

CTA Oral examination

IBOC procedures to run on-line CTA exams

This document is an addendum to Section 9 of the IBOC Certification and Examinations Handbook and relates to the development of on-line procedures for CTA exams.

Principles

The initial stimulus for considering on-line certification was the impact of Corona virus, the risk to health and the travel bans that have gone on across the world. In order to keep our commitment to candidates and the TA community we had to rethink how to offer a high standard, accessible exam system and plan for the protection and future of our certification system. We envision this to be a two-fold approach to exams, on-site and on-line. To this end we have developed procedures for on-line CTA & TSTA exams.

The principles, therefore, are:

1. Protection of the certification of transactional analysts across the world.
2. Power, privilege and equity - we are embracing the opportunity to offer on-line examinations in support of the wider initiative in the TA community regarding diversity and inclusion. This includes:
 - making arrangements that improve the engagement of candidates who might be otherwise disadvantaged in terms of family commitments, financial costs, mobility issues.
 - enabling the candidate to be examined in a similarly familiar context to that of the examining board members. In other words, the candidate can choose to be in their own space and the exam board can anticipate that candidates will be more established and therefore more robust in both their preparation and performance.
3. Eco awareness – on-line exams will cut the carbon footprint of transactional analysts, a necessary step in the climate crisis, (for more detailed consideration of this issue see de Graaf & Tigchelaar, *The Script*, August 2020).

Plan

IBOC delivered the first on-line CTA exams in January 2021. On-site exams will continue to be planned. This will enable IBOC to offer a range of exam possibilities to candidates and examiners, all maintaining the high standard of TA exams. All information re dates, fees and how to apply are on the website.

Procedures

On-line exams will follow the procedures of on-site exams as closely as possible, with appropriate adjustments made for the different forum as outlined below.

Technology

Zoom is the platform used for on-line exams. This accessible platform enables the Briefing meetings to happen in a virtual Exam Headquarters providing a space for examiners and candidates to meet before and after the examinations and this virtual room will stay open throughout the exams so that candidates

and examiners can return to it to seek support, celebrate each other and be in contact with colleagues throughout the day.

Candidates can link into the virtual exam room and wait in a 'virtual waiting room' before the examiners invite them in. They must ensure they have a quiet and private space in which they can take the exam. They can make arrangements for their own local support as well as the on-line support of the usual meetings, exam supervisors and buddies. IBOC will offer a short on-line workshop ahead of the exams specifically for candidates to help them prepare for the process of being examined on-line.

Examiners will attend the virtual briefing meetings as well as an extra on-line training (this will be offered in advance of the exam days) which will offer training specifically in on-line examining. They must also ensure they have a quiet and private space from which to examine on-line. The Chair of each board will host the virtual exam through a dedicated Zoom room. Once all examiners have entered the hosting can be shared or delegated between examiners.

Gallery view on Zoom is advised. All must have their camera on to allow participants to see one another clearly. Earphones are preferable as it keeps background noise to a minimum. Muting can be used whilst listening to the tape to promote the best audio experience. If an exam is observed the observer is recommended to introduce themselves to the board and then turn their camera and microphone off whilst the exam is in process, just as they would sit out of sight line in an on-site exam and not intrude.

There is no private chat allowed during the exam.

Zoom exams will be secure and candidates will be sent all Zoom links ahead of the exams. One for the Exam Headquarters for the briefing meetings and the second for the Exam room. Timings will be clearly planned and communicated by email in advance.

All candidates must make arrangements to record their exams on their own personal device in case of appeal. Examiners are not permitted to record the exam.

The process facilitator can be called virtually. The Chair will have the contact details for the process facilitator who will be able to Zoom-in to that specific exam room if called.

Exam process on-line

Exam Supervisors will recruit examiners who have good internet connection and can examine using a computer or laptop rather than an iPad or smaller mobile device. They will also collect information about the time zone the examiner is in, so this can be considered when planning timings of exams. They will then collate draft boards and boundary check these in advance of the exams with examiners and candidates.

Before the exam

All participants will be joining the exams remotely. Therefore, it is important for everyone to familiarize themselves with the technology and get any support they need ahead of time. Good lighting is essential so people can be seen clearly.

Candidates are recommended to practice mock exams in this format and need to ensure that the recording devices they are using are of a good enough quality so that their recordings can be heard by their online exam board. It is important to be familiar with the Zoom technology of sharing audio sound. This must be practiced in advance, so candidates are confident in the process. If a recording cannot be heard, then the exam may result in a 'no exam' decision.

Planning to be involved in on-line exams involves planning your own structures for the exam days and managing your own environment. We suggest minimizing other external commitments to allow you to focus on being at the exams as if you were on-site. Candidates can be around to witness and celebrate

colleagues and examiners could take breaks with other colleagues in breakout rooms if this can be organised. There will be a celebration at the end of the exams involving everyone (plus candidates' families and peers are welcome to join). This way we can also maximize the social community aspect of the exams as far as possible.

Before the exam meetings (the exact date will be announced by the online exam coordinators)

The candidate will prepare two PDF files:

1. Their examination log, with a contents page and page numbered for easy reference, containing:

- Curriculum vitae
- Supervisor's personal letter of recommendation
- Log of all training
- Supervision and contact hours
- Written exam feedback
- Training contract with details of any exceptions and the associated training plan attached to the contract.
- Transcripts of their three recordings

2. Copy of the written exam

The exam supervisor will support the candidate to place their file in a specially created personal folder on P-cloud, a Swiss based secure cloud server with sophisticated file encryption. This can then be accessed by the examiners.

A few days before the exam

The exam supervisor will send a finalized list of exam boards and timings of exams to all parties:

- Candidates will receive a timetable with all necessary Zoom links.
- Examiners will receive a timetable with all necessary Zoom links for the Headquarters and a Zoom link for each exam they are involved in.
- Examiners will receive all paperwork securely relating to each candidate and the exam via a link to P-cloud to access the pdf file with the candidate's information in and the correct scoring sheet for the exam. They can print it off or access it on screen. They are charged with keeping all material confidential and asked to destroy it appropriately after the exams.

On the day of the Exams

On the day of the exam meetings everyone will link into the Zoom Headquarters, opened and hosted by the exam supervisors. There will be a short welcome and opportunity to see everyone involved in the exam days together. The exam supervisors will then lead two briefing meetings, one for the candidates and one for the examiners.

Good breaks will be included through the days so examiners can rest their eyes, move and get some air as they need.

There are two times allocated to each exam:

- the time the Board meet to form and

- the time the exam starts (i.e. the candidate joins).

At the time allocated for the board to meet the examiners will link into the virtual exam room (hosted by the Chair) to meet together 20 mins before the exam starts so that they can form and discuss their initial impressions of the candidate's log, to agree on some questions they wish to ask the candidate, and decide how to best work together. The candidate's paperwork will have been sent to them before the examination. The candidate will also link into the virtual exam room 10 mins before the start time of the exam (so they can be prepared, and the board know the candidate has arrived). The candidate will wait in the waiting room to be invited in by the Chair at the exam start time.

Candidate's recordings

Each candidate will have prepared three recordings of their work to show their competencies. These will be played over the Zoom platform and must be audible to all examiners, so we recommend that candidates select their recordings with this in mind and practice in advance.

The candidate is responsible for protecting the anonymity of the client on the recording.

Translated exams

It is the candidate's responsibility to ensure their translator has all the information needed, timings of meetings and Zoom links.

It is also the candidate's responsibility to ensure the exam supervisors know the name of their translator and to involve them in the meetings before and after the exams. The exam supervisor can brief both the candidates, translators and the examiners on best practice for a translated exam as laid out in the Handbook. The same principles will apply on-line as on-site.

During the exam

When the board are ready the Chair will invite the candidate to join and remind them to start their recording of the exam (this is the candidate's responsibility to organise a device to record the exam). They will invite everyone to introduce themselves, in the same way as they would in a face-to-face exam.

The Chair's role is particularly important, to ensure the candidate is not disadvantaged and to ensure that the exam is proceeding as it should. On-line conversations are slightly more deliberate and often require more explicit checking that everyone is understanding and following what is being asked or responded to. While everyone has a responsibility to check this out with each other, the Chair needs to take an active role in doing this.

While using technology can present practical challenges, if everyone involved is patient, calm and approaches it with good humour, the technology itself should not add to the stress. It is important to allow time and not interpret problems but look to cooperate to solve them. Hence the process might need slightly longer to allow for on-line adjustments (up to 15 mins longer if necessary).

The Chair is also responsible for taking the initiative in ensuring any technical problems are resolved. Technological help will be available but is also a live limiting factor with many dependent variables. In the event of a technological failure, the Chair, in consultation with the process facilitator and exam supervisor will be responsible for deciding whether it is possible to continue. If one examiner loses internet connection and cannot return to the link, then the board can decide to proceed with 3 examiners. Where an exam cannot be completed due to technical problems a 'no exam' will be declared.

At any point during the exam, any party may call the process facilitator. When this happens, the Chair will pause the process and contact the process facilitator. The process facilitator will join via the Zoom link and be admitted by the host.

Once the board is ready to commence scoring, the Chair will remind all present that this is the candidate's last chance to call the process facilitator and will ask if the candidate wishes to do so. After scoring begins, only board members can call the process facilitator.

At the end of the exam, each examiner will complete a Scoring Sheet and the Chair will collate the scores onto one scoring sheet. If the candidate does not want to witness the scoring, then they can switch off their audio and camera and negotiate with the Chair how they will hear their result. After receiving their feedback and pass/defer from the board, candidates can leave the virtual exam space. They need to check back into the virtual Headquarters, where they will be welcomed by exam staff and colleagues.

Debriefing the exam

Examiners then have 20 mins to debrief their experience of the exam and their work together. Each examiner must complete the Google on-line score sheet so scoring can be collated centrally.

After the debrief examiners are asked to check back into the virtual Headquarters. This will be an opportunity for general feedback to the exam supervisors and to connect with colleagues.

Back to Headquarters

At the end of the examinations examiners and candidates will be asked to meet in Headquarters to have an overall debriefing and to share their experiences. As in the original briefings candidates and examiners may have separate meetings. They will then join all together for a celebration.

Celebrations and certifications

The time at the end of exams is an important moment of ritual, thanks and celebration. Everyone involved can join together to appreciate the collective work and celebrate the candidates. We will not be able to give out certificates, these will be posted to candidates along with their yellow CTA ribbon. IBOC hopes that candidates can return to their local communities where they can wear their ribbon and show their certificate for a second celebration with TA colleagues. We welcome candidates who have passed on-line to wear their ribbons with pride at the next conference or workshop they are at, even if it is virtual. To pass a CTA is to train for a long time. We hope candidates will celebrate for a long time too.

Continued professional development (CPD) certificates will be emailed to examiners with thanks for their involvement.

IBOC July 2022