



**Framework for the Qualifying Professional Examinations for
Optometrists Applying for Registration with the Pharmacists Council
of Zimbabwe**

PHARMACISTS COUNCIL OF ZIMBABWE

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Pharmacists Council of Zimbabwe (PCZ) previously required applicants wishing to register as optometrists in Zimbabwe to submit only their certificates and academic transcripts from any recognizable local or foreign based school of optometry. A recognizable school of optometry was defined generally as any optometry training institution known to produce optometrists qualified to practice the profession of optometry within its own country of origin. No pre-registration examinations have been previously prescribed by the Council. As optometry develops academically and professionally, regulators of professional practice need not only assure the quality of optometry education but also ensure that specific knowledge, skills and attitudes imparted by academic institutions remain adequate as well as appropriate within the targeted practice settings.

2. BACKGROUND ON THE ROLE OF OPTOMETRISTS

The role of optometrists in health care systems of developing countries can never be ignored. They in most cases are part of the first health care professionals to detect life threatening ailments during their patient screening processes. It is therefore imperative that every patient be treated by an optometrist who meets high standards of personal and professional conduct. Standards are set so that every registered practitioner knows what is expected of them. Standards are set in two areas: performance and knowledge; and behaviour and action is taken against registrants who do not meet these standards.

3. PURPOSE OF THE QUALIFYING EXAMINATION

Qualifying examinations are designed for the evaluation of applicants' competency (knowledge, skills and abilities) to practice as an optometrist safely and effectively in "entry level" positions. These evaluations are generally based on the practice competencies defined by the official regulatory body. The PCZ has through its Education and Liaison Committee defined those competencies that reflect the current standard of practice in Zimbabwe. This framework has drafted those competencies which make the basis of the qualifying examinations. The qualifying examination ensures that successful candidates have met the required standard of competence. Through a process of producing regular updates of the required competencies, the PCZ will position itself to

directly influence the direction of optometry practice in the country as required by the Health Professions Act [Cap 27:19].

Assessment of competence requires the understanding and application of knowledge, attitudes, and skills as well as the performance of key professional tasks. The Council therefore reserves the right to prescribe the format of the examination which shall include methods such as performance-based assessment, or interviews.

4. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS FOR OPTOMETRIST PRACTICE AND THE STRUCTURE OF QUALIFYING EXAMINATIONS IN ZIMBABWE

The minimum requirements for registering to practice as an optometrist in Zimbabwe are clearly defined and accessible to all applicants locally as well as internationally. There is accessibility of those requirements even for early career seekers in high school in order to promote early professional attitude development. Those requirements are also available on the PCZ website for effective achievement of this goal.

With reference to other optometry professional regulators globally, the PCZ has implemented the following minimum requirements for optometrists practice:

A. Evidence of successful completion of a degree in optometry from a recognized or accredited training institution.

The local minimum academic requirement is a degree in optometry coupled with registration with any other qualifications that Council might prescribe from time to time.

B. Successful completion of qualifying examinations

Every applicant who submits evidence of minimum academic qualifications (unless exempted or denied eligibility by the Council) would be eligible to write a qualifying examination. The examination would cover technical theory and professional, ethical, social, legal and administrative subjects.

5. THE EXAMINATION

The optometrists professional qualifying examinations is a combination of practical assessment of competencies and an oral test (interview) with a panel of at least four optometrists of at least ten years of experience where questions relating to specified areas of practice are put to the applicant.

The Examination shall;

- have two levels, 1 and 2.
- be held twice a year in April and October only at a venue and time to be prescribed by Council.

Applicants will only be allowed to proceed to write Level 2 of the examination after satisfactory completion of Level 1. Newly qualified applicants shall not be allowed to practice independently before satisfactorily passing all levels of the examinations. Candidates who fail a level of the examination twice shall be referred for remedial tutorials before being allowed to retake the examination

5.1. Level 1: Written Examination

Ten Competencies

This level of examination is taken within three months of preregistration training for newly qualified practitioners. For qualified practitioners practicing elsewhere, the examination must be passed prior to admission onto the provisional register. Sixty questions will be asked and the pass mark for this level of examination is 60 percent.

The candidate is expected to demonstrate the following competencies:

- i. Importance of thorough history and symptoms, able to ask careful questions relating to symptoms
- ii. Patient confidentiality issues
- iii. Legal issues – Health Act, code of conduct, role of PCZ, record keeping, referral Procedure
- iv. Prescription analysis – identify and explain problems that may arise from a given Prescription
- v. Provide all necessary info required to duplicate a pair of spectacles, correct analysis of lens type, measurement of Rx etc
- vi. Occupational requirements
- vii. Contact lens indications and contraindications, keratoconus
- viii. Eye disease risk factors, when to refer, common conditions in Zimbabwe
- ix. Understanding of treatment regimes for common conditions e.g. glaucoma, DR, cataract etc. Diagnostic drugs knowledge
- x. Interpretation of abnormal visual field results

5.2. Level 2: Practical assessment

The Council in collaboration with various stakeholders shall keep a confidential database of patients with abnormal conditions that would be suitable for examination purposes.

Ten competencies worth 5 points - total 50

This level of examination must be taken by a candidate who has satisfactorily passed level 1 of the examination and after the first six months of pre- registration training in the case of newly qualified practitioners. For practitioners registered elsewhere, the examination must be taken within six months of passing Level 1 of the examination. Pass mark for each competency is three [3] points and the pass mark for this level of examination is thirty [30] points

The candidate is expected to demonstrate the following competencies within the specified time frames:

- i. *History and Symptoms - 5 minutes
- ii. *Refraction – retinoscopy, subjective, duochrome, near add, cover test, fixation disparity - 20 minutes
- iii. *Binocular vision - 15 minutes
- iv. *Slit lamp use- ability to detect abnormality - 15 minutes
- v. Keratometry- 5 minutes
- vi. *Ophthalmoscopy, Volk lens ability to detect abnormality - 5 minutes
- vii. Childrens vision, stereopsis, colour vision assessment- 20 minutes
- viii. Visual fields – able to carry out a visual field test and correctly interpret results – 15 minutes
- ix. *Tonometry - 5 minutes
- x. Soft/ GP contact lens fitting - 20 minutes

* These are essential examination sections and must not be failed by the candidate.

6. THE EXAMINATION REGULATIONS

- i. Newly qualified Optometrists should be undertaking a programme of pre-registration training and should have completed at least 75% of the prescribed period of training before presenting themselves for the final examination.
- ii. Candidates must sign an application form for each examination, agreeing to abide by the regulations.
- iii. The last date of application will be notified to candidates but will be not less than four weeks prior to the examination. Late entries may be accepted at the discretion of the Council and in this case late examination entry fees will then be payable.
- iv. If candidates withdraw or fail to present themselves at the examination, they are entitled to present themselves at a subsequent examination upon payment of appropriate fees set by Council from time to time.

- v. Examination fees can be transferred to the next examination without payment of a further fee ONLY in cases of illness where the application is supported by the production of a medical certificate.
- vi. Candidates who fail to present themselves at an examination and do not produce a medical certificate to verify illness, will be deemed to have failed that examination.
- vii. Candidates, who are late in presenting themselves for any examination, will not be allowed to proceed with the examination and will be treated as absent.
- viii. Candidates are required to supply their own ophthalmoscopes, retinoscopes, loupes, clinical torches, trial frames, rules and drawing instruments. No book or written material of any description whatever may be brought into the examination room. Contravention of this rule will render the offender liable to disqualification.
- ix. Any complaint about the conduct of the examination must be made immediately, in writing, to Council not later than seven days from the date of examination, after which appropriate action would be taken.
- x. Candidates may apply for remarking and reassessments within seven days of the publication of results and would be required to pay a non-refundable fee for the exercise.
- xi. Council reserves the right to have a final determination in all matters relating to the Professional Qualifying Examinations.