2011 Year in Review

A Study of Certification Examination Results

Commission on Paraoptometric Certification
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Purpose and Summary

With the passage of the new Health Care Reform Bill, the need for trained and experienced paraoptometrics will likely increase. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the healthcare industry will be providing the greatest number of jobs over the next ten years. Medicine is evolving into more of a team approach where doctors and assistants work together to provide all types of care. Is your practice ready to handle the influx of new patients? There is no better time than now to get certified and stay certified.

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification is pleased to report that we have completed another successful year of providing certifications to paraoptometrics. The examinations are developed in cooperation with Professional Testing Corporation (PTC) who provides professional organizations of all sizes with quality psychometric services. The certification programs are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The NCCA helps to ensure the health, welfare, and safety of the public through the accreditation of a variety of certification programs/organizations that assess professional competency. In order to receive this accreditation, the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification completed an application for each certification demonstrating compliance with the NCCA’s Standards for the Accreditation of Certification Programs, which were the first standards for professional certification programs developed by the industry. NCCA uses a peer review process to: establish accreditation standards; evaluate compliance with the standards; recognize organizations/programs which demonstrate compliance; and serve as a resource on quality certification. The NCCA requires that each accredited organization/program complete an annual report form to enable the NCCA to monitor continuing compliance with NCCA Standards.

The purpose of this Year-in-Review report is two-fold. First, it assures that the examinations are compliant with NCCA standards and assists the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification in identifying trends, targeting audiences, and ensuring that the examinations are reliable. Second, these metrics are valuable to stakeholders as it identifies potential training opportunities that are lacking, personal development needs that are not being met, and identifies target demographic audiences for marketing purposes. The information in this report is derived from candidate responses on the examination applications and the stringent review of score reports. All documentation regarding these reports is kept on file for 5 years. Only through extensive task analysis studies can CPC determine the body of knowledge. Task analyses assess how a task is accomplished, including a detailed description of both manual and mental activities, task and element durations, task frequency, task allocation, task complexity, necessary equipment and precautions, and any other unique factors involved in or required for one or more people to perform a given task. The CPC conducts these analyses every three years. In between these studies, test reviews and item performance reviews are conducted annually. Test specifications are updated frequently according to the environmental scan of the optometric practice.
Executive Summary

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification program continues to offer the only certification available for paraoptometrics and seeks to make this experience valuable and desirable for all interested participants. The CPC Certified population now represents more than 6,000 participants throughout the United States, Canada, and the Armed Forces. Ongoing efforts are in place to continue to improve the quality and integrity of the program. The success of these efforts has been documented through studies and testimonials that confirm the positive perception of the program within the optometric community.

Background

The Commission on Paraoptometric Certification, formerly known as the National Council on Paraoptometric Certification, was established in 2000 by the American Optometric Association. This program replaced the National Paraoptometric Registry which was established by the American Optometric Association in 1978.

Certification focuses specifically on the individual and is an indication of current proficiency in a specialized field. Certification is highly valued and provides formal acknowledgement of knowledge and skills in a particular area of practice. A goal of the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification is to develop and maintain a consistent and ongoing process for paraoptometric certification that grants certification to qualified candidates. The marketing goal is to grow the number of certifications by successfully communicating the value of the program. The plan is to identify communication tactics to reach different audiences and promote the virtues of certification.

The Paraoptometric Certification Program consists of three levels of certification. Each level consists of a recommended self-study program, optional review course and written examination. Paraoptometric Certification provides a formal declaration of education and skill achievement in the profession of optometric assisting by:

• Recognizing formally those individuals who meet all requirements of the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification of the American Optometric Association
• Encouraging continued professional growth of the paraoptometric
• Establishing and measuring the level of knowledge required for certification of paraoptometrics
• Promoting a standard of requisite knowledge required for certification; thereby assisting the employer, public, and members of the health professions in the assessment of paraoptometrics.
In addition to initial recognition, the CPC provides a recertification mechanism to ensure its certificants remain current in their optometric assisting skills and knowledge by way of continuing educational activities. The need for lifelong education is validated and enhanced by information that attributes long-term value to participants in this program. Continuing education and professional development is a critical component of CPC recertification. In emphasizing this, the CPC has a newly established committee that reviews applications from organizations and sponsors offering continuing education opportunities for paraoptometrists. This process is comprised of experienced and knowledgeable volunteers that review courses to ensure the programs are quality and that the level of difficulty is appropriate for a certified paraoptometrist. Our research indicates the economic, social and personal value of investing in training for personnel is a positive and constructive manner to avoid costly staff turnover. To meet this need the CPC offers an experience that serves as a value and benefit to optometry. These important benefits continue to validate the purpose of the CPC examinations.

Certification is a voluntary process instituted by a nongovernmental agency in which individuals are recognized for advanced knowledge, competence and skill. Certification requires assessment, testing, and evaluation of one’s education and/or experience. A certification organization conducts a program to evaluate the competence of optometric assistants. The competent optometric assistant performs work accurately and interacts with other professionals and patients effectively. Competence must be demonstrated and maintained.

Program Overview

The Certified Paraoptometric Examinations are prepared and administered by the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification (CPC) with the assistance of the Professional Testing Corporation. The purpose of the examinations is to ensure a level of knowledge to perform the functions of a Certified Paraoptometric at each appropriate level. Those who have successfully completed the appropriate examination will be certified with the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification as a Certified Paraoptometric (CPO), Certified Paraoptometric Assistant (CPOA), Certified Paraoptometric Coder (CPOC), or Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT).

The passing score for the all examinations is set at the time each new form is reviewed for currency, appropriateness, and accuracy by an appointed committee responsible for examination development. During the process, this committee meets with a psychometrician who serves as a consultant to the committee to guide deliberations and to help ensure psychometric soundness of the decisions reached.

The primary consideration in this process is to represent the basic body of knowledge required for practice. A second consideration is to maintain the equivalent difficulty level of successive examinations. Based on Standard 4.21 of the AERA, APA, and NCME Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, the passing scores are established so that the test review committee can bring their knowledge and experience to bear in a reasonable way.
Year-In-Review

All examinations (with the exception of the CPOT Practical and CPOC) were offered during four two-week testing periods as a computer-based examination and one paper and pencil examination in conjunction with AOA’s Optometry’s Meeting®. The highlights are as follows:

**Overall Pass/Fail**

In 2011, there were 1,162 candidates for the CPO, CPOA, CPOC, or CPOT examination. 88 percent of candidates passed an examination on the first or second attempt. 12 percent were not successful.

**Practice Setting**

Overall, 85% of examination candidates are employed by a private practice. Of the 987 candidates in this category, 90% or 890 passed the CPO, CPOA, CPOC, or CPOT examination on the first or second attempt.
3% of candidates are employed in a branch of the military while just over 4% are students or graduates of a CPC or ACOE approved assistant or technician program.

**Education Level**

The majority of candidates (61%) hold a minimum of a high school diploma or its’ equivalent. 31 percent of candidates hold an Associate or Bachelors degree, or have been studying toward a Post Graduate degree, and 6% of candidates are enrolled or are graduates of a CPC or ACOE approved assistant or technician program.
**Candidate Age, Gender, and Race**

The majority of examination candidates are white, female, and between 30 and 39 years of age. 24 percent of the candidates are between 25 and 29 years of age while 27% are under the age of 25. Previous years indicate that the majority of candidates were less than 25 years of age.

88 percent of examination candidates are female which is consistent with previous years.


Candidate Level of Experience

Candidate experience level is relative to the particular examination criteria. For example, a criterion for the CPO examination indicates that candidates must have a minimum of six months experience in the eye care field. The CPOA examination criterion states there are three ways in which one can meet the eligibility requirements, and there are two ways in which one can meet the eligibility requirements to sit for the CPOT examination. And, the CPOC examination requires that candidates have a minimum of two years of experience in coding and billing. The majority (35%) of the combined candidates (excluding CPOC) have more than 3 years of experience.

All candidates for the CPO examination have a minimum of six months experience; however 23% have more than 3 years of experience. Eligibility is verified, particularly for those who did not indicate a response to the number of years experience held to qualify for the CPO examination.

![2011 Candidate Level of Experience by Examination Level](chart.png)

### Table 1: 2011 Candidate Level of Experience by Examination Level (excludes CPOC)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Level</th>
<th>CPO</th>
<th>CPOA</th>
<th>CPOT</th>
<th>No Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3+ years</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>66</td>
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<tr>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Candidate State**

For the 5th consecutive year, North Carolina has produced the greatest number of candidates.
Highlights Specific to the Certified Paraoptometric (CPO)

The CPO examination is comprised of 100 multiple choice questions and there are two forms of this examination. A minimum score of 75% is required to pass. A total of 757 candidates sat for the CPO examination in 2011; 91.5 percent passed the examination on the first or second attempt. The annual high and low scores were as follows:

100% -High Score - 52% -Low Score

Test Date Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Total Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Avg % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>218</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>62%</td>
<td>87%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>98%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td>52%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There were 52 individuals who were repeat candidates that attempted the examination a minimum of one time prior. Of the 52 repeat candidates, 42 passed on the second attempt while 10 were unsuccessful once more.

Subject Matter

The examination is divided into four main domains as follows:

I. Basic Science (29%)
II. Clinical Principles and Procedures (37%)
III. Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing (22%)
IV. Professional Issues (12%)

Within these four content areas is expanded content. Each item (question) on the examination is coded and linked to a particular content area of the study outline (see appropriate candidate handbook for full outline). For example, an item pertaining to soft contact lens would be coded as II. C. 1. When referring to the study outline, that item is appropriately located in the Clinical Principles and Procedures – Contact Lenses – Soft area of the outline.
Based on an overall analysis of content area, 9.5% (64) of the candidates in 2011 have failed the examination. Those candidates who failed scored lowest in the clinical principles and procedures (68%) subject matter areas.

**Comparison of 2009, 2010, and 2011 CPO Candidates Area Scores**

Area scores are increasing - When comparing content area scores over the past three years, the scores have slightly increased in 2011 according to the table.

Increased numbers of candidates hold a higher education degree - The number of CPO candidates who hold an Associate or Bachelors degree, or have been pursuing a Post-Graduate Degree has increased.

27% - 2009
29% - 2010
32% - 2011
Highlights Specific to the Certified Paraoptometric Assistant (CPOA)

The CPOA examination includes 225 multiple choice questions and a minimum score of 67.5 percent is required to pass. A total of 229 candidates sat for the CPOA examination in 2011; 81 percent passed the examination on the first or second attempt. The annual high and low scores were as follows:

92% -High Score 51% -Low Score

Test Date Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Total Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Avg % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jun</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>92%</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject Matter

The examination is divided into six main content areas as follows:

I. Office Operations (13%)
II. Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing (20%)
III. Testing and Procedures (20%)
IV. Special Procedures (17%)
V. Refractive Status of the Eye and Binocularity (13%)
VI. Basic Ocular Anatomy and Physiology (17%)

Within these six content areas are expanded content. Each item (question) on the examination is coded and linked to a particular content area of the study outline (see appropriate candidate handbook for full outline). For example, an item pertaining to HIPAA Regulations would be coded as I. B. 2. When referring to the study outline, that item is appropriately located in the Office Operations-Records Management-Confidential / Safeguards area of the outline.
Based on an overall analysis of content area, 9.5% (64) of the candidates in 2011 have failed the examination. Those candidates who failed scored lowest in the clinical principles and procedures (68%) subject matter areas.

![2011 Certified Paraoptometric Assistant (CPOA) Candidate Area Scores by Pass/Fail Percentage](image)

**Comparison of 2009, 2010, and 2011 CPOA Candidates Area Scores**

Area scores have moderately increased. With the exception of Office Operations, when comparing content area scores over the past three years, area scores have increased slightly in 2011.

![2009-2011 CPOA Candidate Area Scores](image)
Highlights Specific to the Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT)

The CPOT examination includes 250 multiple choice questions and a minimum score of 66.8 percent is required to pass. In order to be considered a Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT), candidates must pass both the CPOT written and practical examinations except for those candidates that are currently enrolled as a student (in final semester) or are a graduate of an ACOE approved optometric technician program. These individuals are exempt from taking the CPOT Practical Examination and upon passing the CPOT written examination, are fully certified as a Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT). A total of 72 candidates sat for the CPOT written examination in 2011; 89 percent passed the examination on the first or second attempt. The annual high and low scores were as follows:

227 (91%) - High Score 127 (51%) - Low Score

Test Date Results (CPOT Written Only)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Total Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Avg % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass Fail</td>
<td>Pass Fail</td>
<td>Pass Fail</td>
<td>Pass Fail</td>
<td>Pass Fail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb</td>
<td>11 3 86% 64% 74%</td>
<td>1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>25 3 90% 66% 77%</td>
<td>3 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug</td>
<td>10 0 87% 67% 77%</td>
<td>1 0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov</td>
<td>18 2 88% 62% 75%</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject Matter

The examination is divided into six main content areas as follows:

I. Pre-Testing Procedures (20%)  
II. Clinical Procedures (28%)  
III. Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing (20%)  
IV. Refractive Status of the Eye and Binocularity (12%)  
V. Anatomy and Physiology (15%)  
VI. Practice Management (5%)  

Within these six content areas are expanded content. Each item (question) on the examination is coded and linked to a particular content area of the study outline (see appropriate candidate handbook for full outline). For example, an item pertaining to optical crosses would be coded as III. B. 3. When referring to the study outline, that item is appropriately located in the Ophthalmic Optics and Dispensing – Prescriptions – Optical Crosses area of the outline.
In 2011, just 8 (11%) of CPOT candidates failed the examination. Of those candidates who failed, percentage scores were well below passing level in the ophthalmic optics and dispensing subject matter areas.


Increased numbers of candidates are passing the examination on the first attempt.

- **58%** - 2008
- **72%** - 2009
- **78%** - 2010
- **89%** - 2011
Highlights Specific to the Certified Paraoptometric Technician Practical Examination (CPOT)

The practical examination includes three separate stations for the examination process in which 30 minutes is allotted for each. There are over 170 items that the examiner looks for from the candidate. Depending upon the nature and importance of the task, items are worth between 1-5 points each and candidates must score a minimum of 70 points to successfully pass. At station one, candidates must take a thorough case history and perform various testing procedures. At station two, candidates must be able to handle application and removal of contacts from a patient’s eyes. Additionally, eye drop instillation and blood pressure taking skills are required. Station three requires candidates to take an accurate PD measurement and neutralize two pairs of spectacles.

A total of 35 candidates were administered the CPOT practical examination in 2011; 91 percent passed the examination on the first or second attempt.

### 2011 Overall Performance

**Station 1**—Case History/Pre-Testing

1 point per task/question

100 tasks/questions

Total possible score = 100 points

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 Overall Performance</th>
<th>Station 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Score</td>
<td>88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Score</td>
<td>99%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Station 2**—Contact Lenses/Drop Instillation/Blood Pressure Procedures

- There are 4 tasks/questions that are worth 5 points each. Total possible score = 20 points
- There are 40 tasks/questions that are worth 2 points each. Total possible score = 80 points

**Station 3**—Neutralization/Ophthalmic Dispensing

- There are 30 tasks/questions that are worth 3 points each. Total possible score = 90 points
- The remaining tasks/questions are worth 2 points each. Total possible score = 10 points

**Total possible score for station = 100 points**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 Overall Performance</th>
<th>Station 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Score</td>
<td>89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High Score</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

94% of CPOT practical examination candidates who took the examination in 2011 are employed at a private practice. Eligibility requirements mirror those for the CPOT written examination. Candidates must successfully pass both the written and practical examination to be considered a Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT). However, candidates that are currently enrolled as a student (in final semester) or are graduates of an ACOE approved optometric technician program are exempt from taking the CPOT Practical Examination and upon passing the CPOT written examination, are fully certified as a Certified Paraoptometric Technician (CPOT).
Highlights Specific to the Certified Paraoptometric Coder (CPOC)

The CPOC examination includes 150 multiple choice questions and a minimum score of 70 percent is required to pass. A total of 69 candidates sat for the CPOC examination in 2011; 77 percent passed the examination on the first or second attempt. The annual high and low scores were as follows:

91% -High Score 48% -Low Score

Test Date Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Total Candidates</th>
<th>High Score</th>
<th>Low Score</th>
<th>Avg % Correct</th>
<th>Repeat Candidates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td>Pass</td>
<td>Fail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>91%</td>
<td>71%</td>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>88%</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>76%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Subject Matter

The examination is divided into six main content areas as follows:

I. Anatomy and Physiology (8%)
II. Medical Terminology (8%)
III. Review of Current Procedural Terminology® (22%)
IV. Diagnosis Codes (24%)
V. Medical Records (paper/electronic) (14%)
VI. Claim Filing (12%)
VII. Compliance (12%)

Within these six content areas are expanded content. Each item (question) on the examination is coded and linked to a particular content area of the study outline (see appropriate candidate handbook for full outline). For example, an item pertaining to Evaluation and Management (E/M) Services Guidelines would be coded as III. B.. When referring to the study outline, that item is appropriately located in the Review of Current Procedural Terminology® area of the outline.
In 2011, (23%) of CPOC candidates failed the examination. Of those candidates who failed, percentage scores were well below passing level in the claim filing and anatomy and physiology subject matter areas.

**Practice Setting**

Overall, 93% of examination candidates are employed by a private practice.

The CPOC examination was first launched in May 2011. Year to year comparisons will be available in 2012.
Conclusion

From the beginning, the Commission on Paraoptometric Certification has endorsed the belief that all optometric practices can benefit from having their staff certified. Employing certified paraoptometrics who have been trained in different aspects of the practice effectively avails the optometrist to concentrate on patient care and less on paperwork and problems. To many paraoptometrics who have attained certification and to many of their employers, the value of certification has already become evident professionally and personally. A highly trained and certified staff is oftentimes better equipped to assist the employer in meeting the increasing demands of the practice. Voluntary certification and maintenance of that certification through continuing education is a step toward more professional development and personal achievement. With the support of their employing ODs, paraoptometrics can experience personal and professional growth and pride through attainment of certification and the knowledge that they have achieved professional recognition in their career. Paraoptometrics are a valuable part of the optometric team. Each should be encouraged to reach for the highest level of certification and to maintain competency through lifelong learning.

Younger and less experienced candidates are sitting for the examinations and some area scores are decreasing. It might be time to review your practice training needs and plan accordingly. The AOA Paraoptometric Section is a great resource and offers several opportunities for both training and continuing education. The AOA Clinical Practice and Advancement Group offer several practice resource tools on the AOA Web site that include paraoptometric staff. And, the AOA Paraoptometric Group is contributing useful information for optometric team building in each issue of the AOA News.

Additionally, to meet the needs of optometric office managers, a new Optometric Administrative Assessment-Based Certificate Program and HIPAA Compliance and Security Certificate Programs are being created and will become available in the near future.

Another focus of the CPC is to provide assistance to those paraoptometrics who are not successful in passing one of the examinations. All candidates receive a post-examination report detailing the individual overall score and area score percentages. The CPC will be directing attention to these candidates and will offer additional information as to how to interpret the area scores and make recommendations for continued study and progress.

Let us know how we are doing and how we can better assist you........