

FORAC Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada

Canadian Optometric Evaluation Committee (COEC)

APPLICANT GUIDE TO CREDENTIAL ASSESSMENT

(August, 2020)

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FORAC

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Introduction

In 2014, the Optometry profession in Canada assigned responsibility for assessing the academic credentials of internationally educated eye care professionals to the Canadian Optometric Evaluation Committee (COEC), a committee of the Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FORAC).

Internationally educated eye care professionals are defined as individuals who have carried out the same work as optometrists in Canada even though their professional titles may be different.

COEC examines the academic credentials of internationally educated eye care professionals to assess applicants' eligibility to apply for the Internationally Graduated Optometrist Evaluation Examination (IGOEE) administered by the Touchstone Institute. Following credential assessment, COEC makes a recommendation to the optometry regulatory body in the province(s) identified by applicants as their expected Canadian destination.

Academic Criteria for Eligibility to Apply for IGOEE

Graduates from institutions or programs accredited by the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education (ACOE) or by another accrediting body approved by a provincial regulator are not required to have their academic credentials assessed. These graduates may apply directly to the Optometry Examining Board of Canada (OEBC-BEOC) to challenge the national registration examination, the OEBC exam (formerly CACO).

Applicants who are graduates of non-accredited optometry programs and institutions (including all institutions outside Canada and the United States) must meet the following academic criteria before they will be considered eligible to apply for IGOEE. If you have not completed one of the following educational paths, you will not be eligible to practice optometry in Canada.

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If your enrolment in your undergraduate study program commenced after August 31, 2014, you must have successfully complete:

- a) three complete academic years of full-time* undergraduate university studies in sciences and a 4-year optometry degree**

or

- b) a 4-year optometry degree** followed by three years of optometric work experience outside Canada .

If your enrolment in your undergraduate study program commenced prior to September 1, 2014, you must have successfully completed either:

- a) three complete academic years of full-time* undergraduate university studies and a 4-year optometry degree**

or

- b) a 4-year optometry degree** followed by three years of optometric work experience outside Canada .

NOTES:

*Full-time refers to 5 courses per four-month term or semester with two terms per year.

** The following is accepted as equivalent to a 4-year optometry degree: A three-year optometry degree followed by a pre-registration period of supervised practice endorsed by an appropriate authority in the source country and successful completion of the final assessment. Applicants must provide evidence of this endorsement; specifically, official correspondence from organizations assessing performance and evidence from sources of supervised practice confirming hours and areas of practice.

THIS APPLICANT GUIDE

This guide describes the requirements for the credential assessment process and contains details that you will need to make application. This application is the first of several steps you must take before you may apply for registration to practice optometry in any province or territory in Canada (except Quebec¹). A flowchart of the credential assessment process is available on the FORAC website at: <http://www.forac-faroc.ca/>.

It is important that you also contact the optometric regulatory authority in your destination province in Canada to determine what additional documents and other information they require for your registration in that province. Do not assume that the requirements of all provinces are the same. Contact information for every regulator is available on the FORAC website at: <http://www.forac-faroc.ca/>.

FIRST STEPS

If you are considering practicing optometry in Canada, the **first action you should take** is to review the Doctor of Optometry course descriptions published by the University of Waterloo. See: <http://www.ucalendar.uwaterloo.ca/2021/COURSE/course-OPTOM.html> These descriptions constitute the criteria against which your optometry education and training will be assessed by COEC. If after reviewing the course descriptions, you think that the combination of your degree(s) and other formal training in optometry is comparable to the education and training provided at the University of Waterloo, you should consider applying for credential assessment.

The second action you should take is to obtain a Credential Evaluation Report from World Education Services (WES). FORAC requires that your university education be evaluated by WES before you apply to FORAC for credential assessment.

FORAC requires that you purchase from WES an International Credential Advantage Package (ICAP) and a detailed course-by-course evaluation report for all of your postsecondary education credentials. The fee is \$245 per person.

WES will authenticate your documents, confirm the level and subject of your education, and determine the recognition status of your educational institutions in the source country. WES will also confirm the language in which you obtained your degree(s). Purchasing the ICAP Package means that you do not have to provide FORAC with your transcripts, degrees, diplomas or certificates. FORAC will obtain them through WES. Please ask WES for a second copy of their evaluation report and send it, sealed, to FORAC along with your completed application form and other required documents.

¹ If you would like to register as an optometrist in the Province of Quebec or practice optometry in the French language in another part of Canada, contact the Ordre des optométristes du Québec at: <https://www.ooq.org>.

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WES can be reached at: <https://www.wes.org/ca/>.

If FORAC has reason to believe that academic documents are forged, fraudulent, altered, irregular, or involved cheating, it will investigate. Applicants will be contacted to verify their information and if they cannot provide a satisfactory explanation, their record will be closed. All documents received become the property of FORAC and FORAC will notify in writing, the applicant or their representative and the credential assessment services with which FORAC works.

The presence of fraudulent or altered documents will lead to refusal to issue credential assessment results. Further assessment will not be carried out if it is determined that documents have been falsified in any way. Applicants may request a review and appeal of an assessment panel's decision to close their record.

After you have completed the first two steps described above, your application for credential assessment should be submitted to the FORAC Credentialing Office and include the following items. They are each described in detail in the next section of this Guide.

1. A fully completed Application Form (see Form 5 – available on the FORAC website)
2. A completed Release of Information Authorization Form and a Document Access Fee Form (see Forms 2 and 24 – available on the FORAC website)
3. Confirmation of a completed credential evaluation report from World Education Services (WES)
4. Course descriptions of all optometry-related courses including your undergraduate studies.
5. Official documentation on additional optometry-related education or training (if any)
6. COEC Assessment fee (see Form 23 – available on the FORAC website)
7. Confirmation of English test results (if required)
8. All necessary translations

Please note that your application for credential assessment will not be considered active until all of the above have been submitted to the FORAC Credentialing Office. FORAC will send you a letter by email confirming receipt of all your documents within 7 days of their receipt.

All forms referred to in this document are available on the FORAC website at <http://www.forac-faroc.ca/>.

If you have any questions regarding your application or its processing contact the FORAC Credentialing Office by telephone at (647) 746-2050 or by email at: credentialing@forac-faroc.ca.

1. A Fully Completed Application (Form 5)

A fully completed application form must be included at the time of your application. The form can be obtained from the FORAC website or by emailing a request to the FORAC Credentialing Office. Once you have completed the Application Form, save it as a pdf document and then print, sign, and mail it to the FORAC Credentialing Office with your other documents.

The mailing address is:

FORAC Credentialing Service
Sheppard Centre Post Office
4841 Yonge Street, Unit 242
PO Box 43215
Toronto, Canada
M2N 5W0

NOTE: FORAC staff do not meet with applicants in-person. If you have a question about the application process, contact the Credentialing Office by mail, telephone at (647) 746-2050 or email at: credentialing@forac-faroc.ca.

2. A Completed Release of Information Authorization (Form 2)

In order to preserve your privacy, only authorized personnel may access information from applicant records. This includes members of COEC, FORAC staff involved in credential assessments, and any other person authorized in writing by applicants. FORAC-approved consultants may access applicant records for the purpose of FORAC research and evaluation on the condition that a confidentiality agreement is signed.

Completion of Form 2 also authorizes FORAC to provide documents to provincial optometric regulatory bodies and the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science (WOVS).

FORAC will refuse to provide any person including applicants with any information that in FORAC's opinion jeopardizes the safety of any person.

3. Confirmation of a Completed Credential Evaluation Report from World Education Services (WES)

As described earlier, when WES completes its evaluation of your credentials it will provide you with a report. FORAC requires a copy of this report to be submitted along with your application.

4. Course Descriptions

FORAC must receive official copies of descriptions for all optometry-related courses taken. FORAC will only accept official descriptions sent directly from applicants' universities in a sealed envelope. Please note that course descriptions should include all undergraduate and graduate courses that you believe are relevant to optometry. This may mean that you must arrange for them to be sent from more than one university.

If course descriptions are not obtainable directly from your university, notarized copies may be accepted but it will depend on your circumstances. You should provide FORAC with a detailed written explanation of these circumstances. Convenience is not an acceptable basis for submitting notarized documents. If notarized copies of course descriptions are accepted by FORAC, they must include both the signature and the seal of the notary public along with their name (printed), address and phone number. FORAC reserves the right to contact notary publics who have notarized applicants' documents to verify submitted information.

A notary public is an official authorized by government to certify that copied documents are true copies of the original by applying his or her official signature and seal. Notary public is a specialized role that is recognized internationally. The following are NOT equivalent to a notary public:

- Justice of the Peace
- Commissioners of Oaths
- Commissioners of Declarations
- Health care professionals
- Embassy officials unless they are notaries public

5. Official Documentation on Additional Optometry-related Education or Training (if any)

In accordance with FORAC policy, an applicant's undergraduate courses in sciences (natural or social sciences) that have been assessed by WES, and are optometry-related, will be assessed as part of COEC's Education Analysis upon request by applicants. These undergraduate courses must represent a minimum of 3 full-time academic years of undergraduate studies in sciences for you to qualify for professional practice anywhere in Canada (except Quebec).

In its analysis, COEC will also take into account additional optometry education and training acquired outside your initial optometry degree programs. This could include graduate degree courses, post-graduate certificates and diplomas, residency training, and possibly other courses from other optometry professional development programs offered in source countries. It may also include optometry courses that do not directly correspond to University of Waterloo optometry courses (e.g. immunology taken in another program).

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In addition, if you have taken additional education and training including professional development courses in optometry, please include with your application as much information as possible on their relevance, structure, depth, breadth, credibility, authenticity, and method of evaluation.

Supervised Practice

The country in which your degree was obtained must endorse any pre-registration period of supervised practice that you might have undertaken. You must provide evidence of this endorsement; specifically, official correspondence from organizations assessing performance and evidence from sources of supervised practice confirming hours and areas of practice.

6. COEC Assessment Fee

FORAC is a not-for-profit organization. It makes every effort to keep costs and fees to a minimum but to be sustainable, it must recover the costs of services it provides to applicants. Applicants are responsible for providing FORAC with full payment of credential assessment fees in advance of their application being activated.

You will be required to send your assessment fee payment to the FORAC Credentialing Office using a Credential Assessment Fee Payment Form (Form 23 – available on the FORAC website). Fees may be paid by certified cheque made payable to the Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada or by credit card. Only payment in Canadian currency will be accepted. These fees are non-refundable.

The fee for a COEC academic credential assessment is \$2,250.00 + HST (harmonized sales tax = 13%) = \$2,542.50 Canadian Funds. This fee was approved by FORAC in July 2019 and reflects the cost recovery nature of the academic credential assessment service.

Other FORAC Fees

If at any time you request copies of documents in your FORAC record, you will be asked to complete a Release of Information Authorization Form (Form 2) and a Document Access Fee Payment Form (Form 24). FORAC staff will advise you in writing of the costs of fulfilling your request and the amount charged will be determined by the number and size of documents and costs of administration according to the following schedule:

- Photocopy costs for copies of documents from your record: Depends on number of copies.
- Postage costs, if any: Depends on size of package, destination, and method of delivery.
- Courier costs, if any: Depends on size of package, destination, and method of delivery.
- Administration costs: \$50.00 per request.

Form 2 and Form 24 are available from the FORAC website at <http://www.forac-faroc.ca/>.

7. Confirmation of English test results (if required)

If your optometry degree program was conducted in English you are not required to undertake a language proficiency test.

WES will confirm the language of instruction for your degree and advise FORAC.

If your optometry degree program was not conducted in English, you must successfully complete an English proficiency test. You must achieve the minimum score indicated for any one of the following tests:

- International English Language Testing System (IELTS) Academic – minimum overall average of 7.5 with no individual score lower than 7.0.
- CanTest – minimum overall average of 4.5 with no individual score lower than 4.0.

Official notice of the results of your English language test must be submitted to the FORAC Credentialing Office directly from the testing institution.

8. Translations

All documents submitted for academic credential assessment must be in English or translated into English. Applicants wishing to have their credentials assessed in French will be referred to the Ordre des optométristes du Québec.

Translations of all languages must be authentic, true, and dependable to ensure that all relevant information is considered during the assessment process.

WES provides FORAC with access to your verified transcripts, degrees, diplomas, certificates, and their English translations. You do not need to submit translations of these documents to FORAC. However, all other documents such as course descriptions must be translated into English. They must be accompanied by the original documents in the original language. All translations must be conducted by one of the following:

1. A certified translator at the original source (e.g. the university from which the applicant graduated), or
2. A certified translator at a consulate, high commission or embassy of the country in which the document originated, or
3. A certified translator at a Canadian consulate, high commission or embassy in the country from which the document originated, or
4. A certified translator in Canada.

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An original statement from the translator must accompany all translations and affirm that:

1. The translation is accurate and authentic.
2. The translator is certified.
3. The identification number and/or seal, name, address and telephone number of the translator.
4. The printed name and original signature of the translator.

Arranging translations and providing them to FORAC is the responsibility of applicants. The cost of translations into English is also the responsibility of applicants. If FORAC receives documents directly from organizations in source countries, it will forward copies of these documents to applicants to arrange appropriate translations.

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

FORAC recognizes that in order to treat applicants equitably, there may be circumstances in which individual applications require special consideration. Two examples illustrate but do not limit this policy: first, credential assessment procedures may be modified to accommodate applicants with disabilities. Secondly, if applicants are unable to obtain required documents due to situations of war or other crises in source countries, alternative procedures will be considered in consultation with applicants. Decisions are subject to review and appeal.

To request consideration of special circumstances, you must apply in writing and provide sufficient evidence to justify your request. FORAC will contact you to discuss your situation and you will be notified of FORAC's decision in writing with reasons.

ASSESSMENT RECOMMENDATIONS

COEC credential assessments result in recommendations to provincial regulators on whether applicants should be considered eligible to apply for IGOEE. It is the responsibility of provincial regulators to make all decisions. Notification to unsuccessful applicants will explain where evidence is lacking, and provide applicants with information on where they might be able to obtain further relevant education that could be favourably considered by FORAC upon re-application.

FORAC makes every effort to advise applicants of the results of their assessment within 7 days of assessment completion.

REVIEWS AND APPEALS

If you are dissatisfied with an assessment recommendation by COEC, you may request a review by the original assessment panel within 45 days after it is sent out from FORAC. A review will be held within 45 days of FORAC's receipt of your request and you will be notified of the results within 30 days of the review.

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If you are dissatisfied with the results of the review, you may request an appeal by a COEC Appeal Panel within 45 days that it has been sent out by FORAC. COEC Appeal Panels are comprised of three members of COEC who did not participate in the assessment or review of an applicant's academic credentials. Requests for an appeal must be made in writing within 30 days of your receipt of a review results notification. An appeal will be held within 45 days of FORAC's receipt of your request and you will be notified of the results within 30 days of the appeal.

Applicants may request reviews and appeals on procedural and substantive grounds, that is, relating to assessment panel procedures and the merits of its decisions.

Procedural Details

In the case of credential assessment reviews, the following steps will be followed:

1. Applicants provide the FORAC office with a written request for a review. Reasons for the request and any supporting documentation must be provided at this time. Contact information including address, phone number, and email address are also required.
2. The review is scheduled.
3. The review is held by the assessment panel. The panel bases its decision on a full review of its earlier assessment, the information in the applicant's record, the written request for review and any additional documentation provided by the applicant.
4. The assessment panel notifies the applicant of its review decision in writing with reasons that explain the basis for the decision. The applicant is also advised of their right to appeal the review decision. The relevant regulators are also informed of the decision.

In the case of credential assessment appeals, the following steps will be followed:

1. Applicants provide the FORAC office with a written request for an appeal. Reasons for the request and any supporting documentation must be provided at this time. Contact information including address, phone number, and email address are also required.
2. The appeal is scheduled.
3. The appeal is held by the Appeal Panel. The applicant does not attend. The Appeal Panel bases its decision on the information in the applicant's record, the original assessment, COEC's review decision, the written request for appeal, and any additional information provided by the applicant.

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4. The Appeal Panel notifies the applicant of its decision in writing with reasons that explain the basis for the decision. The applicant is advised that the appeal decision is final. The relevant regulators are also informed of the decision.

FORAC welcomes all qualified internationally educated eye care professionals to Canada. The requirements and procedures contained in this Guide are designed to protect both applicants and the public. We hope you find the information helpful and we are pleased to receive your comments and suggestions.