

Regulatory examinations candidate handbook– Objective structured clinical examination

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Introduction

The Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (the Board) Regulatory examinations candidate handbook – Objective structured clinical examination (the handbook) provides information about the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) that is part of the assessment of overseas-qualified Chinese herbal medicine practitioners and acupuncturists who apply to for registration to practise in Australia.

The Board has statutory responsibility under the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law), for deciding the outcome of

applications for registration from Chinese medicine practitioners in Australia in the divisions of acupuncturists, Chinese herbal medicine practitioners, and Chinese herbal dispensers.

As part of assessing registration applications from overseas-qualified practitioners, each applicant's qualifications are assessed against the Board-approved requirements. More information about assessment of registration applications and the Board's approved requirements is available on the [overseas qualified Chinese medicine practitioners page](#) on the Board's website.

Most overseas-qualified practitioners who apply for registration in Australia and who are assessed as holding a qualification that is relevant but not substantially equivalent or based on similar competencies to a qualification approved by the accreditation council and Board (and who meet the mandatory registration standards) need to complete the Board's regulatory examinations to qualify for general registration.

The Board uses the regulatory examinations to assess whether each candidate has the knowledge, clinical skills and professional attributes (as stated in the [Professional capabilities for Chinese medicine practitioners](#)) needed to safely and competently practise as an acupuncturist and/or Chinese herbal medicine practitioner in Australia. The Board may also require an individual to undertake an examination or assessment under the National Law when recency of practice or performance matters raise concerns about their competence to practise.

The regulatory examinations comprise a written examination (computer-based) consisting of scenario-based multiple-choice questions (MCQs), and an objective structured clinical examination (OSCE). Candidates must successfully pass the MCQ examination to be eligible to do the OSCE.

The MCQ examination is designed to assess candidates' ability to interpret information and make safe and effective clinical decisions. The OSCE is a practical and real-world approach and is designed to assess competence and clinical skill performance.

Following successful completion of the multiple-choice question (MCQ) examination, candidates will be eligible to register for the objective structured clinical examination (OSCE).

This handbook has been prepared to help eligible candidates who are required to complete the OSCE. The OSCE is designed to assess competence and clinical skill performance at the entry to practice level.

Please note: The regulatory examinations described in this handbook are for two divisions of Chinese medicine practitioner – acupuncturists and Chinese herbal medicine practitioners. The Board does not currently hold regulatory examinations for Chinese herbal medicine dispensers.

Ahpra

The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) is the national organisation responsible for implementing the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme).

Ahpra works with the 15 National Boards to help protect the public by regulating Australia's registered health practitioners. Together, Ahpra and the National Boards' primary role is to protect the public and set standards and policies that all registered health practitioners must meet.

Chinese Medicine Board of Australia

The Chinese Medicine Board of Australia (the Board) is one of the 15 National Boards that work in partnership with Ahpra to help protect the public by regulating Australia's registered acupuncturist and Chinese herbal medicine practitioners. The aim of the National Scheme is to protect the public by ensuring that only suitably trained and qualified practitioners who practise safely and ethically are registered.

The Board's regulatory functions include:

- developing standards, codes and guidelines for the Chinese medicine profession
- approving accreditation standards and accredited courses of study
- registering Chinese medicine practitioners and students
- handling notifications, complaints, investigations and disciplinary hearings, and
- overseeing assessment of overseas-qualified Chinese medicine practitioners who apply for registration as an acupuncturist or Chinese herbal medicine practitioner in Australia and determining their suitability for registration.

Overview of regulatory examinations

The objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) is a station-based examination. It is designed to assess competence and clinical skill performance for overseas-qualified Chinese herbal medicine practitioners and acupuncturists who apply for registration to practise in Australia.

The table below shows the number of stations a candidate is required to complete at the OSCE¹. Each OSCE station includes different tasks relating to a clinical scenario or clinical skill demonstration. All stations are completed on the same day.

Division	Number of stations
Acupuncture practice	7
Chinese herbal medicine practice	7
Acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine practice	9

Aspects of Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture practice assessed through the OSCE stations

The OSCE stations are designed to assess aspects of Chinese herbal medicine and acupuncture in Australia and may include but are not limited to:

- Diagnostic and differential diagnosis skills
- Safe needling techniques
- Appropriate prescribing of Chinese herbal medicines
- Herb and drug interactions
- Cultural safety in clinical practice
- Consent, referral and communication skills
- Interprofessional practice and understanding of simultaneous healthcare in the clinical setting in Australia
- Understanding of common western medical diagnosis and implications for Chinese medicine acupuncture and/or herbal medicine treatment.

Communication skills

As communication is central to Chinese medicine practice in Australia, candidates' communication skills are also assessed during the OSCE. This includes:

- active listening, use of appropriate language and detail, use of appropriate verbal and non-verbal cues
- clearly explaining diagnosis, examination findings and/or treatment plan to the patient
- involving the patient in decision-making
- clearly explaining the benefits and risks involved in the treatment and seeking an informed consent
- providing clear instructions and answering questions, and
- demonstrating compassion and care during communication.

Some OSCE stations include assessment of a candidate's interaction and approach with the patient including the candidate's ability to provide clear explanations to the patient in an appropriate manner and confirming that the patient has understood the explanation.

Some OSCE stations assess a candidate's ability to communicate and collaborate with other health practitioners including written and verbal communication skills. Specially trained actors perform the roles of patients and health practitioners to ensure the OSCE stations are standardised.

Clinical examiners

The candidate's performance in the OSCE is observed and assessed by trained examiners, using evidence-based assessment criteria matched specifically to the OSCE stations.

Assessment criteria have been mapped to the Professional capabilities for Chinese medicine practitioners.

At times there may also be an observer present in the clinical examination. This observer will be an audit examiner, present for quality control and benchmarking as part of the evaluation process. They will not be directly assessing any candidate's performance. The observer will be as unobtrusive as possible during the station and the examiners will ensure observers do not disturb any candidate.

1. Note that if a candidate has already qualified for registration in either acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine, the Board may exempt the candidate from having to complete all stations. Please refer to the [Board's Regulatory exam policy](#) for further information.

Examination venue, fee, and registration

Examination venue

Candidates are advised to check the Board website for the latest information about the OSCE venue and schedule.

Examination dates and venue information: [CMBA regulatory examination](#)

Examination fee

Candidates who Ahpra has assessed as eligible to sit the OSCE, must register and pay the OSCE fee online before the application closing date.

Fee and payment information: [CMBA regulatory examination](#)

Examination registration

Candidates are responsible for registering to sit the OSCE and attending the OSCE venue on the correct day and time. Candidates must check the Board website for the information about the OSCE registration process.

Contact details

Candidates must advise Ahpra of any change in contact details, immediately by writing to cmbaregulatoryexam@ahpra.gov.au.

Rescheduling the examination

Candidates who wish to reschedule their OSCE session must:

- contact Ahpra on cmbaregulatoryexam@ahpra.gov.au at least five working days before the scheduled examination, and
- receive confirmation from Ahpra that their OSCE examination has been rescheduled. The next available OSCE session may not be scheduled for up to six months.

Refunds

The OSCE fee will not be refunded:

- if a candidate reschedules/cancels less than five working days before the scheduled OSCE, or
- if there are any discrepancies with the identification information, as referred to in the delivery and administration policy.

The candidate must pay another OSCE fee if they wish to sit the OSCE in the future.

Examination day procedure

Candidates are advised to read this information carefully before arriving at the OSCE venue for the scheduled OSCE session.

Check-in and identification

- Each candidate is expected to arrive at the OSCE venue 20 minutes before the scheduled start time for the OSCE session.
- Before the OSCE starts, each candidate must present a valid photo identification such as an Australian or overseas passport and a confirmation email from Ahpra. The first and last names printed on the photo identification must match exactly the first and last names on the confirmation email and on the Ahpra list of candidates. If the name on the candidate's photo identification does not match exactly, the candidate will not be allowed to start the OSCE and will forfeit their OSCE registration and fee.
- Subject to approval by the Board, the candidate may be allowed to re-register for the next available OSCE session and must pay another OSCE fee.

Late arrival

Candidates who arrive after the scheduled start time will not be permitted to start the OSCE and will forfeit their OSCE registration and fee. The candidate will be required to re-register for the next available OSCE session and must pay another OSCE fee. The next available OSCE session may not be scheduled for more than six months. For further information on late arrival, please refer to the special consideration policy.

During the examination

- Candidates are not allowed to bring personal belongings (including handbags, hats, gloves, scarves, and coats) into the examination area. An area will be provided for the safe storage of candidate's personal belongings before the OSCE starts. Candidates will not be allowed to access any personal items at any time during the OSCE session.

- Candidates are not allowed to bring any food or drink into the examination area. Only clear water bottles are allowed.
- Candidate's family, friends, relatives, or support people are not allowed into the examination area.
- Candidates are not allowed to bring any study material into the OSCE area and must note that this is a 'closed-book' examination.
- Candidates are not allowed to communicate with each other once they have entered the examination area. Those who fail to comply will be removed, their examination will be cancelled, and they will forfeit their OSCE fee.
- Candidates must not write any prompting material on their skin or other objects before or during the examination. Candidates must not take any material including any notes from the OSCE stations when they leave. All documents required as part of the OSCE must be left at the candidate's testing station.
- Once the OSCE has started, there are no scheduled breaks for candidates to use the bathroom. If a candidate needs to use the bathroom during the OSCE, they must advise the examiner and will be escorted to the bathroom. Candidates must note that any time spent on a bathroom break counts as testing time and they will not be provided extra time to complete the OSCE regardless of the circumstances of the bathroom break. Examination conditions apply at all times.
- Candidates who need to leave the OSCE room temporarily (e.g. bathroom break or from any unscheduled break) and are able to continue the OSCE after the temporary break, will enter at the station they are scheduled for at that time. This means that a candidate may miss a station/s and will not be able to make up any stations missed.
- Candidates who are feeling unwell or are unable to continue the OSCE are required to advise the examiner of their situation and stay in the examination area. An examiner will accompany the candidate when they leave the examination area and check the candidate has made suitable arrangements for their situation.
- Candidates who are unable to continue with the examination for any reason, must notify the examiner. The assessment of the candidate will end, and an overall fail result will apply. They will forfeit their OSCE fee.
- Candidates who complete the OSCE will not be permitted to leave the OSCE station or examination area until they have been instructed to do so.

Confidentiality

- Candidates are required to agree to the terms related to confidentiality and security before each OSCE session.
- Candidates must agree to maintain confidentiality of the OSCE content and processes during and after the OSCE, including posting or discussing scenarios or responses on the internet or any form of social media after the OSCE.
- Candidates must not reconstruct OSCE scenarios using their memory of the examination or the memory of others.
- Candidates must not remove OSCE items and/or responses (in any format) or notes about the examination from the OSCE area. Writing on any materials or skin is strictly prohibited and will result in an incident report and results will be placed on hold.
- If candidates are aware that the confidentiality requirements have been breached, they must advise Ahpra immediately and must comply with any investigation (and follow-up investigation) that needs to be conducted.
- Any candidate who attempts to record or supply material relating to the OSCE will not be permitted to continue with the examination. They will forfeit their OSCE registration and fee.

More information: Objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) delivery policy

Dress code

All candidates are expected to attend the OSCE session in neat and clean clothing suitable for clinical practice. This is to ensure a safe environment is provided for the candidates and the simulated patients.

The following items of clothing are not suitable for clinical practice:

- singlet tops or low-cut tops
- ripped or torn clothing
- unsecured neck ties
- sleeves that extend below the elbows
- open toed or high heel footwear, or
- clothing that may get caught on any equipment or make contact with the patient.

Professional conduct and candidate behaviour

Candidates are expected to be courteous and professional at all times and in all matters when interacting in writing or in person with Ahpra staff, examiners, patients, staff at the examination centre and other individuals at the examination centre.

Candidates are expected to adhere to the Board's professional standards, which define the practice and behaviour of practitioners practising in Australia, including the Shared code of conduct. It is recommended that candidates familiarise themselves with the Board's professional standards before attending the OSCE. Adherence to behaviour and conduct

in line with the professional standards will ensure the safety of all the candidates and the simulated patient during the OSCE.

Deviation in practice from the professional standards during the OSCE may result in the examiner and/or chief examiner advising the candidate/s to discontinue the examination before completion of the OSCE. Behaviour that may lead to discontinuation of the OSCE includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- the simulated patient feeling unsafe because of a candidate's behaviour/actions, or
- the examiner deeming the candidate's behaviour to be unsafe, or not professional. If a candidate has been asked to stop the OSCE due to unprofessional behaviour, the candidate will not be allowed to restart the examination until further discussion between the clinical examiners. The examiners may decide the candidate is not allowed to continue the OSCE and may result in the candidate being removed from the OSCE altogether.

If the examination was discontinued because the simulated patient felt unsafe, but the examiners decide the candidate is permitted to continue, the candidate must adjust their practice to ensure the patient is no longer feeling unsafe. If a candidate does not adjust their practice, and the patient continues to feel unsafe, the examiners may decide the candidate is not allowed to continue because their performance at that stage of the examination is

below the level expected of an entry level for a registered Chinese herbal practitioner and/or acupuncturist.

The simulated patient may also request that the candidate not perform a certain task if they are feeling unsafe in anyway. If this occurs, but the examiners decide the candidate is

permitted to continue OSCE, the candidate must adjust their practice to ensure the simulated patient is no longer feeling unsafe. If a candidate does not adjust their practice, and the simulated patient continues to feel unsafe, the candidate will be required to stop the OSCE.

Candidate must not engage in misconduct of any kind during the OSCE.

Misconduct is defined in the Board's examination policies as, 'professional conduct that is of a lesser standard than that which might reasonably be expected of the health practitioner by the public or the practitioner's professional peers.' A more extensive definition is available under section 5 of the National Law.

More information: Objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) misconduct policy

Examination result

The examiners and OSCE centre staff do not have access to the OSCE results, and therefore no results are released during the OSCE. Candidates are requested not to approach examiners for examination results.

Results will be finalised about eight weeks after the date of OSCE. Ahpra will advise candidates via email whether they have passed or failed the examination. Candidates must ensure the email address provided to Ahpra is reliable and checked regularly. Any change in contact details must be notified to Ahpra immediately on cmbaregulatoryexam@ahpra.gov.au.

Candidates who pass the OSCE will be provided with information on the next steps in the registration process. Candidates who fail the OSCE will be provided with a report identifying the area(s) where they haven't performed to the expected levels.

More information: Objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) results policy

Examination repeats

As per the Board's [Regulatory exam policy](#) for repeat candidates or those applying for an additional division, candidates may sit each Regulatory Examination up to five times for each division.

A candidate who fails the OSCE will be allowed to submit a new application for registration as a Chinese herbal medicine practitioner and/or acupuncturist and may be authorised to repeat the OSCE, provided they satisfy the repeat eligibility criteria defined under the Regulatory exam policy. When a candidate repeats an OSCE, they must complete all stations relevant to the division they are applying for. Results from a candidate's previous attempt(s) will not be taken into consideration when determining the result of the candidate's repeat examination, unless they qualified

for registration in either acupuncture or Chinese herbal medicine. Candidates are encouraged to read the Board's Regulatory exam policy for repeat candidates or those applying for an additional division for further information.

A candidate, who wishes to re-sit the OSCE, must pay the relevant application and OSCE fees in full for each attempt.

As the OSCE sessions are scheduled for specific months, a candidate can sit the OSCE only when there is a scheduled session. No special arrangement in addition to the scheduled examination sessions will be arranged.

More information: [Regulatory exam policy for repeat candidates or those applying for an additional division](#)

Special consideration

Special consideration may be considered where a candidate was unable to attend or complete their scheduled OSCE due to exceptional circumstances beyond their control. Only those candidates who can demonstrate that they have reasons beyond their control are eligible for special consideration.

Possible reasons include:

- acute illness or injury (such as hospital admission, onset of serious illness)
- loss or bereavement (such as death of close family member)
- hardship or trauma (such as being a victim of crime, severe disruption to domestic life)
- unforeseen call-up for service (such as military service, court appearance, jury service, emergency service)
- work commitments and circumstances beyond their control (a letter on company/ organisation letterhead from an employer confirming this must be provided)
- religious convictions (a letter from a religious leader must accompany the application), or
- natural disaster, bomb threat or similar such event requiring evacuation of the exam centre (providing that the natural disaster or pandemic is verified by Ahpra).

In case of a natural disaster, for example, an earthquake, flood, or bushfire occurs, or the World Health Organization declares a pandemic, candidates who have scheduled to sit the OSCE may reschedule their OSCE without penalty (even if the examination centre is open for business). This is providing that the natural disaster or pandemic is verified by Ahpra.

Candidates must submit a request for special consideration in writing, before or within five working days following the scheduled OSCE. Relevant documentary evidence of the exceptional circumstances beyond their control must be included in the request.

In no circumstances will special consideration lead to an adjustment of the candidate's OSCE results.

More information: Objective structured clinical examinations (OSCE) requests for special consideration policy

Procedural review of examinations

Candidates can contact Ahpra directly to apply for a procedural review of OSCE in accordance with the examinations policies in the following circumstances:

- the procedural requirements and instructions, as specified in the handbook were not followed to a significant extent, or
- the candidate's performance was adversely affected by significant deficiencies in the OSCE procedures beyond the control of the candidate.

The following matters are not reasons for applying for a procedural review:

- disagreement with the standards set by the Board for OSCE
- disagreement with the result for OSCE or any station of OSCE, or
- personal or other reasons that affected the candidate's ability to undertake or prepare sufficiently for OSCE.

Candidates must pay the initial assessment fee before the application for procedural review can be considered.

More information: Objective structured clinical examination (OSCE) procedural review policy