



Frequently Asked Questions Regarding NCCAOM's Announcement to Eliminate Certification Eligibility Route #3 (Apprenticeship) in 2021

Introduction: The Acupuncture, Chinese Herbology, and Oriental Medicine certification programs of the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM®) are accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA) which is a separately governed accreditation arm of the Institute for Credentialing Excellence (ICE). *NCCA Standard 7: Program Policies* requires establishing the eligibility requirements for taking NCCAOM's certification examinations. Every NCCA accredited certification organization must provide a rationale, qualitative and/or quantitative documentation for all eligibility requirements and routes for candidacy to sit for any certification examination. NCCAOM's approach to meeting these requirements includes monitoring pass rates on exams and tracking the number of candidates taking each exam for each of its eligibility routes, and for monitoring the substantive academic and training equivalence of each route by monitoring the pass rates for all candidates from each route, for each exam.

Currently the NCCAOM has six different eligibility routes for Certification. These are:

- **Route 1:** Education in the United States (U.S.), i.e. candidates must be a graduate from an academic program in Acupuncture (AC) or Oriental Medicine (OM), accredited (or in candidacy status) by the Accreditation Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (ACAOM)
- **Route 2:** International Education – i.e., graduates of academic programs in AC or OM
- **Route 3:** Apprenticeship (U.S. or International), i.e., applicants who have trained with at least two preceptors;
- **Route 4:** Combination of Formal Education and Apprenticeship (U.S. or International);
- **Route 5:** Conversion from Acupuncture and/or Chinese Herbology Certification to Oriental Medicine Certification; and
- **Route 6:** Reinstatement to Active Diplomate Status from Terminated Status.

Refer to the *NCCAOM® Certification Handbook* and the *NCCAOM® Reinstatement Handbook* [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook](#) and the [NCCAOM® Reinstatement Handbook](#) for more detailed information and route requirements.



After careful review of the NCCAOM Apprenticeship Route, it was found that the average pass rate for this route was significantly lower (when compared to the other routes) which indicates that most candidates are not as adequately prepared to pass the NCCAOM certification exams via the Apprenticeship Route. Further, the number of candidates each year who entered testing through the Apprenticeship route, versus the Formal Education route were significantly fewer.

Based on the rationale above, and the fact that very few state acupuncture boards accept an apprenticeship route for licensure, the NCCAOM Board of Commissioners decided to announce the elimination of the Apprenticeship Route (Route #3), effective December 31, 2021.

Questions and Answers:

Q1: Why is the NCCAOM eliminating the Apprenticeship Route (#3) for eligibility?

A1: Historically, there are very low volumes of applicants enrolling in the Apprenticeship Route. From 2012 to 2016, fewer than 1% (0.4%; n=26) of applicants applied under the Apprenticeship Route. Also, from 2012 to 2016, Apprenticeship applicants performed poorly on the NCCAOM exams, especially Biomedicine (28% pass rate; n=29) and Chinese Herbology (a zero percent pass rate; n=11). Overall, there was only a 53% pass rate for all exams taken via the Apprenticeship Route during the 2012 through 2016 period. Since NCCAOM needs to have all its NCCA accredited certification programs comply with the 2016 NCCA revised accreditation standards, the documented evidence of the low volume of applicants, and low passing rates ultimately led to the decision to eliminate of the Apprenticeship route. Current exam statistics for the other routes can be found on the School Officials Page of the NCCAOM website. See the [NCCAOM Exam Statistics Reports](#).

Q2: When will the Apprenticeship Route #3 be eliminated?

A2: NCCAOM will not accept applications for certification through Route #3 after **December 31, 2021**. This five-year notice allows for all currently training apprentices to complete and meet the requirements for this route.

Q3: How will this affect current apprentices?

A3: Those currently training through only Route 3 will have until **December 31, 2021** to finish their training and submit their application for certification, along with their completed files, to the NCCAOM to review their eligibility for certification testing.

Q4: How will this affect future apprentices who wish to take exams for licensure purposes after December 31, 2021?

A4: Individuals who complete an apprenticeship after December 31, 2021 may still be able to test as a state candidate, but this will be contingent on approval from a state board of acupuncture. NCCAOM has found that **many state acupuncture boards do not accept the**



apprenticeship route for licensing. Contractual agreements between NCCAOM and state acupuncture boards are available. It will be at the state acupuncture board's discretion to allow an apprentice to take the exams for licensure purposes only. These state licensing applicants; however, will not be eligible to achieve certification as a Diplomate with the NCCAOM.

Q5: Will applicants still be able to apply through a Combination Route of Formal Education and an Apprenticeship (Route #4)?

A5: Yes. The ***Combination of Formal Education and an Apprenticeship (Route #4)*** will remain a valid route to eligibility and certification through the NCCAOM. This route allows an individual to marry formal education through an ACAOM accredited college, university, or other institution, **and** training through an apprenticeship program with one or more preceptors as outlined in the [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook](#). For those applicants receiving their formal education outside the United States, the educational institution must meet the criteria specified by the NCCAOM for international education. These criteria can be found in the [NCCAOM® Certification Handbook](#).

Q6: By what process did NCCAOM seek stakeholder input prior to making the significant determination to eliminate Apprenticeship Route #3?

A6: The NCCAOM gathered stakeholder input on the apprenticeship route periodically throughout the last ten years. Feedback from Diplomates around the country was split between continuing the route (to include keeping it around for historical reasons), no opinion, or that it be eliminated. Feedback from the Eligibility Committee (EC) and Exam Development Committees' (EDC) members review for the metrics on the Apprenticeship Route were concerned as to the inadequate preparation that most apprentices receive, given the low passage rates. The EC and EDC members are made up of subject matter experts (SMEs) including educators and practitioners throughout the country. In addition, NCCAOM conducted the 2008 and 2013 Job Analysis Surveys which also supported this important decision.

Most importantly, the critical reason for the decision to eliminate the Apprenticeship Route was the need for the NCCAOM certification programs to meet the NCCA accreditation standards.

If you have any additional questions, feel free to contact NCCAOM via email at info@thenccaom.org or by phone at 888-381-1140.