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**Visit to
THE UNIVERSITY OF BRADFORD
BSc Optometry Programme & Optometry Progression Course
3&4 MARCH 2009**

1A ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Visitors wish to express their grateful thanks to the Vice Chancellor Professor Mark Cleary, the Dean of Life Sciences Professor David Coates, Associate Dean Dr Nigel Lindsey, the Head of Financial Management Mrs Angela Dobrucki, Head of Optometry Dr Jim Gilchrist and Optometry Clinic Director Dr Graham Mouat, plus the department 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 and to the department for agreeing to participate in the pilot of the GOC's new annual monitoring scheme. The Visitors recognise the considerable work involved in preparing the documentation which was of great assistance to the Visitors in preparing for and during the Visit.

1B BACKGROUND TO THE VISIT

The last GOC full Panel Visit to Bradford University's BSc Optometry Programme was in 2003. The Optometry Career Progression Course has been subject to GOC Education Committee visits during its development and introduction. Its last visit was in October 2007.

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.

In addition, in 2009 the GOC will be introducing a new annual monitoring scheme. Bradford University agreed to pilot the scheme and completed the annual monitoring form as pre-visit information.

In accordance with the new scheme this visit was shorter and more focused on areas of risk as such a student patient numbers and clinical and hospital experience. Employer / supervisor questionnaires were circulated in advance of the visit rather than the Panel meeting with these representative groups.

The GOC Visitors to Bradford's BSc programme were:

- Professor Reginald Davis– Educationalist (Chair)
- Mr Chris Burton - Dispensing Optician
- Ms Angela Whittaker – Optometrist
- Professor Martin Rubenstein – Optometrist
- Dr Paul Baines - Ophthalmologist
- Miss Linda Kennaugh – GOC Officer

The Visitors considered the programme using the '*Guidelines for the Approval of Training Institutions Handbook*' (the Handbook), a copy of which is available on the GOC website.

During the Visit the Visitors met with the Vice Chancellor Professor Mark Cleary, the Dean of Life Sciences Professor David Coates, Associate Dean Dr Nigel Lindsey, the Head of Financial Management Mrs Angela Dobrucki, the Head of Optometry Dr Jim Gilchrist and the Optometry Clinic Director Dr Graham Mouat. The Visitors also met with academic teaching staff and a number of students from each year.

In addition to the above meetings, the Visitors observed the teaching and had a tour of the facilities.

1C INTRODUCTION

Since the last GOC Visit the Optometry Department has been subject to organisational change. The Division of Optometry is now part of the School of Life Sciences, and the Optometry Division and Vision Science Research Focus Group together comprise the Bradford School of Optometry and Vision Science (BSOVS). The Head of Optometry is also Head of BSOVS.

The Division of Optometry offers two optometry programmes, a BSc Optometry Programme and the Optometry Career Progression Programme.

The BSc programme is a full-time, 3 year modular course leading to a Bachelor of Science (BSc) degree with honours. The entry requirements for the programme are 340 points (AAB) including a minimum of 240 (AA) from two of the following subjects: biology (or human biology), chemistry, mathematics or physics at GCE advanced level. General Studies or Key Skills are not accepted.

The Optometry Career Progression Programme is designed for qualified Dispensing Opticians who have been working in practice for at least 2 years. This course allows Dispensing Opticians to gain a qualification in Optometry in one year's full time study. This course has lower numbers than the BSc programme. It achieved an intake of only 7 students in 2007 but the 2008 intake was much stronger with 17 students. Of the 2007 intake 5 students graduated with a 2:1 or 1st class degree.

2 CONCLUSIONS

The Panel were very impressed with the quality of teaching and the positive comments received from students and staff about the programme. The Career Progression programme is continuing to develop, having seen an increase in student numbers over the past two years and good success rates.

During the Visit the Panel did identify a few areas they felt needed further consideration by the University.

In respect of resourcing and staffing issues the Panel were concerned about the potential pressure they may be placed on the department to make efficiency savings. The required level of savings could only be achieved through a reduction in staff levels or increase in SSR, and this would have a damaging effect on quality of the provision and would be considered unacceptable by the GOC.

The Panel also learnt of concerns within the department around the consequences of a previous move to a centralised approach to administrative support, particularly in respect of the loss of identity / reduced visibility of the department and an extra burden on teaching staff created by a tendency for them to undertake more administrative tasks themselves following the changes to the support arrangements. The Panel were encouraged by and supportive of the School of Life Sciences' intention to conduct a review as to the effectiveness of the changes to the way in which support services are provided to the departments within the School. The outcome of this review should be included in a future Annual Monitoring Report from the University.

When considering clinical experience during the Visit, the Panel were concerned as to the proportion of records within student log books that related to volunteer patients rather than 'real' patients. Whilst the Panel commend the university for the use of volunteer patients to enhance the student experience they must also stress the need and importance of increasing numbers of 'real' patients seen by students, in particular in primary care, contact lens and dispensing clinics. The GOC consider it to be unacceptable for more than 3 or 4 of the total recorded patient experiences to be volunteer patients.

It also became apparent during the Visit that the department had not updated its course documentation following the publication of the revised GOC Handbook and Core Competencies in March 2008. The Panel appreciated that there had been confusion regarding the date in which the revised competencies had come in to effect but would stress the importance of the documentation being updated as soon as possible ready for the next intake. In particular, the log book must be updated to ensure all of the current and future students are being signed off against the most up to date set of GOC Core competencies.

Overall, the Panel had a very positive impression of the programmes and are confident that the department will have no difficulties in implementing the required changes in the near future. The

new annual monitoring scheme provides a suitable avenue for the department to report progress on these issues in Winter 2009.

3 APPROVAL, CONDITIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The Visitors recommend to the General Optical Council that it continue to approve Bradford University as a training institution, under Section 12(1) of the Opticians Act 1989 for a further **5 years** with the next Visit taking place in **March 2014**, subject to submission of satisfactory Annual Monitoring Reports and the following Condition and Recommendations:

3A CONDITIONS:

That the University:

- i. Ensures that the course documentation is updated to reflect the revised GOC Stage 1 Core Competencies, which came in to effect in March 2008. This condition must be met before the start of the next academic year in September 2009 and the GOC will need to receive copies of the relevant documents by the end of August 2009.
- ii. Increase the number of 'real' patients students see in the university clinic to enable every student to meet the required patient numbers under all the categories listed in Section 2.3.3 of the GOC Handbook.
- iii. That the current level of staffing within the department is at least maintained to ensure that current standards are maintained.

3B RECOMMENDATIONS

That the University:

- i. Reviews the student logbook to ensure it enables effective tracking and recording of achievement of the GOC core competencies
- ii. Conducts a review of clerical support to satisfy itself that the level and availability of support to department staff is sufficient and accessible.

In 2009 the GOC will formally establish a system of annual reporting and this will be the vehicle through which the University must report progress against the Condition and Recommendations of this Visit Report. The first annual monitoring form will be due in January 2010.

The Visitors would like to emphasise that given the excellent environment that has been generated 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 department will be able to fully satisfy the Condition and Recommendations identified.