

abdo | Examinations

# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

End Point Assessment Handbook

- Level 6 Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing
- Level 6 Dispensing Optician Apprenticeship



# Contents

## Updates to this handbook

Information is correct at the time of publication. However, the handbook may be updated periodically to reflect any legislative, policy and/or operational changes. Previous updates are summarised below.

### Updates to the End Point Assessment (EPA) Handbook for ABDO Awarding Body:

**VERSION: 2.1** **July 2024**

Update to typing corrections

**VERSION: 2.0** **January 2024**

The EPA administration and policy handbook relative to the ABDO 2023 ophthalmic dispensing syllabus incorporating the Level 6 apprenticeship delivery and administration

**VERSION: 1.0** **August 2007**

First official publication of the Awarding Body handbook and specification relative to Ofqual accreditation of the Level 6 diploma

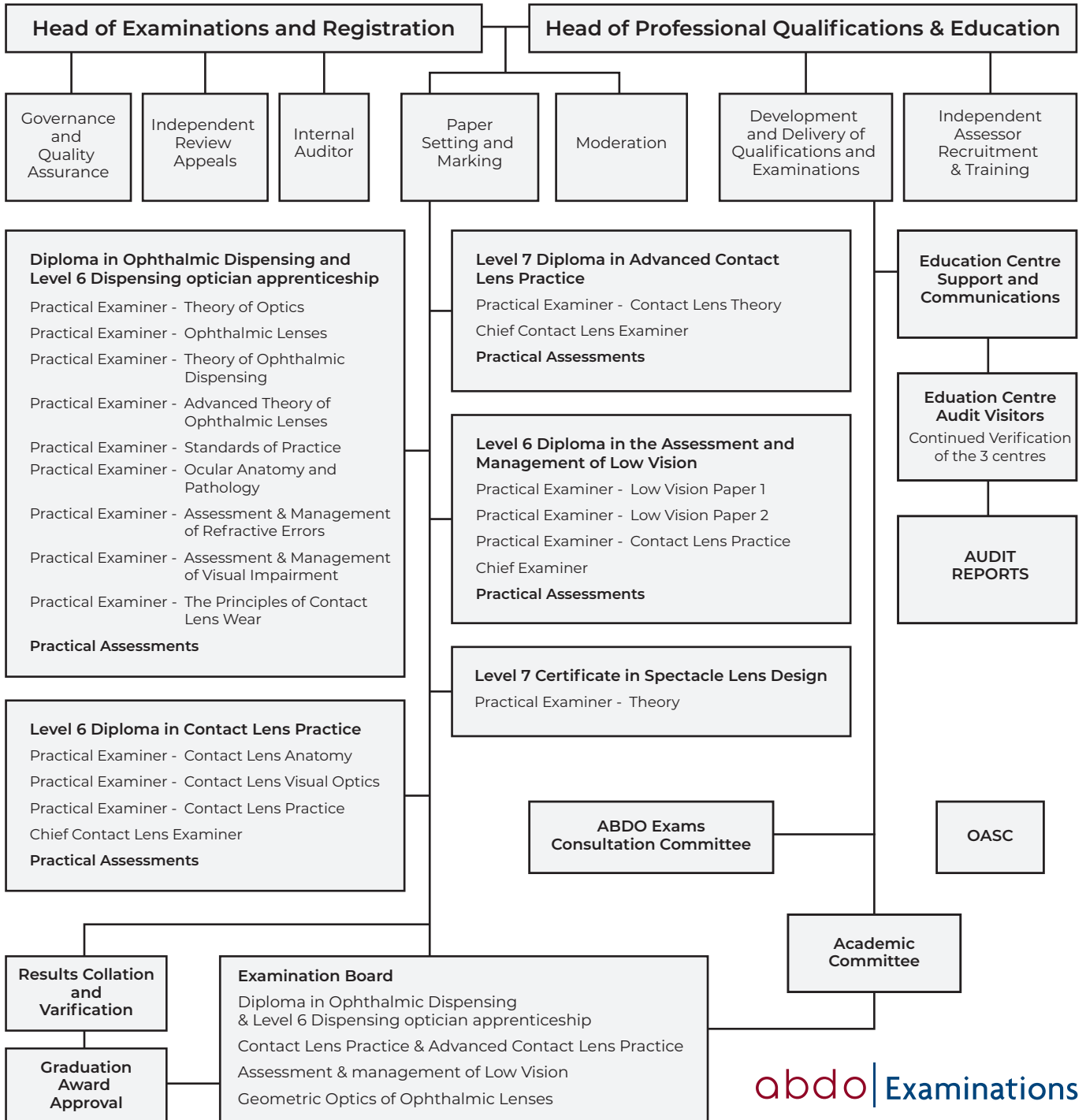
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## Introduction

The ABDO End Point Assessment Handbook is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the end point assessment (EPA) process, terminology and the apprenticeship gateway and to provide information regarding the ABDO Level 6 ophthalmic dispensing qualifications. Content regarding all EPAs is discussed generally in the first few sections of this handbook, while specific details will be covered in the relevant EPA section.



ABDO Examinations and Registration organisational structure

## Who is eligible for ABDO Level 6 ophthalmic dispensing qualifications?

### ABDO OFFER:

- Level 6 FBDO Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing
- Level 6 dispensing optician apprenticeship

The minimum entry requirements are the achievement of grade 4 (equivalent grade C) or higher in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) in the following subjects:

- mathematics
- English
- a science-based subject
- and two other subjects

The ABDO Awarding Body may consider the results obtained in an equivalent examination or qualification and may agree to waive this educational requirement in respect of persons who have had at least 10 years practical experience in optics. Both Level 6 qualifications would be suitable for:

- anyone over the age of 16 years who has the right to work in the UK (for the diploma) or in England (for the apprenticeship) and is employed for a minimum of 30 hours a week
- individuals who are ambitious and interested in a career in optics
- school leavers
- graduates – individuals who already hold a degree may be eligible for government apprenticeship funding, provided there is an opportunity to acquire new knowledge, skills and behaviours, otherwise the non-apprenticeship FBDO route would apply
- new and existing employees or staff members – employers can offer both qualifications to existing staff who want to improve their skill set and increase their contribution to the organisation while gaining a nationally recognised qualification

## What are the differences between the two ABDO Level 6 qualifications?

ABDO qualified dispensing opticians are recognised both nationally and internationally, training individuals with responsibilities in high street and hospital settings, domiciliary services, contact lens clinics and ophthalmic lens manufacturers. A dispensing optician is a regulated profession, with

registrants accountable for providing optical advice and the supply of the most appropriate optical appliances after taking account of the patient's personal, visual, lifestyle and vocational needs.

Both Level 6 qualifications are a route to the register of qualified professionals overseen by the optical governing body, the General Optical Council (GOC). Each learner will undertake their studies via a distance learning block release or day release model, studying while working on placement. The main difference between the two qualifications is in terms of funding.

## Funding

### *The FBDO Level 6 Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing*

is a self-funded route to GOC registration, where the employer/learner is responsible for the fees incurred.

### *The Level 6 dispensing optician apprenticeship*

is a funded route to GOC registration, where an employer may draw down on funding received from the Government for those learners meeting apprenticeship and ABDO entry requirements. Funding covers a first attempt at the EPA, whereas resits or retakes are generally funded by the employer/apprentice.

### *Apprenticeship funding*

The funding bands that apply to approved standards are available at:-

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/apprenticeship-funding/apprenticeship-funding>. These bands reflect an upper limit on the amount of funding the Government will provide. The cost of training will have to be negotiated by employers with training providers. Further details on how the funding system works can be found on GOV.UK ([www.gov.uk](http://www.gov.uk)) at *How to register and use the apprenticeship service as an employer*.

Both ophthalmic dispensing pathways will result in an ABDO Level 6 diploma being awarded. ABDO will notify the GOC of the final qualification awarded and entry to the GOC register as a qualified optical professional (subject to GOC ongoing review). Remaining a fellow of ABDO will allow the use of the protected title – Dispensing Optician and the suffix of FBDO.

# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## Roles and responsibilities

### Roles and responsibilities

The ABDO EPA for both Level 6 programmes is designed to ensure that all learners demonstrate how, with a strong emphasis on self-reflection, their work experience establishes the required knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) and meets the requirements of the GOC Outcomes for Registration (OfR). The responsibilities of the various stakeholders involved in the delivery of the EPA are set out as follows:

<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>EPA1 professional discussion</b>	<b>EPA2 practical assessment day</b>
<b>ABDO</b>	<p>Produce assessment brief.</p> <p>Provide guidance for portfolio completion.</p> <p>Review the discussion based on portfolio case record patient encounters.</p> <p>Make a pass/fail decision.</p>	<p>Set and mark the assessments.</p> <p>Make final judgement on overall grade.</p> <p>Notify GOC when a learner passes all EPAs.</p> <p>Notify the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) when a learner passes all EPAs.</p> <p>Provides pre- and post-gateway exam support resources.</p>
<b>Learner</b>	<p>Attend regular progress review meetings with training provider and workplace mentor.</p> <p>Prepare and submit Preliminary Qualifying Period (PQP) portfolio for employer validation.</p> <p>Undertake all pre-gateway requirements.</p>	<p>Read and agree to ABDO EPA terms and conditions.</p> <p>Book the assessments online.</p> <p>Sit the assessment at the approved test centre.</p>
<b>Training provider</b>	<p>Undertake regular progress reviews with the apprentice.</p> <p>Provide 'off the job' training to help the learner develop the relevant technical knowledge, skills and behaviours.</p> <p>Support the learner with their on-programme training and in preparation for the EPA.</p>	<p>Validate the learner's information at least once a week through the training provider portal.</p> <p>Provide appropriate training to the learner in preparation for the EPA.</p> <p>Complete the gateway checklist and notify ABDO of any exceptions.</p>
<b>Employer or workplace mentor</b>	<p>Make the final judgement whether the apprentice has met the gateway requirements.</p> <p>Complete the gateway checklist.</p> <p>Set the learner objectives.</p> <p>Create opportunities for the learner to carry out significant and challenging tasks to meet objectives.</p> <p>Undertake regular progress reviews with the learner.</p> <p>Validate the learners PQP submission.</p>	<p>Provide appropriate training to the learner in preparation for the EPA.</p> <p>Complete the gateway checklist.</p>
<b>Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA)</b>	<p>On successful completion of both EPA1 and EPA2 (as notified by ABDO), issue apprenticeship completion certificate for the relevant level.</p>	
<b>General Optical Council (GOC)</b>	<p>On successful completion of both EPA1 and EPA2 (as notified by ABDO), confirm entry to the GOC register as a qualified dispensing optician.</p>	

## The ABDO learner's journey

### The ABDO learner's journey

Both the Level 6 dispensing optician apprenticeship programme and the Level 6 Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing will follow the same distinct phases:

- 1) on-placement training and assessment
- 2) preparation for the EPA
- 3) gateway requirements
- 4) completion of the EPA

The duration of either Level 6 qualification, from start of placement and on-programme training to the EPA, typically takes 36 months. However, the length of time to complete the four phases may vary due to prior qualifications and relevant work experience.

#### **Registration and self-enrolment**

Before the journey starts, learner's must be employed in a relevant practice setting and be registered with an ABDO-approved training provider. On receipt of their membership numbers from both ABDO and the GOC, learners must confirm the pathway under which they will complete their studies. Once enrolled, the training provider will be required to validate a learner's progress on a regular basis through their training provider portal.

#### **PHASE 1: on-placement training and assessment**

Phase 1 begins when the training provider confirms the learner's enrolment and the learner registers their practice and practice education lead with ABDO Examinations. The purpose of on-placement training is to ensure that the learner is progressing towards full competence ahead of attempting the EPA.

Our recommended approach to on-placement training is through a combination of skills tasks and patient encounters, and training logs must be kept as part of the PQP.

Phase 1 requires the learner to submit prerequisites, such as staged submission of patient encounters with associated reflective learning statements, and regular development meetings with employers and education providers. This phase also requires learners to spend 20% of their workweek engaged in off-the-job training, defined as learning and skills development that is undertaken outside of the normal day-to-day working environment.

Off-the-job training must be directly relevant to the programme and/or apprenticeship standard, such as:

- teaching of theory (eg lectures, roleplaying, simulation exercises, online learning or manufacturer training)
- practical training, shadowing, mentoring, industry visits and attendance at continuing professional development (CPD) events
- learning support and time spent writing assessments/assignments

Off-the-job training can include training at the apprentice's place of work but must not be activities or responsibilities that are part of the learner's normal working duties.

#### **PHASE 2: preparation for the end point assessments (EPA)**

Tracking sheets, training logs and development meetings, and the gateway requirements (as articulated in the next section) should form part of the learner's continuous development throughout Phase 1 and Phase 2.

The learner should start to prepare for EPA1 through the accumulation of patient encounters and discussion of each case with the relevant supervisor, considering the skills, behaviours and learning outcomes they demonstrate. Preparation for EPA2 can be done through familiarisation of tasks, knowledge and skills used throughout placement.

ABDO has prepared a wealth of guidance to support learners as they prepare for EPA1 and EPA2, which are available to download from the ABDO website:

- Preliminary Qualifying Examination (PQE) revision guide – Year 1 Dispensing Examinations - ABDO - Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing <https://www.abdo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/ABDO-PQE-Practical-Guide-Students-SEPT-2023.pdf>
- portfolio and supervision guide (for students, and separately for supervisors) <https://www.abdo.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/ABDO-PQP-Trainees-Guide-A4-May-2024.pdf>
- practice visit guide (link to follow)
- Final Qualifying Examination (FQE) revision guide – which is the ABDO EPA (link to follow)



# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## The ABDO learner's journey (*continued*)

### **PHASE 3: gateway requirements**

The gateway refers to the requirements that need to be met for the employer to put forward the learner for the EPA. To do this, the employer, learner and designated training provider will jointly sign declarations to confirm the point at which the learner has completed their gateway requirements and is provisionally competent in all aspects of the standard.

At this point, the learner is eligible to apply for the EPA, which is designed to assess the competencies of the standard and GOC learning outcomes synoptically. The assessment will typically take place in the last two to three months of the apprenticeship. Learners, employers and training providers should be clear on the plan for completing the assessment, and the need to defer to the following session should a learner not be ready to undertake the EPA.

The EPA process details the steps, deadlines and timetables required to progress through ABDO's Level 6 dispensing qualifications. To be eligible to schedule the EPA, apprentices must have accomplished the following:

- completed the required programme of training via a registered education provider.
- passed the PQE.
- passed Year 1 and Year 2 theoretical assessments.
- applied for Year 3 theoretical assessments.
- passed the practice visit.
- The reflective statements and PQPs must be validated and signed off by the employer before submission and passed overall.
- During the assessment process, ABDO requires assurance from training providers and employers to determine readiness for the EPA, meaning the employer and training provider must also deem the learner provisionally competent in relation to knowledge, skills, behaviours and GOC learning outcomes and they have therefore achieved the gateway requirements.

### **PHASE 4: completion of the end point assessments (EPA)**

ABDO delivers the EPA approximately quarterly at our own designated assessment centre, with the main session running through the month of July. Learners will need to ensure that they are enrolled onto a suitable examination session.

All learners must undertake two EPAs, demonstrating the knowledge, skills and behaviours reflective of the GOC learning outcomes that have been developed throughout the training programme. Completing two EPAs ensures that all ABDO learners meet the standard set by employers and those of the GOC, ensuring they are fully competent in their role.

For both ABDO Level 6 dispensing optician pathways, following successful completion of the EPA, ABDO will notify the GOC. Specific to the Level 6 dispensing optician apprenticeship, ABDO will also notify the ESFA and request the apprenticeship certificate.

### **Progression**

After successfully completing the ABDO Level 6 qualification, the natural progression route for the learner allows them to initially apply for full ABDO and GOC membership. The successful learner will need to pay an annual membership subscription fee.

Upon completion of the Level 6 dispensing optician qualification, the learner will receive an email confirming the results and advice on upgrading to full membership. The learner will then be an ABDO member with the globally recognised FBDO designation, and on the GOC register with permission to use the protected title of dispensing optician (subject to GOC ongoing review of the programme).

The training provider should have encouraged learners to be inspired, motivated and challenged. It should also enable them to make informed decisions about further learning opportunities and career pathways. Having attained the ABDO Level 6 Diploma in Ophthalmic Dispensing, learners will then meet the entry requirements for further qualifications offered by ABDO, including contact lenses, low vision, paediatrics and spectacle lens design, should they wish to continue their optical pathway.



## Learner, training providers and employer support

### Learner support

Full tuition for the EPAs is provided by registered training providers who offer tailored off-the-job training. Those training providers working in conjunction with ABDO are currently:

- ABDO College
- Bradford College
- City and Islington College

### *Additional resources available*

Key updates about the EPAs, including technical updates, developments and specific learning guidance, can be found on the ABDO website. The main guidance available is:

- PQE revision guide – in preparation for the main EPAs
- portfolio guidance for learners and supervisors
- practice visit guide
- FQE revision guide
- supervisors' CPD-accredited online training course

For specific queries and extra support, contact ABDO Examinations and Registration.

### Support for employers

ABDO will provide support and guidance for employers in the form of:

- supervisors' guide
- supervisors' course
- practice visit guide

Furthermore, the ABDO Examinations team will be ready to answer EPA-related queries, offer advice and provide employer support where necessary.

The ABDO Examinations team can provide links to registered training providers if one has not already been selected, as well as offer guidance on the process to register apprentices for their EPA and meet the gateway requirements. ABDO will work with the relevant training providers to provide the support required to help progress apprentices through their assessments.

### Support for registered training providers

Registered training providers who are preparing learners for their EPA will work closely with the ABDO Examinations team in order to help support and quality assure the management and operational processes.

The team will provide cohort data on candidate performance, which enables training providers to assess the effectiveness of their course planning and delivery. This information may feed into future course development in order to improve outcomes.

# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## End point assessment (EPA) policies and procedures

### End point assessment (EPA) policies and procedures

The following section outlines the ABDO examination terms and conditions for EPA assessment bookings, reschedules, cancellations, refunds and resits/retakes.

#### *ABDO EPA exam scheduling guidelines*

Learners will generally have completed the gateway requirements towards the end of the final year of study. Once the gateway requirements have been met, learners will be able to apply for their FQEs, which encompass EPA1 and EPA2.

The gateway requirements are:

- successful submission of stage 1 10 PQP case records and reflective statement
- successful submission of stage 2 - further 20 PQP case records and second reflective statement
- successful completion of literature review
- successful submission of stage 3 final 20 PQP case records and final reflective statement, logged hours and dispensing tasks
- provide evidence of CPD
- successful completion of Year 1 PQE
- successful completion of practice visit
- successful completion of Year 1 and Year 2 theoretical assessments
- registration for Year 3 theory assessments

Applications for the ABDO FQE/EPA must be completed by the learner online using their member/examinations dashboard. An independent ABDO assessor will contact the learner directly to organise a mutually convenient time for EPA1 – the online professional discussion. ABDO Examinations will notify learners of their EPA2 allocated date and encourage the use of the ABDO guidance for the requirements of the day.

If there is an issue with the allocated EPA2 date, learners must contact ABDO Examinations immediately to request an alternative date. All requests will be considered; however, an alternative date cannot be guaranteed.

EPA examination sessions will be available in January, April, June/July and September. For the main summer session (June/July), EPA applications must be submitted between 1–31 March. When applying for the ABDO EPA, please refer to the ABDO examination terms and conditions before submitting your application.

#### *Resits and retakes*

Learners should be entered for the EPA only when both the training provider and employer consider the learner to be sufficiently prepared and expected to pass the assessment. ABDO apply a maximum of four attempts for any part of the EPA – more details can be found in the ABDO Four Attempt Policy on the ABDO website. If a learner fails one or more assessment component(s), it is recommended that assessment should be reattempted within 12 months of the date that the other assessment component was passed.

Specific to learners undertaking the ABDO dispensing optician apprenticeship, retakes and resits are not covered by the government funding (levy), so apprentice learners should discuss with their employer/provider how payment for additional fees associated with a resit or retake will be paid.

A **resit** occurs for both pathways when a learner does not require any further support or additional learning to pass and is simply resitting the assessment after failing an assessment attempt.

A **retake** occurs when learners are unsuccessful in one or both elements of the EPA for the third time and will therefore require further support and additional learning before applying for their fourth and final attempt. In this circumstance, learners should discuss their performance with their tutor and employer. From this discussion, an appropriate revision plan for the learner should be put in place and completed in full, with evidence provided to ABDO, before a final retake attempt is permitted.

Resits and retakes will be delivered during any of the four examination sessions (January, April, June/July and September).

#### *Reasonable adjustments*

ABDO welcomes entries from learners with disabilities, learning difficulties or special requirements. We can provide reasonable adjustments, such as extra examination time as appropriate to individual needs. Reasonable adjustments must not, however, affect the reliability or validity of assessment outcomes, nor must they give the learner an unfair advantage over other learners undertaking the same or similar assessments. Because the needs and circumstances of each learner are different, any request for a reasonable adjustment is considered on a case-by-case basis. Evidence of need is required from a physician or other qualified healthcare professional.

Learners can apply for reasonable adjustment, but this

must be done in advance of their examination for the adaptation(s) to be implemented within the EPA schedule. Learners should apply for reasonable adjustments when prompted at the point of registering for their assessments via their online portal. The process for consideration of reasonable adjustment can be found within the ABDO examinations standard operating procedures. Please also refer to the Higher Education Occupational Practitioners (HEOPS) website, which includes guidelines for optometry professionals. [https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521731214HEOPS\\_Optomety\\_Students\\_fitness\\_standards\\_2015\\_v5.pdf](https://heops.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/bsk-pdf-manager/2019/09/1521731214HEOPS_Optomety_Students_fitness_standards_2015_v5.pdf)

### **Special consideration**

ABDO has a process in place that allows learners to apply for special consideration if their exam performance was adversely affected by mitigating circumstances shortly before or on the day of the examination. Special consideration is a key part of ensuring that exams are fair and is therefore a post-exam adjustment to a mark or grade to reflect temporary illness or injury, recent bereavement of a close family member or other adverse circumstances that may have disadvantaged their ability to take an assessment or demonstrate their normal level of attainment.

However, special consideration can only go some way towards compensating a learner who has been disadvantaged due to unavoidable circumstances. It is not always possible to reflect what might have been achieved in more favourable circumstances. Only minor adjustments can be made to the overall grade awarded without undermining the standard of the examination. Similarly, when an examination requires a competence, criterion or standard to be met fully, it may not be possible to apply special consideration.

The application process for special consideration takes the features of the different components of the EPA into account. Please refer to the ABDO special consideration policy for further details about what rules apply to a specific assessment. Evidence for the circumstance of mitigation is required in support of the special consideration application- for example crime reference number for a car accident.

### **Challenges to end point assessment (EPA) results**

ABDO cannot adjust results after the assessment process is complete or the results are published. ABDO's results process is overseen by our

Examinations Board, which ensures due process is followed and all necessary quality assurance checks are undertaken during the marking process to confirm accurate and reliable results.

ABDO does not accept challenges to results based on academic judgement or once the results are approved by our governance committee. If a learner feels the EPA performance in either component was adversely affected by mitigating circumstances, please refer to the guidance issued in ABDO's special consideration policy.

*Please note an application for special consideration must be received no later than two weeks after the assessment has been sat and before the exam results are issued.*

### **Results enquiry service**

If a learner feels their assessment outcome does not reflect their performance, they can submit an enquiry of results via ABDO Examinations. The ABDO results enquiry service includes a check of all processes and procedures leading to the issue of the outcome. The service does not include a review of the original marking, and an administration fee will be applied.

### **Complaints and appeals policy**

If a learner is not satisfied with the response to their result enquiry or they have concerns about the way their case has been handled, they can submit an appeal. All appeals should be submitted in writing to the head of examinations and registration. The appeal will be considered by the ABDO external moderator and a report will be presented for review by the Examinations Board. It is the Board's role to ensure the policy and process is implemented fairly and consistently.

*Please note that the outcome of a complaint will not always result in a grade change if the panel is satisfied due process has been followed. Please refer to ABDO Examinations complaints policy for more details.*

### **Misconduct**

ABDO reserves the right to take appropriate action if a learner fails to comply with the ABDO EPA examination terms and conditions and the EPA general terms and conditions. We also reserve the right to invalidate or withhold results when, in our judgement, there is reasonable grounds to question the validity of an assessment result when testing irregularities occur.

# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## End point assessment (EPA) policies and procedures (*continued*)

Testing irregularities refer to events that affect the administration of an exam or the authenticity of any part of the EPA. Unfair practices include the following:

- plagiarism or falsification – copying directly from any other source without referencing the original source, or taking or using another person's thoughts, work or ideas as your own
- duplication of (copying) all or parts of work produced and submitted by someone else
- allowing someone else to produce all or part(s) of your work
- using custom writing services, which includes the use of any service that produces custom materials for a fee or other benefit
- using online technology, including the use of AI software such as ChatGPT, to produce work within the training programme or related to formative and summative assessments

If a case of misconduct is raised against a learner, whether due to a breach or potential breach of the EPA terms and conditions, engaging in unfair practices or otherwise, one or more of the following actions will apply:

- your case may be referred to the ABDO Examinations Board
- your case may be subject to the ABDO's exam standards investigation procedure
- As a registered student member of the optical governing body (the GOC), the Examinations Board may refer your case to the GOC Fitness to Practice Committee for further investigation and, if necessary, disciplinary action.
- your ABDO membership status may be withdrawn
- specific to the ABDO apprenticeship pathway, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE), an external quality assurance agency, and the apprentice's employer and tuition provider may also be notified of misconduct cases.

### **Withdrawals**

A learner who does not attend an examination may apply for a partial refund under certain circumstances. If a refund request is successful, the learner will be expected to re-apply for the next examination session by submitting a new application form and enclosing the appropriate examination fee.

All refund requests must be made in writing and attached to a 'Request to withdraw form' from the ABDO website. An administration fee will be deducted for each withdrawn unit.

### **Criteria**

#### ***Illness, injury or exceptional personal circumstances***

Specific to the FBDO diploma programme, an examination fee refund may be given provided that the withdrawal is notified to ABDO Examinations in writing as soon as possible and no later than two days before the examination. A refund may be given on compassionate grounds if a learner withdraws due to exceptional personal circumstances, such as bereavement or personal trauma. The withdrawal must be supported by a medical certificate or other supporting documentation.

Application for a discretionary refund should be made in writing as soon as possible and no later than five days after the examination, with full details substantiating the request for an exceptional refund.

Specific to the ABDO apprenticeship programme, the EPA fee is paid via your training institute. If you meet the requirements (below), the fee will be transferred to the next available sitting, but no refund will be made.

#### ***Reasons for a withdrawal for which no refund will be made***

If a learner fails to attend on the day of the assessment without following the correct withdrawal procedure, all fees will be retained and the booked date will count as one failed attempt.

Other reasons for a withdrawal for which no refund will be made are:

- learner not ready for examination
- learner withdrawn by training institute
- transport issue (learners sitting a morning practical examination are advised to travel the day before)
- learner on holiday on date of examination.

In the event that a learner needs to withdraw in an emergency on the day of their practical examination, candidates should email either of the following:

#### **Head of examinations and registration**

Mark Chandler [mchandler@abdo.org.uk](mailto:mchandler@abdo.org.uk)

#### **Head of professional qualifications and education**

Miranda Richardson [mrichardson@abdo.org.uk](mailto:mrichardson@abdo.org.uk)

## ABDO end point assessment (EPA)

### ABDO end point assessment (EPA)

By the end of their training, learners will have a list of substantial achievements recorded in their PQP portfolio of evidence and reflective statements that should pass the gateway requirements.

At the point of gateway, learners should be able to confidently:

- draw together their skills, knowledge and understanding from across the full breadth of study and practical experience to tackle real-life patient encounters, challenges or issues
- justify why they have chosen a particular course of action
- reflect on their performance – process, outcomes and lessons learned
- demonstrate how they can add value to their organisation
- evidence a range of significant and challenging tasks they can perform to a consistently high standard

#### **EPA1: professional discussion**

Once the application has been processed, an ABDO independent assessor will schedule an online professional discussion with the learner. The purpose of the professional discussion is for learners to show competence against the knowledge, skills and behaviours, reflective of the GOC OfR, that they have acquired through their practical work placement.

This is done with reference to the reflective statements that demonstrate the skills, behaviours and learning outcomes supported by the portfolio of evidence. Both components will be used as the basis for discussion and will help to validate the learner's claims of competence. The PQP portfolio and reflective statements provide an opportunity for the learner to demonstrate competency at the required Level 6.

#### **Format**

The professional discussion will be a two-way discussion between an ABDO independent assessor and the learner to assess in-depth understanding of their work and will last for a maximum of one hour. The professional discussion will draw upon supporting evidence within the PQP portfolio (submitted as a gateway requirement) and will be used to effectively determine the authenticity of that supporting evidence.

Based on a learner's patient experience and reflective statements, the professional discussion will be wide-ranging in scope and cover a large part of the role. ABDO provides a number of tools and templates that can be used as a guide. The professional discussion will be conducted online and will be recorded to aid moderation and for quality assurance purposes. The recordings will be deleted after moderation.

The professional discussion will involve the independent assessor and the learner actively listening and participating in a formal conversation, with the use of a small number of main questions and follow-up questions that may lead the direction of questioning, therefore allowing the learner the opportunity to make detailed and proactive contributions to confirm their competency across the knowledge, skills and behaviours and GOC OfR as mapped within the ABDO FQE revision guide.

The ABDO independent assessor will be looking to ensure that the learner can evidence through discussion:

- an in-depth understanding of each subcategory as listed within the PQP portfolio
- those skills, behaviours and outcomes that require probing questions to explore the reasons for the learner's ideas or actions
- tasks/challenges that cannot be directly observed in practice
- aspects of the occupation that are difficult to observe, are rare occurrences, or take place in restricted or confidential settings
- a discrete set of KSBs and learning outcomes that are better assessed using a two-way conversation

#### **Patient and organisation confidentiality**

Any potentially sensitive information (such as patients' personal details) or information specific to the employer/organisation should be removed or redacted from evidence submitted for this part of the assessment. This redaction is required of all personal, practice and GP details and should be a skill that learners develop with guidance from employers and training providers.

The rules of confidentiality form part of the 'behavioural' aspects required. However, it is important that all stakeholders involved in the learner's development are aware of the need for confidentiality and actively encourage it, drawing attention to any instances where it is not being upheld. EPA2: practical assessment



# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## EPA 2: practical assessment

### EPA 2: practical assessment

ABDO have designed a practical examination day, delivering authentic simulation of core tasks undertaken by a learner within a practice setting. The different tasks set within the practical examination assess the learner's ability to analyse and respond to a typical set of ophthalmic dispensing tasks through simulation that reflects activities undertaken in a typical role at the required Level 6. Simulated patient encounters provide the opportunity to evaluate the learner's competence in a broader context, covering the scope of their role.

The examination is synoptic, drawing upon all aspects of the learner's knowledge, skills and behaviours throughout the training programme. Learners are expected to demonstrate their familiarity with the context and interrelationships between the different knowledge areas required. This reflects the practical work required within an optical practice setting.

#### Core activities

ABDO has identified four core activities that allow learners to demonstrate their competence and prove that they can perform the role:

- A. demonstrate and appropriately record the assessment of refractive status in relation to a presbyopic patient
- B. measure and record details for a regular bridge handmade frame and dispense and fit the most appropriate frame to paediatric head supplied
- C. manage a case of progressive lens non-tolerance and analyse optical prescriptions to suggest the most appropriate optical solutions
- D. recognise and manage ocular pathological conditions, note the suitability of low vision appliances for given scenarios, and note a variety of suitable Special Optical Appliances for a given scenario

The four core sections are assessed during one practical assessment day, involving independent assessors observing the learner undertaking the set tasks or series of set tasks in a simulated environment. This type of assessment allows the learner to demonstrate procedural knowledge and skills of 'how to do something'. This will be complemented by questioning from the independent assessor during that section. By their nature, the core activities are synoptic, ensuring that learner's knowledge, skills and behaviours are tested holistically and objectively.

#### Examination format

The ABDO EPA2 practical examination day (Syllabus Unit 14 – FQE) is taken under timed, controlled conditions at a neutral central location, the ABDO National Resource Centre (NRC) in Birmingham. The four main sections are made up of several subtasks; learners have up to four hours in total to complete the examinations, and each section is typically one hour. Breaks between assessments are scheduled on the day.

#### Examination types

A range of task types are used within the FQE practical assessment day:

- simulated patient interactions
- skills tasks
- decision making
- discussion
- written response to scenarios

The assessment criteria are covered by the training provider, and guidance is available for each section in the ABDO FQE revision guide. Case studies used for the patient scenarios will only be available during the assessment sections; they are not available for preview and revision prior to the examination. Learners should therefore respond accordingly on the day of the assessment.

#### Taking the examination

Both EPA1 and EPA2 are offered four times a year, with results released within six weeks of the end of the examination session. Result records will be available on learners' member/examinations dashboard. The examination timetable is released four weeks in advance. ABDO works to deliver all practical assessments in a secure environment with processes and procedures quality assured by both the GOC and Ofqual.

#### Support

There are several ways ABDO supports learners through the gateway requirements and their FQE/EPA examination. ABDO provides a number of study resources to support learners:

- PQE revision guide  
*in preparation for the main EPAs*
- portfolio guide
- practice visit guide
- FQE revision guide

## EPA 2: practical assessment (*continued*)

Reasonable adjustments are available for those who meet the eligibility criteria. ABDO provides reasonable adjustments for elements both of EPA1 and EPA2. The learner will not be charged for the costs of these reasonable adjustments but must qualify to apply. All applications for reasonable adjustments must be made at the point of applying for assessments. When the form is completed and uploaded, any supporting information, ie medical documentation from a qualified health professional, must be included.

Special consideration is available to learners undertaking the ABDO EPA1 and EPA2 who believe there were mitigating circumstances beyond their control shortly before or on the day of the examination.

Learners are permitted to bring their own rulers and tools to EPA2 at the NRC to help with familiarity in completing the tasks.

### ***Marking, results and feedback***

ABDO FQE/EPA examinations are noted as a pass or fail. All assessment decisions are subject to rigorous internal quality assurance processes (standardisation and verification activities) before the results are issued. If a section of the EPA has been failed, learners will also receive sectional feedback on the exam element.

Each EPA section is based on knowledge, skills and behaviours and GOC OfR that are expected of a Level 6 qualified dispensing optician. Both EPA1 and EPA2 offer a consistent way to describe how well a learner has performed or can be used to identify where performance may have fallen short of the national standard.

Examination responses are assessed at a standard that can be reasonably expected of a learner in the last 12 months of programme learning and practice placement experience. Assessment decisions are based on the quality of examination performance – how well the learner has addressed task requirements and applied their knowledge to the scenario presented in each section.

The ABDO independent assessors use a detailed marking scheme to inform their decision and to ensure they are applying their professional judgement consistently. Learners' achievements will be co-marked on the day to ensure fairness and consistency for every learner. Pre- and post-exam support resources will be available. Results will be available within six weeks of the examination date.



# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## ABDO quality assurance policies and procedures

### ABDO quality assurance policies and procedures

#### *Independent assessors*

ABDO independent assessors must be qualified in the noted professions for a minimum of two years, working in practice or ophthalmic dispensing academia for a minimum of two days per week, and retain full membership of ABDO and the GOC for the duration of all attended examination periods. All independent assessors commit to the following:

- attend assessor training annually
  - *Annual assessment training will be organised by the head of professional qualifications and education*
  - *Training is to ensure independent assessors implement necessary changes and are aware of all procedures and examination processes to ensure consistency and standardisation of marking*
- adhere to guidance provided on all core activities, split into the relevant practical sections when conducting any ABDO assessment (both for PQE and FQE) with the appropriate marking schemes applied
- co-mark learners' answer forms ensuring all fails are co-signed – maintaining consistency and accuracy in the final achieved mark
- receiving peer-review observations during each examination session

#### *Supervising examiner*

Each FQE/EPA2 practical examination day will be overseen by both an administrator and an allocated supervising examiner, who will be responsible for:

- reviewing borderline results with associated independent assessors
- undertaking random peer observations throughout the day, evaluating individual assessors' performance and consistency in marking, which will be recorded on the 'Supervising examiners' report form'
- confirming the observation plan of independent assessors for that day with the administrator prior to the examination commencing
- the timely return of supervising examiner reports to the head of professional qualifications and education clarity of the supervising examiner

reports, as these will be presented to the ABDO Examinations Board by the head of professional qualifications and education for review, and if required, agreed actions implemented

#### *Moderation*

ABDO appoint independent external moderators who can visit at any point during an examination session, observe each core section of EPA2, and ensure that the assessments run as specified and all quality assurance measures are active and in place. The external moderator will also select, at random, recordings of EPA1 to ensure learners are assessed appropriately (recordings will be deleted after moderation and final Examinations Board review).

The external moderator(s) will prepare a report of their conclusions, alongside results over time, and submit the report to the head of professional qualifications and education for review at the following examination board.

#### *Ratification*

The ABDO Examinations Board meets after every examination session and reviews:

- learner results, presented per learner, per section and per training institute
- the external moderators report
- incident reports from the head of professional qualifications and education
- any requests for special consideration from the head of examinations and registration

Once all reports have been considered, the results are ratified and released.

#### *Appointment of independent assessors*

Applications must be made to the deputy head of professional qualifications and education with a full CV and a statement of reasons why the applicant wishes to undertake the role. Key foci for interviews are academic knowledge and practical expertise, motivation, principles of examination, communications skills and problem solving.

Independent assessors are required to attend a formal online interview and, if successful, would go on to complete a short correspondence course... (based on the practical examinations) and online training before attending the examinations to complete their probationary training under full supervision (approximately two years of training).

### **Independent assessor's standardisation training**

On successful completion of the correspondence course, probationary assessors attending the practical assessment day will be:

- invited to observe each section at the next round of examinations; on attendance the 'Dispensing Examiners Guide' both for PQEs and FQE are provided
- invited to assist and co-mark in each section under supervision from an experienced assessor both the PQE and FQE
- invited to examine each section both of the PQE and FQE and monitored under supervision from an experienced assessor

A report on the probationary examiner is prepared by the experienced assessor for every section and, if satisfactory overall, the head of professional qualifications and education reviews and confirms the addition of the applicant to the approved list of examiners.

Continuous training and monitoring of examiners is achieved through daily supervising examiner performance reports, which also provide feedback to the examiner on the day.

### **Consistency over time**

#### **Setting**

When setting practical assessments, the head of professional qualifications and education, together with the ABDO Exams Consultation Committee (AECC), must take note of the examination format, results over time, marking schemes, student surveys and other material to ensure consistency over time.

The AECC must ensure the practical assessments are reflective of daily practice and ensure all KSBs and GOC OfR are covered within the assessment formats. Marking schemes are designed to ensure all learners are assessed consistently and fairly and that if a KSB or learning outcome is not achieved, the section cannot result in a pass.

Each practical section will be co-marked, ensuring fairness to learners and accuracy in the awarded marks. Borderline results are reviewed and moderated on the day with the relevant ABDO independent assessors and daily supervisor.

Practical results are reviewed alongside results over time, by the ABDO Examinations Board, and individual data are provided to the institutes.

### **Standardisation – 4 years**

The ABDO Examinations Board undertakes a detailed comparative study to consider the standardisation and consistency of all examinations to include:

- the impact of GOC OfR and the apprenticeship knowledge, skills and behaviours
- the impact of changes to the law
- consistency in theory and practical examinations
- monitoring and maintenance of the practical assessment materials

### **Complaints**

ABDO does not accept challenges to results based on academic judgement or once the results are approved by our governance committee. However, if a learner is not satisfied with the response to their result enquiry or they have concerns about the way their examinations have been handled, they can submit a complaint.

All complaints should be submitted in writing to the ABDO head of examinations and registration. ABDO will escalate the complaint to the AECC, who will provide a report for review by the Examinations Board. It is the Board's role to ensure all policies and processes have been implemented fairly and consistently.

Please note that the outcome of a complaint will not always result in a grade change if the panel is satisfied due process has been followed.

- The head of examinations and registration will acknowledge receipt of a complaint immediately; however, if the substance of the complaint is not clear, further clarification will be sought from the complainant.
- The head of examinations and registration will investigate the complaint and draft a report for the AECC to review.
- All complaints will be logged and presented to ABDO's Examinations Board for review of the awards process.
- If the complaint is substantiated, and in the opinion of the head of examinations and registration calls into question the integrity of the recent examinations, the matter will be referred immediately to the head of professional qualifications and education, the external moderator and the chair of the appropriate examination board for urgent consideration and action.
- All complaints will be answered within six weeks.

# Level 6 qualifications in ophthalmic dispensing

## ABDO quality assurance policies and procedures (*continued*)

### ***Post-examination survey***

To ensure that the quality, availability and value of ABDO's qualification process is continually improved, ABDO releases a short examination survey after each examination session. The survey is sent to all learners who have undertaken their assessments in that session, inclusive of resits and retakes, and the results of each survey will be included in an annual review of the examination process.

Following the finalisation of an examination session, the ABDO learner survey will be sent out and request learners' feedback on the following:

- academic/institute support
- the examination registration procedures
- customer service aspects of the examination process
- the delivery of the examination's theory and practical, as appropriate
- the conduct of the ABDO independent assessors
- how requests for special accommodation/special consideration were managed
- how complaints and appeals were managed
- any other comments

The head of examinations and registration will review the results of the survey and, in consultation with the head of professional qualifications and education, will consider and implement, if necessary, recommendations for improvements.

The analysis will be submitted to ABDO's Examinations Board for their annual review and self-assessment process. The recommendations identified will be reviewed and confirmed as appropriate.





abdo

## abdo | Examinations

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