this mark depends on the difficulty rate of the used MCQs but lies around 60%).
- If the candidate fails one or more module(s), he can take the examination in the failed module(s) at another two attempts provided he reached a total average of 60% on that Part.
- A passed module is valid for up to three years for the concerned Part. After that period, this succeeded module will become invalid and will have to be retaken.

Reporting of Scores

One complete score report will normally be issued to each candidate within 6 weeks of the examination administration. Results will not be released over the telephone or by fax.

Verification

The Board is extremely concerned about maintaining 100% accuracy in the scoring of the European Diploma examinations. Therefore, numerous verification and quality control procedures are employed to ensure that candidates' scores accurately reflect the responses recorded on their answer sheets. It is therefore highly unlikely that any scoring errors will occur. However, candidates have the prerogative

to request hand verification and re-scoring of their answer sheets. This process consists of ensuring that each answer sheet was scanned (i.e. entered) correctly and that the scoring, scaling and pass-fail decisions were accurate. This process does not include any interpretation of a candidate's intended response, or any comparison between the answer sheet and other documents, such as the test booklet.

All requests must emanate from the candidate in writing and be received by the Board within 40 days of the results being sent out. Any requests for hand verification received after this date may not be honoured. Candidates should be aware that hand verification is an additional service which requires a substantial amount of staff time to conduct. Therefore, candidates requesting this service must pay an additional fee (please see the schedule of fees for details).

Examination Critique Procedure

This is a formal procedure which allows candidates to challenge the content of specific test items during the written examinations. Under this procedure, candidates are given special test critique forms during these examinations for noting possible ambiguities or other examination quality issues that they wish to raise. These comments are used by the Board for review and possible action.

Preparations for the Examinations

Strategy for Optimal Test Performance

The Board of Examiners devotes a considerable amount of time to ensure that the test items are written in a clear, direct, and straightforward manner such that being "test wise" is not an advantage, and having "too much knowledge" is not a disadvantage. The *Candidate Guide* is designed to help candidates prepare for the examinations without needing special test taking strategies. Nonetheless, there are several mechanics of test taking, described below, that all candidates should utilise.

- The examinations are timed tests, and invigilators have been directed to adhere strictly to the time limits. Therefore, candidates should not spend an excessive amount of time on any one item that they find to be difficult. Instead, items that are found to be excessively difficult and/or time consuming should be temporarily omitted in order that easier items may be answered. After completion of the easier items, candidates should return to the items that were initially difficult. This will help ensure that the time limit does not expire before some candidates have had the opportunity to respond to a significant number of items.
- Since scores are solely a function of the number of correct responses, candidates should select one answer for each item. Items which have been omitted or which have two or more marked responses are scored as incorrect.

The Board scores answer sheets not test booklets. Therefore, all answers must be recorded on the answer sheet. Candidates may highlight key words and write down computations and notes in their test booklets; for difficult items in which the correct response is not known, candidates may also note in the test booklet which options they can eliminate as incorrect. However, it is inadvisable for candidates to record their responses in the test booklet for subsequent transcription to the answer sheet. Many transcription errors may result that can significantly lower a candidate's score.

Exam Regulations

Eligibility

In order to be considered for the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry, potential candidates must either possess a recognised qualification authorising them to practise independently as an optometrist or optician in a member state of the European Economic Area or Switzerland; or be in a training leading to entry to the profession. Potential candidates for the Diploma must have completed their training and have a recognised qualification before they can be awarded the Diploma.

For permission to apply to the European Diploma, you are required to present either:

- A certified copy of your qualification, indicating the name and address of the institution awarding your qualification and the date of its issue,
- Or, in the case you are still in training, the name and address of the institution, the head of the institution, and a letter from the institution recommending you as suitable to enter the exams for the Diploma.

Cycle for Completing Exams

Candidates have, depending on the date of their first examination, three years in which to complete the part commenced. For example, a candidate who takes the written exam of part B for the first time in September 2007 must complete that part (theory and practice) by September 2010.

If the time limit is exceeded, exams that were taken more than three years before have to be retaken. This limit ensures that the candidates for the European Diploma are always tested on the basis of current knowledge.

Language

English is the defining language for the European Diploma in Optometry. All correspondence must be in one of the languages in which the examinations are administered. National associations are responsible for the translation of these regulations and the examination guide and are responsible for the accuracy of translation.

Candidates must specify at the time of application in which language they wish to take the examination. It is acceptable to specify a different language for each Part of the diploma and for the written and patient care section within a Part. Candidates who request to change the language after the specified closing date will be required to pay the supplementary administration charge.

Question papers which have been produced in more than one language will contain the same items. The translation of all items is conducted under the direct supervision of the Board of Examiners (the Board).

Applications

Candidates must sign an application form for each examination, agreeing to abide by the regulations. The last date of application will be notified to candidates but will not be less than six weeks prior to the examination. Late entries may be accepted at the discretion of the Board. The supplementary administration charge will then apply.

On first making an application to take one of the examinations, candidates must include a certified copy of the appropriate examination or registration document. Subject to acceptance by the Board, registration for an examination is achieved when an application form has been correctly completed and is accompanied by the appropriate examination fee and authenticated documents. Candidates who fail to include the examination fee with their application form will have the form returned.

Award of Diploma

Candidates who pass all Parts of the European Diploma in Optometry examinations and provide a completed Portfolio of Optometric Training and Clinical Experience will be issued a Diploma, without additional charge, recognising this achievement. The supplementary administrative charge will apply to any subsequent requests for duplicate Diplomas. Successful candidates may use the suffix "EurOptom".

Conduct and Irregularities

Candidates must carry proof of identity at all examinations to show to examination supervisors upon request. Candidates are required to conduct themselves throughout the examination in a manner appropriate to a professional examination, as detailed in the rules contained within the Candidate Guidelines. Any breach in the observance of this requirement will be reported to the Board who reserve the right to refuse admission to any further examinations.

The Board reserves the right to cancel a test administration if it has been determined that the security of the examination was compromised prior to its administration.

Non-attendance at an Examination

Candidates who wish to withdraw from the examination after submitting an application form and fee, but prior to the closing date of entry, may have their registration for the examination cancelled and fee returned. This will be subject to payment of the supplementary administration charge. Should candidates withdraw their name after the closing date or fail to present them at the examination; the entry fee will not be returned nor transferred to the next examination EXCEPT in cases of illness where the application is supported by the production of a medical certificate signed by a medical practitioner.

Late arrival at an Examination

Written Examination

Candidates will not be permitted to take a written examination if they arrive 15 minutes after the start of the examination. A candidate who arrives late for the examination (but not after the first 15 minutes) will not receive additional time. A candidate who completes an examination early cannot leave the room in the first hour and a half of the examination, or in the final 15 minutes.

Patient Care

Candidates who are late in presenting themselves for the orientation session or for the start of the examination, may not be allowed entry into the examination and will be treated the same as candidates not attending. However, at the discretion of the Examinations Supervisor candidates may be entered into a suitable later session of the examination if there is space.

General Information

Calculators and Drawing Instruments

Candidates are allowed to use calculators during all of the examinations. However, all calculators must meet the following criteria:

- (a) Small (i.e., classified as hand-held or smaller)
- (b) Noiseless, cordless, and tapeless
- (c) Does not have printing capability
- (d) Does not accept interchangeable plug-in memory modules or magnetic cards
- (e) Does not contain an alphabetic (typewriter) keyboard
- (f) Is not mounted in a wallet-like container
- (g) Is not capable of displaying any alphabetic characters other than calendar and time functions

Programmable calculators are allowed, provided they conform to these criteria. Candidates who wish to use such electronic devices are responsible for ensuring that they meet the Board's criteria and are required to register it with the Board for each test for which usage is desired. Any candidate who uses an electronic device that does not fully conform to the criteria listed above or who uses an electronic device for a test that has not been checked in by the Examination Supervisor, may be disqualified from that examination.

Equipment and materials guidelines

Candidates will be provided with pencils for the written elements of all examinations. Candidates may use protractors, rulers and compasses during any examination, but these will not be supplied. Candidates are also required to supply the equipment specified in the Patient Care sections of the Scope and Content of the examination. If candidates do not bring these items to the Patient Care examination and therefore cannot complete the required task, they will be scored as if the task was not performed correctly. It is the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that all of the equipment that they are required to supply is in good working order and that they have extra power supplies if appropriate.

Examination conduct and irregularities

Food or drink is not permitted in the test room with the exception of bottled water. Those candidates with special diet needs should make prior arrangements as outlined under the section entitled Candidates with Disabilities. Smoking is not permitted in any of the examination rooms.

Collaboration and other disruptive behaviour during an examination are strictly prohibited. All examination supervisors have been instructed to adhere strictly to the Board's policies to prevent collaborative behaviour and to detect and report it if it occurs. In order to obtain optimal test administration conditions, Examination Supervisors may change any candidate's seat in order to minimise or eliminate environmental disruptions or annoyances including but not limited to noise, a poor writing surface, ineffective lighting and potential collaboration or other concerns.

Any candidates determined to have cheated on any of the Diploma examinations will receive a score of zero (0) on the examination Part(s) in which the cheating occurred, or otherwise have their score(s) cancelled, and may be prohibited from taking future Diploma examinations. Occasionally, a candidate may be asked to change his or her seat; candidates should not interpret this change as harassment or an accusation of cheating. The Board reserves the right to cancel any test scores if in its sole opinion, there is adequate reason to question its validity. Candidates will be notified promptly if such a determination is made. All Diploma examination questions are protected by copyright laws. Any reproduction or distribution of such questions is therefore unlawful and subject to legal action.

There may be administrative irregularities that might unknowingly be detrimental to candidate performance. Examples of such conditions are an electrical power outage or poor lighting. Such an irregularity may impair candidate performance without the candidate having done anything contributory. Therefore, candidates who experience extraordinary disturbances or distractions related to the administration of a Diploma examination must draw it to the attention of the Examinations Supervisor. The Board cannot be held responsible for any disturbances, especially external, which are out of their control. However, the Board and its staff will, whenever it can, act to alleviate such disturbances.

Candidates with disabilities

Special examination arrangements may be made for candidates with disabilities or special needs. Requests for any special arrangements must be made in accordance with the following guidelines:

- (a) The candidate applying for special arrangements must apply in writing with supporting evidence, including documentation.
- (b) The Board must receive the request no less than four weeks prior to the test administration.
- (c) The Board will review and evaluate each request on its own individual merit.

The Board reserves the right to obtain a second professional opinion, at its own expense.

Verification

Candidates have the right to request a hand-verification and re-scoring of their answer sheets. This process cannot include any interpretation of a candidate's intended response, or any comparison between the answer sheet and other documents, such as the test booklet. Verification of scores is not a matter for the Appeals Panel but is an administrative process, supervised by the Secretary to the Board.

Appeal Arrangements

Procedures for Appeal against Examination Results

The only grounds for appeal are:

- a) That there is evidence of substantive irregularity in the conduct of the examination
- b) That the candidate has grounds to believe that the evaluation of his/her examination result was not properly carried out because of bias or prejudice.

- c) That there are circumstances that might have affected the candidate's performance of which the Board of Examiners was not aware when the evaluation was carried out.

Note: An appeal which questions the judgement of the examiners on a candidate's examination performance will not be accepted.

The appeal must state clearly and explicitly the grounds for the appeal and must include any relevant documentary information, such as medical certificates, letters etc.

Appeal procedures

- A candidate who wishes to appeal against an examination result must send a letter to the ZVA setting out the grounds for the appeal within 14 days of the results of the examination being issued.
- Upon receipt of a written appeal, the ZVA informs the BoM and BoE, that an appeal has been lodged.
- The BoE considers the grounds of the appeal and then informs the BoM about its decision.

Pending the outcome of the appeal, the candidates should be advised as follows:

- An appeal may not necessarily be successful.
- The candidate will be informed of the result of the appeal within six weeks of its submission.

Final appeal

If the candidate is unhappy with the results of his/her appeal, he/she can make a final appeal to the office of the ZVA within one week of notification of the results of his/her last appeal.

A board of three members of the BoM (none of whom are members of the BoE) will then reconsider the case.

Their decision will be final.

Distribution of Results

Candidates will receive written notification of their results. Examination results cannot be given over the telephone in any circumstances.

Results can be distributed to a third party upon the written request of the candidate.

Note

From time to time changes may be made to these Regulations or to the format of the examination. The regulations in force at the time of a candidate taking an examination will override any previous regulations.

Portfolio

To demonstrate particular practical experience candidates have to present a collection of cases ("Portfolio") on optometric and clinical experience. This casebook is intended to document what optometric problem cases the candidate has already solved during his/ her training or in professional practice. The idea is to be able to assess the optometric skills and the practical experience of the candidate. The portfolio consists of two parts:

Part 1: Professional qualifications and exams past by the optician/optometrist and information about the institution which tested the candidate.

Part 2: A proof of satisfactory experience of those clinical skills which were not included in sufficient depth in the written and practical exams of the ECOO-European Diploma.