

GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL

**Visit to
Glasgow Caledonian University
Higher Diploma and BSc Degree in Ophthalmic Dispensing**

21 & 22 APRIL 2009

1a Acknowledgements

The Visitors wish to record their thanks for the kind hospitality shown by Professor Alan Tomlinson, Head of Department and Dr Glyn Walsh, Programme Leader during the visit and for the administrative support provided by Mrs Margaret Galloway.

In addition, the Panel were very grateful to the Principal and Vice Chancellor Professor Pamela Gillies, the Head of Learning, Teaching and Quality of the School of Life Sciences, Karen Thomson, the School Manager, Stephen Lopez and the Clinic Director Dr Norman Button all of whom gave up their time to meet with the Panel during the Visit.

The Visitors would also like to extend their thanks to those staff, students, graduates and employers who also gave up their time to meet with the Panel.

1b Background Information

Glasgow Caledonian University is Scotland's fourth largest university in terms of student recruitment and its campus is situated in the heart of Glasgow city centre. The origins of the institution date back to 1875 but in 1993 the university was formed following the merger of Glasgow Polytechnic and The Queen's College, Glasgow.

The university has a student population of over 14,000, coming from over 90 countries. The university offers over 90 undergraduate and 40 taught postgraduate programmes as well as research centres for those following PhD programmes. Many of the undergraduate programmes are career focused and 92% of graduates seeking employment find work within 6 months of graduation.

The university consists of 7 academic schools. The Ophthalmic Dispensing programme is the responsibility of the Department of Vision Sciences which is part of the School of Life Sciences. The School also hosts the Biological and Biomedical Sciences and Psychology departments.

Since 2004 the department has been involved in an overseas initiative for the development of a new Optometry degree programme at the Independent University College of Technology in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Accreditation was approved by both universities in 2007 allowing graduates to receive a double-badged degree from both institutions. The ongoing input of staff within the Vision Sciences department at GCU is in to the course content, method of delivery and assessment of students in Malaysia. Income from this initiative will be used to fund an additional lecturer position within Vision Sciences.

In May 2007 the department was reviewed under the Scottish system of Enhancement Led Institutional Subject Review (ELISR). The report was generally favourable.

The department operates a strong research output with 75% of staff rated at international level in the 2009 RAE. The University's Centre for Vision in Health submitted their research under the category of subjects Allied to Medicine. The University was ranked top in submissions by Scottish Universities and within the top 10 of those in the UK.

The last full Panel Visit to the programme was in 2004 however following the introduction of a new core curriculum and syllabus in 2005 leading to the new ABDO professional qualifying examinations the programme has been subject to annual visits by the GOC Education Committee (ESDO) Panel. These visits monitored the effective implementation of the new standards and changes to the ABDO professional examinations. It is the successful completion of the professional qualifying examinations which enable entry on the GOC Register of Dispensing Opticians.

Currently the total number of students on the BSc programme is 61, with 264 students on the optometry programme.

The remit of the Panel during this visit is therefore to consider the suitability of the programme as a route to the professional qualifying examinations as outlined in the Opticians Act 1989 (as amended 2005).

2 Introduction

1. This Report is of the Visit by the General Optical Council to Glasgow Caledonian University Higher Diploma and BSc in Ophthalmic Dispensing Programmes. The Visit took place on 21st and 22nd April 2009.
2. The Visitors were:
 - Professor Reginald Davis – Educationalist and Chair
 - Mrs Christine Harm, Dispensing Optician & Contact Lens Practitioner
 - Mrs Annette Latham-Jackson, Dispensing Optician & Contact Lens Practitioner
 - Mr Richard Broughton, Optometrist
 - Mrs Sally Powell, Educationalist
3. The Visitors were accompanied by Miss Linda Kennaugh, Head of Education for the General Optical Council.
4. The GOC is required to undertake such Visits in order to obtain assurance that the standards of teaching and clinical practice within the programme are compliant with the GOC's competences and standards, and that the course can continue to be recognised by the GOC for the entry of successful students on to the Register of Dispensing Opticians.
5. During the Visit the GOC Handbook, 'Guidelines for the approval of Training Institutions' ('the Handbook') was used by the visitors. The Visitors conducted their assessments during the Visit applying the criteria and requirements as set out in the Handbook.
6. In order to enter the programme candidates must have a minimum of 3 Scottish Highers, one at grade B and 2 at grade C or 2 A levels at grade C. A good standard in physics and mathematics is also required. For students who are weak in sciences or mathematics a summer school is provided before commencing the course.
7. Prior to the visit, the GOC received comprehensive pre-visit information from the University based on the GOC's Handbook. The Panel were satisfied with this documentation.
8. As well as the pre-visit information received in advance, during the visit the visitors reviewed examples of the following documentation for the programme
 - Course Modules.
 - Course & Student Handbooks.
 - Copies of student portfolios, logbooks and tracking sheets.
 - Clinic Handbook and Guidance documents.
 - Course Committee and Programme Board Minutes
 - Annual Reports and Programme Improvement Plans for 2006/7 and 2007/8.

The Visitors were satisfied with the documentation provided.

3a Conclusions

9. Overall the panel were encouraged by the professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm of the course team and judges that the teaching and the facilities to be of high quality.
10. During the visit the Panel focussed on years 1 and 2 of the programme as all of the professional content required by the ABDO syllabus was covered in this period. The third year contains additional content required to obtain a BSc level award.
11. The Panel were pleased that a Blackboard system was available and were encouraged that students considered it to be a useful tool, although it is not currently utilised by all staff and students expressed a desire for additional content. The Panel would support further innovation and increased use of the facility by all staff within the department.
12. The Panel were aware of difficulties encountered by students in finding placements in the local area due to the high level of demand. Having discussed the issues with students and local employers, it became clear that if students were able to work for one whole day in the week, it would give employers the flexibility to take on a greater number of students. The Panel would strongly encourage the department to give consideration to restructuring the timetable to deliver the teaching in four days, enabling students to work in practice on the 5th day.
13. In addition, the Panel suggested that by extending the opening hours of the university clinic it would increase student's access to patients and provide an enhanced service to the local community. They would encourage further consideration being given to the feasibility of this.
14. The Panel found the level of Dispensing Optician input in to delivery and management of the programme disappointing. The Head of Department, the programme leader and a significant majority of full time staff within the department are Optometrists. In addition, for those modules with similar content to the Optometry programme, dispensing students are taught jointly with Optometry students. The Panel appreciate some benefits of this approach, but it was clear that the dispensing students are often being taught content which goes beyond that required for professional qualification as a Dispensing Optician and relates more to Optometry. This was considered to be positive by those students who intend to progress to optometry, but was a source of frustration for those who want to be registered Dispensing Opticians.
15. The Panel also noted that of the students and graduates they met, the majority had been unsuccessful in obtaining a place on an optometry course, which was their first choice and had been pro-actively encouraged to join the dispensing course as an alternative with the possibility of subsequently transferring to optometry. They had not been aware of dispensing as a profession in its own right before joining the course.
16. The Panel consider a more appropriate balance of Dispensing Optician input into the programme would address this issue and raise the course profile as a route to professional practice as a Dispensing Optician. It could increase demand from applicants as their first choice course rather than a fall back option for those unsuccessful in gaining an optometry place.
17. The Panel found that the system of obtaining student feedback via electronic questionnaires could not be used as an effective tool because of the low level of student returns. The panel would encourage the university to consider the effectiveness of the current consultation mechanisms with a view to improving the return rate.
18. The Panel noted that the department has an outstanding action in the Annual Programme Improvement Plan to review the effectiveness of the dispensing log book. This action has been listed as ongoing in the last two submissions and the Panel would recommend the department complete this action as soon as possible. Furthermore, despite staff workloads, more attention should be given to the Annual Programme Improvement Plan as a vehicle for delivering the departmental plan.
19. When reviewing the departments approach to quality assurance, the Panel found it difficult to fully appreciate discussions held at Programme Boards meetings as the minutes did not contain sufficient detail. It was also not clear whether External Examiners feedback had been considered and acted upon. The Panel would encourage the department to ensure that it has a sufficiently clear audit trail to show decision making and quality assurance processes.

20. When considering their recommendation for the length of a further approval period the Panel felt it necessary to consider the potential implications on the programme of changes that the Panel were made aware of during the visit.
21. In particular the Panel considered three issues crucial in their impact on the future of the programme:
- i) The impending retirement of the current Head of Department in summer 2009 followed by a period with an Acting Head of Department until a new permanent appointment is made.
 - ii) The current funding subsidy of £250,000 per annum for the programme expires in 2 years time and it is not currently known whether further funding will be granted.
 - iii) Developments in respect of NHS Contract for eye care in Scotland which may impact on the ongoing feasibility of the programme.
22. Given these forthcoming changes which may affect the department **the Visitors recommend** to the GOC that Glasgow Caledonian University Higher Diploma and BSc in Ophthalmic Dispensing Programmes be granted **2 years approval** subject to the following condition and recommendations, with the next visit taking place in 2011.
23. In addition from 2010 the University will be required to provide annual monitoring submissions in accordance with the GOC's new Annual Monitoring Scheme. Evidence of how the following condition has been met along with an update of progress against the recommendations should be reported in the first annual monitoring submission in 2010 and subsequent submissions as appropriate.

3b Condition

1. That current staffing levels, in particular the Dispensing Optician staffing base, are at least maintained.

3c Recommendations

1. To establish an increased Dispensing Optician input in to the leadership and teaching of the programme.
2. To make efforts to increase the profile of the course, particularly at school leaver level, as a route to becoming a qualified and practising registered Dispensing Optician.
3. The Panel would recommend no further integration with the optometry course in order to ensure an appropriate focus specifically on Ophthalmic Dispensing is maintained.
4. To give consideration to amending the timetabling and / or structure of the programme to enable students to work one whole full day in practice during the week.
5. To consider the feasibility of extending the opening hours of the university clinic to enable students greater access and the potential to attract a wider range of patients and create better links with the local community.
6. The Panel encourage further development of the Blackboard system and other new technologies to support students learning.
7. To examine current mechanisms for obtaining student feedback questionnaires to enable a better return and appropriate consideration of any issues.
8. That the division engages fully with the Annual Reporting process in order to gain maximum benefit from the system.
9. In line with the action contained within the Annual Programme Improvement Plan that the division reviews the effectiveness of the dispensing log book.
10. That the department maintains clearer and more detailed written records, in particular within minutes of Programme Board meetings and other university quality assurance processes, showing that External Examiner feedback is considered and acted upon.