

V(2)07

**GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL
Visit to
THE UNIVERSITY OF ULSTER
BSc Optometry Programme
13-15 MARCH 2007**

1a Acknowledgements

The Visitors wish to express their grateful thanks to the Vice Chancellor; Professor Richard Barnett, the Dean of the Faculty of Life & Health Sciences; Professor Hugh McKenna, the Head of Biomedical Sciences; Professor Valerie McKelvey-Martin, the Head of Subject for Optometry; Professor Roger Anderson, plus the departmental staff and the students for giving generously of their time and for their hospitality during the Visit.

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

1b Background Information

1. The University of Ulster is a multi-centred university located in Northern Ireland and has approximately 27,500 students. The University was established in 1984 after a merger with the New University of Ulster (1968, Coleraine) and Ulster Polytechnic (1971, Jordanstown).
2. The University's programme provision is the largest in Ireland and covers the arts, business, engineering, information technology, life and health sciences and management and social sciences. Programmes have a strong vocational element and the majority include a period of industrial or professional placement.
3. The University has four campuses located in Belfast, Coleraine, Magee in Derry and Jordanstown. There is a fifth 'virtual' campus known as Campus One which delivers online programmes, mostly at graduate level.
4. The Magee campus is a mixture of historic and new buildings near the centre of Derry and specialises in the arts, computing and electronics, as well as providing for education, nursing and Irish studies. The Belfast Campus is the home for the University's School of Arts and Design, while the Coleraine Campus acts as the administration headquarters and focuses on the delivery of science and humanity programmes.
5. The Jordanstown Campus is located near Jordanstown, just outside of Belfast and focuses on engineering, health and social sciences. The Jordanstown Campus includes a multidisciplinary clinic for physiotherapy, podiatry and optometry, including full dispensing facilities. The Clinic includes a common reception and waiting area to allow students to gain practical experience in a more 'practice-like' setting.
6. The University is particularly strong in the field of biomedical sciences, with a Centre for Molecular Bioscience located at the Coleraine Campus. The BSc (Hons) Optometry Programme is situated within the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences, within the School of Biomedical Sciences.
7. The last GOC Visit to the BSc (Hons) Optometry Programme was on the 23 October 2003 and a copy of the Recommendations and Conditions can be found in Appendix 1 of this Report.

1c Introduction - The 2007 Visit

8. This Report is of the Visit by the General Optical Council to Ulster University's BSc (Hons) Optometry Programme. The Visit took place over three days, from Tuesday 13 to Thursday 15 March 2007.
9. The Visitors were:
 - a. Mr R Broughton – Optometrist
 - b. Mr D Counter – Dispensing Optician
 - c. Professor R Davis – Educationalist
 - d. Mrs L Gerson – Optometrist
 - e. Dr R Harper - Optometrist
 - f. Dr G Harris – Layperson/Chair
 - g. Mr S A Sadiq – Ophthalmologist
10. The Visitors were accompanied by two GOC Officers.
11. 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 approved as recognised by the GOC for entry of successful students, following their pre-registration year, into the GOC's register of Optometrists.
12. The BSc (Hons) Optometry Programme has been established for 12 years and is a full time three year programme. The University's entry requirements for the programme are as follows:

A levels	Irish Leaving Certificate	BTEC National Diploma
AAB A minimum of 340 UCAS Tariff Points	AAAB A minimum of 340 UCAS Tariff Points	Pass overall with DDD (appropriate science disciplines only accepted)

13. The Optometry Programme recruits 30-32 students per year.
14. Each year of the Optometry Programme comprises six modules of study. Clinical skills are taught from the first year with an introduction to general eye examination techniques.
15. Prior to the Visit, the GOC received comprehensive pre-visit information from the University based on the GOC's Handbook 'Guidelines for the approval of Training Institutions – degrees in optometry' (the Handbook).

16. The Visitors conducted their assessments during the Visit applying the criteria and requirements as set out in the Handbook . A copy of the Aide Mémoire used by the Visitors is available on request to the GOC.
17. The Visitors were impressed with the quality of the pre-visit information received from the University and the mapping of this information to the Visit Handbook. As highlighted in the Acknowledgements, the Visitors commend the University for the quality and comprehensive presentation of the information provided.
18. In 2005 the University, through the programme's Course Committee, decided to change the curriculum of the optometry programme to increase the ocular therapeutics element in the final year. Changes were also made to other aspects of the programme and the University's quinquennial review was brought forward to revalidate the programme prior to its introduction. The new programme includes two full semester modules in ocular disease and ocular pharmacology and therapeutics in the third year. The Visual and Ophthalmic Optics have been moved from the second semester to the first semester in the first year. Visual Anatomy and Physiology has also been moved to the first year. Chemistry and mathematics - both optional half modules - have been dropped
19. These changes to the programme were put in place from the start of the 2006/2007 academic year. Students in the second and third years continue to complete the existing programme, while first year students have begun the revised programme from the academic year commencing October 2006.
20. The Visitors asked whether the changes to the programme had been reported to the GOC previously. The University informed the Visitors that the changes had not been sent to the GOC's Education Committee for consideration.
21. The University stated that they had not informed the GOC because, in the University's opinion, the changes to the programme were not of sufficient significance to require notification to the GOC. The Visitors agreed that they would consider the changes during the Visit before concluding whether the programme should have first been submitted to the GOC for consideration before the commencement of the new programme.
22. The Visitors subsequently concluded that the changes to the curriculum were of sufficient magnitude to require formal notification to the Education Committee of the GOC. Both the structure and the content of the programme have been changed significantly and this may materially affect the way that the GOCs' competencies are covered. It is therefore a Condition of continued approval that the University makes a separate submission to the GOC Education Committee by Monday 3 September 2007, providing details of the new curriculum for all years.

2a Conclusions

23. Overall the Visitors consider that a number of positive measures have been put in place by the University since the last GOC Visit in 2003. The Jordanstown Clinic offers excellent facilities for students and the teaching at the Causeway Hospital was very good. The Visitors agree that student support and guidance is excellent and commend the University on their teaching, learning and assessment methods.
24. However, the Visitors are concerned about a number of areas which required further work and development. These areas are indicated where appropriate throughout the Visit Report and reflected in the Conditions and Recommendations set out below.
25. **The Visitors recommend** to the General Optical Council the continued approval of the University of Ulster in respect of the BSc (Hons) Optometry Programme, under Section 12(1) of the Opticians Act 1989 (and amendments) for two years until a further Panel Visit in **March 2009**, subject to the following Conditions and Recommendations:

2b Conditions

26. That the University submits a report to the GOC by **Monday 12 November 2007**, on proposed changes to strengthen the procedure for recording numbers of students' patient experiences, in order to demonstrate that the numbers of patient experiences as set out in the GOC Handbook for Optometry Visits, meet the GOC's minimum criteria in all specialist categories for all students;
27. That the University develops and implements a robust, efficient and auditable process to monitor students' achievement of core competencies across the programme;
28. That the University strengthens the provision and management of students' hospital placements in order to assure that the required GOC minimum number of six sessions is met by all students;
29. That the University reviews and implements before the start of the next academic year, strengthened management arrangements for the hospital based ophthalmologist so as to enhance the teaching and learning of abnormal ocular conditions within the programme;
30. That the University makes a separate submission to the GOC Education Committee by **Monday 3 September 2007**, providing details of the new curriculum for all years.

2c Recommendations

That the University:

31. considers providing access to specialist clinics, such as dyslexia, diabetic screening, cataract and glaucoma clinics;
32. increases the potential of the student experience at the Jordanstown Clinic with respect to eye examinations, contact lens patients and dispensing;
33. considers the appointment of a dispensing optician to provide support across the programme;
34. increases the number of opportunities for contact lens patient episodes for 3rd year students;
35. develops and implements a protocol to ensure that in cases of staff absence there is a consistent approach to covering clinics and lectures so that students are not inconvenienced or disadvantaged;
36. actively encourages staff to extend their use of the virtual learning environment which will add value to the teaching and learning process;
37. includes a review of students' achievement of core competencies and a number of patient encounters by the end of the first semester for the third year, to ensure that where necessary, remedial action can be taken in a timely fashion and subsequent re-assessments made;
38. considers instituting a regular survey of recent graduates to inform further enhancement of the programme;
39. considers the introduction of grand and mini rounds to ensure that students have more opportunity to observe common conditions;
40. adapts student logbooks to ensure that a range of relevant dispensing episodes and their component elements can be captured and recorded;
41. considers making better use of existing optometric staff resource in the teach of BV.
42. implements consistency in its approach of recording patient experiences in the core competency logbook ensuring that all appropriate examinations are promptly recorded both from the University and the Jordanstown clinic;
43. considers implementing a central monitoring system to track the achievement of core competencies.