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**GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL VISIT  
ASTON UNIVERSITY  
BSc (Hons) Optometry &  
BSc Optometry Programmes**

**19-20 NOVEMBER 2009**

## **1A ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Visitors wish to express their thanks to the Vice Chancellor; Professor Julia King, Executive Deans Professor Martin Griffin and Professor Helen Griffiths, Subject Group Lead Optometry, Professor James Wolffsohn, BSc Programme Director, Dr Frank Eperjesi, Principal Clinician Dr Olivia Hunt, plus the employer, university staff and of course the students for giving generously of their time and knowledge and for the hospitality afforded to the Visitors during the course of the Visit.

The Visitors also wish to express their appreciation for the comprehensive documentation provided in advance and during the Visit. The Visitors recognise the considerable work involved in preparing this information which was of great assistance to the Visitors in preparing for and during the Visit.

## **1B INTRODUCTION**

Aston was originally founded in 1895 and became a University in 1966. Professor Julia King became Vice-Chancellor of the University in 2006.

The Aston campus is based in the centre of Birmingham and has a student population of over 8,000.

The Optometry Department is part of the School of Life and Health Sciences, headed by Professor Helen Griffiths, Executive Dean.

Professor James Wolffshon is the Optometry Group Leader and is supported by Dr Frank Eperjesi, the Director of Undergraduate Studies for Optometry.

The department offers both a BSc Hons degree and an Ordinary BSc degree in Optometry.

The Higher Education Funding Council's Quality Assurance Agency rated all degree programmes in the School, including Optometry, as 'excellent.' The course is based in its own building, with a lecture theatre, tutorial rooms, teaching clinics and open clinics, providing services under supervision to members of the general public.

The aims of the course are to:

- Provide a relevant and challenging education within a supportive environment that integrates scientific, clinical and professional aspects of the Optometry discipline
- Develop the scientific knowledge and professional skills to allow progression through pre-registration training to practice as an optometrist
- Allow for the acquisition of skills as an independent learner in preparation for life-long learning

Aston University Day Hospital (AUDH) is the flagship multidisciplinary clinical research facility of Aston University's School of Life and Health Sciences. It was completed in the summer of 2004 and has built its clinical patient base over the last five years. Appointed clinical specialists collaborate with the highly skilled team of clinical research scientists in the School, together aspiring to excellence in the clinical field. The fundamental objective is to identify areas of clinical need in vision, ophthalmology and neuroscience, and through research initiatives, provide an environment that is uniquely equipped and staffed to problem solve through research, evidence based practice and clinical trials. Aston University Day Hospital is a registered independent healthcare provider, and particular specialities relevant to optometry include the investigation of the onset, progression, and invasive or non-invasive treatments for refractive error; fundamentals of vision and visual recovery; the anatomy and

physiology of the eye in health and disease; the structure and function of the brain in diseases either directly or indirectly impacting on vision.

The Optometry programme benefits from the AUDH by:

- Encountering academics and clinicians with a wider range of clinical practice
- Teaching placements to observe refractive surgery, cataract surgery, and pre- and post-operative Optometric care
- Elective placements
- Exposure to a multidisciplinary clinic in Life and Health Sciences

## **1C BACKGROUND TO THE VISIT**

The last GOC Panel Visit to Aston University's Optometry Programme occurred in 2004.

The GOC is required to undertake Visits in order to obtain assurance that the standards of teaching and clinical practice within the programme are compliant with the GOC's competencies and standards, and that the programme can continue to be approved as recognised by the GOC for entry of successful students, following their pre-registration year, into the GOC's register of Ophthalmic Opticians.

The GOC Visitors to Aston's BSc programme were:

- Professor David Whitaker (Chair & Educationalist)
- Dr Iain Bryce (Ophthalmologist)
- Miss Angela Whitaker (Optometrist)
- Dr Robert Harper (Optometrist)
- Mrs Annette Latham-Jackson (Dispensing Optician)
- Miss Linda Kennaugh – GOC Director of Education

Prior to the Visit, the GOC received pre-Visit information from the University, in line with the GOC Handbook, '*Guidelines for the Approval of Training Institutions*' (the Handbook) updating the GOC on changes implemented since the last visit in 2004. The Visitors considered the programme using the Visit Handbook, a copy of which is available on the GOC website.

During the Visit the Visitors met with the Vice Chancellor, Professor Julia King, Professor James Wolffsohn, Optometry Lead, Dr Frank Eperjesi, BSc Programme Director and Principal Clinician Dr Olivia Hunt. The Visitors also met with Dr Rob Hogan, a local employer, a selection of academic teaching staff and a number of undergraduate students from each year.

In addition to the above meetings, the Visitors observed teaching in progress and visited the optometry building, dispensing clinic, Aston University Day Hospital (AUDH), Birmingham Focus Low Vision Centre, Solihull Hospital and Heartlands Hospital Diabetic Screening Centre.

The BSc Optometry Programme is a full-time, 3 year modular programme leading to either a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree with honours or a Bachelor of Science (BSc). The standard 'A' level entry requirements for the programme are currently AAB. Each student must achieve 120 credits each year in order to progress to the next year.

## 2 CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the panel was very impressed by the programme. In particular the quality of teaching, the dedication and commitment of staff to programme delivery and the provision of student feedback were exemplary. This was also recognised by the department's excellent results in the latest national student survey.

The only area of concern was in respect of the fact the department had not yet fully implemented the revised Stage 1 GOC Core Competencies and updated the programme documentation accordingly. During the visit the panel discussed these concerns with the programme manager and were satisfied that the required action would be taken immediately to ensure the relevant aspects of the programme documentation and student logbooks do reflect the competencies as documented in the GOC handbook.

The panel were confident that this could best be achieved by implementation of the following:

- i) Revision of the logbooks to include a full list of each individual competency including when and how it is assessed and provision of a signature and date confirming that each one has been signed off.
- ii) The student programme guide to explicitly include a list of the GOC competencies and when and how they are assessed throughout the programme, supported by an explanation of their importance.
- iii) Provision of training for staff in signing off competencies.
- iv) Provision of a list of performance criteria for each competency, to be used by staff when assessing competence to ensure consistency.

Based on their overall findings the panel recommends that Aston University meets the requirements for continual approval by the GOC as a training institution. The panel also recommends that the next quality assurance full panel visit to the BSc (Hons) and BSc Optometry programmes be scheduled for a further 5 years time in 2014, subject to satisfactory annual monitoring submissions in the interim years and the following condition and recommendation:

## 3 CONDITIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

### Condition:

- 1) That in order to demonstrate compliance with the requirement outlined in Section 3.1.1a of the GOC Optometry Handbook, the department takes action to ensure that by the start of the next semester, the assessment mechanisms, student logbooks, and tracking sheets are revised to track and assess each student's achievement of each individual GOC Stage 1 Core Competency.

In addition, that staff who are responsible for assessing and signing off competencies receive training, guidance and support to do this.

### Recommendation:

- 1) That the department conducts an audit of the implementation and use of the seminar system to specifically take account of staff and student feedback in order to determine its future role and level of usage in the delivery of the optometry programme.

The Visitors would like to emphasise that given the excellent environment within the School and University – there was clear evidence of a robust, enthusiastic and vibrant approach to

the School's work – they anticipate that the University will be able to fully satisfy the Condition and Recommendations identified.