



COLLEGE *of* OPTICIANS
OF BRITISH COLUMBIA
a B.C. Health Regulator

Registration Policy

Static Registration Policies for
the College of Opticians of British Columbia

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The Registration Committee (the “Committee”) is responsible for considering registration applications under the *Health Professions Act* s. 20. New registrants of the College of Opticians of British Columbia (the “College”) are required to meet the requirements for registration with the College under the College’s Bylaws for Registration (the “College Bylaws”). The Committee has outlined options for registration applications in this policy. The policy set by the Committee determines the types of applications that can be routinely processed by the Registrar of the College and its administration. The policy specifies the types of applications that will require Committee review prior to registration with the College.

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DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this policy, the following definitions are used:

Accredited institution – An institution that offers an opticianry program accredited by the National Alliance of Canadian Optician Regulators (NACOR) AND the College of Opticians of British Columbia's Board under Schedule A of the College Bylaws.

Change of status application – An application submitted by a registrant of the College requesting to change or upgrade their registration status.

Continuing Competency Program (CCP) – A program mandated by the College Bylaws, and supported by Quality Assurance Committee Policy, through which all registrants of the College must complete specific continuing education requirements every three years.

Labour mobility – The arrangement through which applicants registered in another Canadian jurisdiction are considered eligible to apply for registration in British Columbia (based on the national *Mutual Recognition Agreement* and additional provisions allotted for Quebec registrants).

New registration application – An application for registration as an optician and/or contact lens fitter, with or without a certification to conduct independent automated refractions, submitted to the College pursuant to the College Bylaws.

Non-practicing registrant – A registrant who is not currently practicing opticianry and is licensed as non-practicing with the College; may refer to a registrant in any registration category.

Non-routine registration application – An application for registration that must be reviewed by the Registration Committee—or by staff, on the Committee's behalf, using a process clearly defined by the Committee—to determine eligibility. The following applications are considered non-routine:

- A new application for temporary registration where the applicant is a former registrant who has not been registered for at least 3 years and who is completing requirements assigned by the Registration Committee.
- An application for renewal of temporary registration within 12 months of the applicant completing another temporary registration period.
- A non-practicing application where the reason for remaining or changing status to non-practicing is not a routine reason (as outlined below in *Routine registration application*).
- A reinstatement application where the former registrant has been suspended for 3 or more consecutive years.
- A PLAR application where the applicant's competency scores require discussion to make a determination of applicable bridging.
- An application to waive part or all of a particular fee.
- Any application that is not outlined in this policy.

Practicing registrant – A registrant who is currently practicing opticianry and is licensed to do so with the College in accordance with the *Health Professions Act*, the *Opticians Regulation*, and the College Bylaws; may refer to a registrant in any registration category.

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) application – An application for registration as an optician and/or contact lens fitter by an individual who has not graduated from an opticianry program administered by an accredited institution.

Reinstatement application – An application for registration in any registration category submitted by a former registrant of the College whose registration has been suspended pursuant to the College Bylaws.

Routine registration application – An application for registration that can be routinely processed by the Registrar of the College or its administration. The following applications are considered routine:

- A new registration application where the applicant has successfully completed 1) an opticianry program administered by an accredited institution, and 2) the National Optical Sciences Examination(s) administered through the National Alliance of Canadian Optician Regulators (NACOR).
- A new registration application where the applicant has successfully completed 1) the PLAR process, and 2) the National Optical Sciences Examination(s) administered through the National Alliance of Canadian Optician Regulators (NACOR).
- A new application for temporary registration where the applicant provides documentation of current good standing in another Canadian jurisdiction in accordance with the College Bylaws, and this documentation clearly indicates which activities the applicant is authorized to perform in that jurisdiction.
- A practicing renewal application.
- A non-practicing renewal application where one of the following is true:
 - o The registrant is not currently employed in the optical industry.
 - o The registrant is on a leave of absence from the optical industry for any reason.
- A reinstatement application where the former registrant has been suspended for fewer than 3 consecutive years.
- A PLAR application where the applicant's competency scores do not require discussion to make a determination of applicable bridging.
- A change of status application where all the requirements and conditions pursuant to the College Bylaws have been met.
- A labour mobility application under the *Mutual Recognition Agreement*.
- A labour mobility application from the province of Quebec.
- Any request for an instalment-based payment plan, provided the final instalment is paid within the fiscal year to which the payment applies.
- Any reasonable application for payment extension, provided the extension does not extend beyond the end of the fiscal year to which the payment applies.

The policy on routine registrations creates an efficient internal process for approving applications for registration, while providing the oversight necessary to ensure each practicing professional meets the National Competencies for Canadian Opticians. Both assessment programs conducted by the College—CCP and PLAR—are built to assess registrant competency in relation to the National Competencies for Canadian Opticians.

ENTRY TO THE PROFESSION

PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND RECOGNITION (PLAR)

Canadian and internationally trained applicants who have not graduated from an opticianry program administered by an accredited institution and who are not registered in good standing with another Canadian optician regulator may challenge the PLAR process, provided they have an appropriate combination of knowledge, skills, experience, and abilities related to opticianry. After an applicant has successfully completed PLAR, they may be required by the Registration Committee to complete additional education, training, and/or assessments.

The steps to complete PLAR and becoming licensed with COBC are as follows:

1. Online application

The applicant completes and submits an online application through the COBC website, including relevant documentation for review. At this time, they indicate whether they would like to be assessed for Eyeglasses only (for future registration as an optician), for Eyeglasses and Contact Lenses (for future registration as an optician/contact lens fitter), for Eyeglasses and Refraction (for future registration as an optician with a certification to conduct independent automated refractions), or for Eyeglasses, Contact Lenses, and Refraction (for future registration as an optician/contact lens fitter with a certification to conduct independent automated refractions).

2. Document assessment

The following documents submitted to the College aid in determining whether an applicant is eligible to complete the PLAR process:

- 2.1 Details of work experience (Dispensing Experience & Fittings Form)
- 2.2 Certificates, diplomas, and/or transcripts of formal education
- 2.3 Examination results
- 2.4 Letters of personal reference and professional competence
- 2.5 Letters of registration or licensure

3. Competency Gap Analysis (CGA) and Case-Based Interview (CBI), administered by NACOR

The CGA is an online multiple choice exam, while the CBI is a verbal assessment conducted by Licensed Opticians. Both tools are designed to identify any gaps that may exist in the applicant's knowledge, skills, experience, or abilities, as measured against the National Competencies for Canadian Opticians. The CGA and CBI results are combined and provided to the College by NACOR in the form of an Integrated Candidate Scorecard (ICS). The ICS indicates the applicant's score in each competency domain as:

- "Above" the minimum acceptable level
- "At" the minimum acceptable level
- "Borderline"
- OR
- "Below" the minimum acceptable level

4. Determination of applicable bridging

Upon review of the ICS, the Registrar of the College or its administration may process the application by:

- Deeming the applicant eligible to proceed to the National Optical Sciences Examination(s).
- OR
- Assigning the applicable bridging course(s) for the competency domain(s) in which the applicant scored "Below."

If the ICS indicates that assignment of at least 85% of the modules related to a single area will be needed to address the gaps in the applicant's knowledge related to that area, the application must be reviewed by the Registration Committee.

5. Bridging Time Frame

If an applicant is assigned mandatory bridging, they must complete all courses within 1 year of their being assigned.

In the event that an applicant is unable to successfully complete their bridging (i.e., pass the bridging module "post-tests" that serve as the measure of success) after numerous attempts, the Registration Committee may intervene as it sees fit.

In the event that an extension is needed to complete mandatory bridging, the applicant will be required submit a written request to the Registration Committee for approval.

6. **Examination**

An applicant is eligible to challenge the National Optical Sciences Examination(s) administered by NACOR:

- Upon completion of all mandatory bridging courses assigned.
OR
- Upon receipt of the College's decision regarding their application, if no bridging is assigned.

If the applicant has not completed PLAR for Contact Lenses, they will not be eligible to challenge the Optical Sciences 2 - Advanced Contact Lenses Exam.

7. **Registration with COBC pursuant to the College Bylaws**

EXAMINATIONS

NACOR Examinations

Eligibility to challenge the NACOR Examinations is determined based on completion of an accredited opticianry education program or completion of PLAR, including any applicable bridging, within the preceding 3-year period. An eligible candidate is permitted to challenge the Eyeglasses Examination, the Advanced Practice Contact Lenses Examination, or both, up to three times without special permission from NACOR or the College.

Examination results provided directly to the College by NACOR are recognized as the true and accurate representation of candidate performance. The College interprets each candidate's score to be a "pass" or "fail" based on the pass marks provided by NACOR. The current pass marks are:

- 61 for the Eyeglasses Examination
- 68 for the Advanced Contact Lenses Examination

A candidate must pass the Eyeglasses Examination before registering as an optician and must pass the Advanced Contact Lenses Examination before registering as a contact lens fitter. A candidate who passes the Advanced Contact Lenses Examination must *also* pass the Eyeglasses Examination in order to register with the College in any registration category.

An applicant must pass their examinations *and* complete their registration with COBC *within 3 years* of either graduating from an accredited program or successfully completing PLAR (including any applicable bridging).

Extraordinary NACOR Examination Applications

After a third failed attempt at either or both of the National Optical Sciences Examinations, a candidate who wishes to make further attempts at the Examination(s) is required to develop a personal upgrading plan. In this plan, the candidate must identify the areas in which they need to improve, based on their Examination marks, along with any materials, courses, and/or strategies that will support that improvement. They must also select a supervisor or mentor to provide guidance and oversight to their upgrading. The plan must be reviewed and approved by the Registration Committee.

Once the candidate has fulfilled the requirements of their plan, their supervisor/mentor must provide the College with a written report that includes the following information:

1. A list of competencies developed, and a description of how the candidate has developed those competencies during the period.
2. Confirmation that the upgrading plan has been completed as agreed upon.
3. An indication that the candidate is, in the supervisor's/mentor's opinion, sufficiently prepared to attempt the Examination(s) again.

The Document Assessment Fee applies.

Representation on NACOR's National Examination Committee

At the request of NACOR, COBC's Registration Committee will recommend one or more representatives to participate in the work of NACOR's National Examination Committee. The representative(s) will be selected based on their competency in applicable areas identified by NACOR (e.g., for work related to the Advanced Practice Contact Lens Examination, a representative may need to be licensed as a contact lens fitter with COBC).

APPLICATION TIMELINES

Any application for registration received by the College will remain active for 365 days. If an application is not completed by this time, the application will be archived for a period of 3 years. After 3 years, the application will be discarded, and the applicant must re-apply for registration with the College.

FEES

Fees for applicants (new and reinstating)

Fees are paid to the College upon application submission. If an applicant changes or withdraws their application within 365 days (prior to completion of that application), any licensing fees paid are subject to refund as applicable. Application fees and reinstatement fees are non-refundable. Applications that are archived or discarded are not subject to refund.

Assessment fees

Assessment fees are non-refundable. Fees paid for an assessment that is cancelled may be used towards a rescheduled assessment only if adequate notice (i.e., at least 24 hours) or proof of extenuating circumstances is provided at the time of cancellation. An applicant who cancels a scheduled assessment without adequate notice or proof of extenuating circumstances forfeits their assessment fee and must pay in full to reschedule.

Late renewal fees

Immediately following the annual renewal period, staff may adjudicate any request for a waiver or refund of a late renewal fee, taking into account a registrant's payment history, the timing of their request, their reasons for incurring the late fee, and any other applicable factors.

Fee adjustments during the fiscal year

On October 1, annually, licensing fees are reduced by half, in acknowledgement that fewer than 6 months remain in the year to which those fees will apply. The full application fee remains in effect year-round, as does the full licensing fee for temporary registration.

Between April 1 and October 1 annually, staff may refund up to 50% of a registrant's licensing fees upon registrant request, as long as staff deem the registrant request to be reasonable. Such refunds may apply to registrants changing status from practicing to non-practicing, moving to another province, retiring, or voluntarily withdrawing from licensure for any other reason.

A registrant who changes status twice—from practicing to non-practicing, then back to practicing—between April 1 and October 1 may be eligible for an additional refund at the time of the second status change if the amount charged at that time results in a cumulative over-payment of the annual practicing licensing fee for their licensing category.

Fee waivers and refunds

Under extenuating circumstances, a registrant may make a request to the Registration Committee to have a fee waived or refunded, in part or whole, outside of the above stipulations.

LICENSURE AND MAINTENANCE OF LICENSURE

INITIAL REGISTRATION

A first-time applicant is required to meet the requirements for registration defined in the College Bylaws.

Pursuant to the College Bylaws, the applicant must submit to a criminal record check through the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General. Their application for registration may be processed before the College receives the results of the check if the applicant provides proof that they have initiated the check. Form 1 (the "Notarized Declaration") of the Supplemental Package for Registration requires applicants to acknowledge that a registrant whose criminal record check results have not yet been provided to the College is not authorized to work with children or vulnerable adults until explicitly given clearance to do so by the College.

MAINTAINING REGISTRATION

As dictated in the College Bylaws, registrants must renew their licensure annually. In addition to completing a renewal application and paying their annual licensing fees, registrants must also fulfill their ongoing Continuing Competency Program requirements and ensure that their criminal record check clearance remains current in accordance with the College Bylaws and the *Health Professions Act*.

Beginning approximately 3 months before their criminal record check clearance expires, each registrant receives a series of email reminders with instructions for completing a new criminal record check. A final warning is mailed in the month leading up to criminal record check expiry. Once a registrant's criminal record check has expired, their file is passed to COBC's Inquiry Committee, who may take additional action.

CHANGING REGISTRATION

Non-practicing to practicing

A non-practicing registrant of the College may change their status to practicing if the following mandatory requirements are met:

1. Valid criminal record check – A criminal record check under the *Criminal Records Review Act* completed within the last 5 years, in which no criminal record check was found for the purpose of working with children or vulnerable adults.
2. Continuing Competency Program up to date – All requirements of CCP met/maintained in accordance with the “Quality Assurance” section of the College Bylaws.

Any registrant of the College who does not complete their CCP requirements within their 3-year cycle will be ineligible to renew their licensure, as per the College Bylaws.

To remain a non-practicing registrant at renewal time, a registrant must:

1. Submit a declaration attesting that they are not working in the BC optical industry.
2. Pay the prescribed non-practicing renewal fee.
3. Complete the online renewal application.

A registrant who works outside of BC but wishes to maintain a licence with the College must be registered as non-practicing.

Reinstatement as an optician and/or contact lens fitter

If a former registrant applies to reinstate after a suspension of fewer than 3 consecutive years, the registrant will complete the reinstatement process as per the College Bylaws.

If a former registrant applies to reinstate after a suspension of more than 3 consecutive years, the registrant must:

1. Submit sufficient proof to the College that they are licensed in another jurisdiction. A letter from the jurisdiction’s regulatory body may be considered sufficient proof.
OR
2. Complete the Competency Gap Analysis (CGA) for reinstatement, as administered by NACOR.
 - a. Should the former registrant score “below” the minimum acceptable level in any area of competency, they will be assigned applicable bridging courses.
 - b. Assigned bridging courses must be completed within 1 year. Upon successful completion of bridging courses, the former registrant will be eligible to reinstate.
 - c. Assigned bridging courses may be used as a part of the registrant’s CCP (e.g., built into their learning goals).

For the purpose of reinstatement, the CGA constitutes an assessment approved by the Registration Committee, pursuant to Section 49(3)(3) of the College Bylaws.

Reinstatement of certification to conduct independent automated refractions

A former registrant may reinstate their certification to conduct independent automated refractions by successfully completing the Competency Gap Analysis for refracting and the Jurisprudence Examination.

Voluntary forfeit of licensure

A registrant may forfeit their licensure at any time by notifying the College of their intention to do so. Voluntary forfeit may be recorded in the registrant file as:

- **Left province** - Indicating that the registrant has transferred their licensure elsewhere and is no longer working the optical industry in BC.
- **Retired** - Indicating that the registrant has permanently left the optical industry.
- **Voluntary withdrawal** - Indicating that the registrant has, for any other reason, decided they no longer wish to maintain their licensure.

Registrants who forfeit their licensure are required to return or destroy their certificates, as discussed below.

CERTIFICATES

A single set of certificates is issued, free of charge, to each registrant upon initial registration. Duplicate certificates will be issued in the following situations:

Change of name: A registrant must return their original certificate(s) to the College and pay a printing fee for the new certificate(s). Proof of name change will also be required.

Lost or damaged certificate: A registrant must submit a form indicating that they have lost or damaged their certificate(s) and pay a printing fee for the new certificate(s).

Additional practice location(s): A registrant must apply to have their certificate(s) duplicated and pay the printing fee for the new certificate(s).

Certificates distributed to registrants remain the property of the College. Effective July 8, 2013, when a registrant forfeits their licence, is suspended, or changes status to non-practicing, they are required to return their certificate(s) of registration to the College OR provide proof (e.g., a photo) of their certificate(s) having been destroyed. Registrants are required to return certificates within four weeks of the date that a notice of suspension is issued or a change of status to non-practicing is approved.

Certificates will be held on file by the College for 3 years. If a registrant reinstates or changes status to practicing during that time, the College will redistribute their certificate(s) at no additional cost.