

## **New Royal College Exams Centre FAQ**

### **What is changing about the Royal College applied exam?**

Starting with the spring 2025 session, select disciplines will sit the applied exam in the Toronto-based Touchstone Institute and the Ottawa-based Royal College Annex building. These candidates will interact face-to-face with examiners, supported by onsite Royal College exam staff and assessment centre staff. The remaining spring 2025 disciplines will sit the applied exam using the same virtual decentralized model that has been in place since 2020. For the fall 2025 applied session, all disciplines have been accommodated to sit the applied exam in either Toronto or Ottawa. Details for 2026 applied exams will be shared as soon as they are available.

As early as 2027, the Royal College is expected to open a specialized, self-operated assessment centre located in downtown Ottawa. This new location will enable a permanent approach and home for all Royal College applied examinations going forward.

**How does this differ from the current virtual decentralized delivery model for applied exams?** During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Royal College adopted a virtual decentralized model for the delivery of the applied exam. Candidates sat the applied exam at one of 17 regional exam centres established at hotels across Canada. The candidates and examiners interacted on a virtual platform using a Royal College-issued laptop, supported by onsite invigilators. This model has a high level of reliance on technology and requires more security measures to control the environment.

**Why is the applied exam model changing?** The decentralized model exposes exam delivery to a higher level of risk including exam delivery failure that could prevent the administration of the exam as scheduled and result in a postponement of certification for the candidate. This is due to the complexities of administering synchronized one-on-one applied exams to over 3,250 applied exam candidates per year across multiple sites, including an increased dependency on power and internet across multiple locations simultaneously.

**What is the address of the new assessment centre?** The assessment centre will be located at 160 Elgin Street in downtown Ottawa and will occupy two floors.

**When will the assessment centre open?** Renovations will begin in 2025 and are expected to be completed in late 2026. The centre is expected to host the first exam session as early as 2027.

### **Will the written exam be delivered at the new assessment centre?**

No, the risks identified for the applied exam do not apply to the 3,900 written exams which will remain decentralized, delivered at the 17 exam sites across Canada listed below. Where



possible, we aim to minimize candidate travel while balancing the risk of exam and delivery quality.

### **Will Competence by Design reduce the need for applied exams?**

Applied examinations remain a cornerstone of the certification process for all Royal College primary specialties and many subspecialties. While the ongoing transition to competency-based training and other emerging factors such as artificial intelligence may result in changes to our exams in future, the current Royal College assessment strategy, supported through consultations with Examination and Assessment Committees, as well as Exam Board Chairs and other key partners, will continue to include the delivery of some form of applied assessment into the foreseeable future.

### **What disciplines will sit the 2025 and 2026 applied exam in Toronto and Ottawa?**

#### **Spring 2025 applied exam delivery in Toronto, Ontario**

Touchstone Institute: 145 Wellington St. W, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1H8

- Neurosurgery
- Orthopedic Surgery
- Plastic Surgery
- Dermatology
- Anesthesiology
- Medical Genetics & Genomics
- Public Health & Preventive Medicine
- Adult Cardiology
- Rheumatology Adult

#### **Spring 2025 applied exam delivery in Ottawa, Ontario**

Royal College Headquarters: 774 Echo Dr., Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5N8

- Nuclear Medicine
- Medical Microbiology
- Vascular Surgery
- Hematological Pathology
- Pediatric Cardiology

All remaining disciplines are proposed to sit the spring 2025 applied exam virtually from one of the following decentralized exam delivery sites. All examiners will be centralized in Ottawa.

- |             |               |               |
|-------------|---------------|---------------|
| • Vancouver | • Thunder Bay | • Montreal    |
| • Calgary   | • Ottawa      | • Sherbrooke  |
| • Edmonton  | • Kingston    | • Quebec City |
| • Saskatoon | • Toronto     | • Halifax     |
| • Winnipeg  | • Hamilton    | • St. John's  |
| • Sudbury   | • London      |               |

### **Fall 2025**

All disciplines are confirmed to sit the fall 2025 applied exam in-person in Toronto or Ottawa.

### **Fall 2025 in-person applied exam delivery in Toronto, Ontario**

Touchstone Institute: 145 Wellington St. W, Toronto, Ontario M5J 1H8

- Clinical Immunology & Allergy
- Diagnostic & Molecular Pathology (formerly Anatomical Pathology)
- Gastroenterology
- Hematology
- Otolaryngology–Head & Neck Surgery
- Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation
- Radiation Oncology
- Urology

### **Fall 2025 in-person applied exam delivery in Ottawa, Ontario**

Royal College Headquarters: 774 Echo Dr., Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5N8

- Cardiac Surgery
- Diagnostic & Clinical Pathology (formerly General Pathology)
- Hematological Pathology
- Pediatric Surgery
- Respiriology Pediatric
- Thoracic Surgery
- Vascular Surgery

### **Spring and fall 2026 applied exams**

Details of the spring and fall 2026 in-person applied exam delivery are in development and will be communicated as soon as possible.

**What is the risk exposure by holding applied exams virtually?** The decentralized model is highly dependent on reliable connectivity, software performance, complex logistics deployed across multiple sites and six time zones simultaneously nationwide, consistent hardware performance of up to hundreds of devices for larger exams, and on external vendors for technology and invigilation. It requires a significantly higher degree of human and financial resources to administer applied exams in a manner that mitigates risk and ensures the Royal College standards of quality assurance are met. The overwhelming opinion of Examination Boards - as well as our experience trying to address multiple delivery challenges since the switch to a virtual model - supports the resumption of in-person applied examinations.



**How does operating an equipped assessment centre allow more control?** Some elements under a virtual model, such as site technology and invigilators, must be provided by third party vendors, thereby limiting the Royal College's ability to control and mitigate issues as they arise.

**Why can't the applied exam be offered across more than one site, perhaps with Western, Eastern or Northern options?**

The fixed costs associated with a purpose-built centre across two or more sites, the additional level of risk to overall exam quality, and the potential to pass increased costs to resident via fees made this option unviable.

**Why was Ottawa selected as the centralized site?** Given Canada's sizable geography, consideration to candidates and examiners travelling from other regions was a significant factor in the final recommendation. Equally, we considered our responsibilities as a not-for-profit organization trusted with the responsibility of managing Royal College Fellow dues and candidate fees. After a full financial and logistical analysis, Ottawa emerged as the clear and responsible site choice; it is the place of the Royal College headquarters and, according to [2023 CAPER data](#), approximately 78% of candidates and examiners live within a two-hour drive of the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor and can serve the needs of both Anglophone and Francophone candidates.

**Why would the Touchstone Institute not continue to be used?** Despite providing a high-quality exam experience, Touchstone is not a bilingual location nor is it able to accommodate the current quantity and size of Royal College exam cohorts. If Touchstone was used long-term as one site for applied exam delivery, the Royal College would continue to need additional locations to accommodate all applied exam cohorts. This would once again increase risk to the exam delivery and add to cost, fees, and logistics.

**What criteria was considered to inform the decision to open an assessment centre?**

Significant consideration was given to the following criteria (order does not imply priority):

- Quality of exam delivery
- Exam day experience and impact to candidates, examiners, residents and staff
- Cost stabilization
- Risk mitigation related to technological failure
- Location including planetary health considerations
- Flexibility of options

**How will this decision impact exam fees?**

The return to in-person applied exams will not increase or decrease examination fees for candidates. The decision to centralize applied exams is an investment decision made to support a more financially sustainable delivery of applied exams over the long term. Exam



fees for both applied and written exams are set annually, based upon the operating budget required to successfully deliver the exams.

**What is the expected impact on appeals?**

The number of candidate appeals is expected to be reduced under the in-person model as many are related to technology issues. These types of appeals have increased with the introduction of virtual applied examinations.

**Are you concerned about volunteer recruitment and retention?** Exam development and delivery rely on over 1,400 members acting as volunteers. Exam Board Chairs and Examiners have been requesting a return to face-to-face delivery to reduce technical interruptions (that may require additional travel and disruption of clinical schedules to produce and administer back up exams.) The new delivery model will help with retention and maintenance of a volunteer model to develop and deliver exams. Accordingly, maintaining the status quo could risk significant volunteer contributor dissatisfaction and attrition.

For inquiries, please contact [candidates@royalcollege.ca](mailto:candidates@royalcollege.ca)