General Optical Council

Annual Monitoring & Reporting – 2018/19

Sector Report

June 2020

Annual Monitoring and Reporting Sector Report 2018/19

1. Summary

1.1. This year's annual monitoring and reporting (AMR) process identified several areas of strength in the optical education sector, particularly in optometry (OO) programmes.

1.2. OO programmes reported a high ratio of applications to admissions, strong academic qualifications (average offer) amongst prospective students and high levels of student progression and attainment. Ophthalmic dispensing (DO) programmes reported high levels of student progression but appear to have experienced difficulty in recruiting students. National Student Survey (NSS) scores for OO and DO programmes outperform the national average.

1.3. Independent prescribing (IP) and contact lens optician (CLO) programmes provided limited comparable information in this year's process because they are one-year programmes, rendering student progression data unhelpful. Additionally, student attainment is hard to assess in CLO programmes as these programmes prepare students for awarding body exams and do not set their own internal final exams; not all CLO programmes provided data for their students' attainment in awarding body exams. However, IP programmes showed a high level of student attainment in their internal exams.

1.4. The attainment data provided by awarding bodies is highly complex due to the nature of their programmes. This limits useful comparison with the other programmes and hinders interpretation. However, a high proportion of OO and IP students passed the awarding body exams within the permitted timescale, whereas pass rates for DO and CLO awarding body exams were much lower.

1.5. Our analysis also identified several systemic risks to the optical education sector and the wider optical sector. These include:

- sustainability of student numbers, particularly for DO programmes;
- resourcing and investment, including staffing and equipment;
- the comparability of progression and attainment data across routes to registration; and
- data and information management.

1.6. Recommended actions to monitor/mitigate these sector risks are below. We will:

- request that programmes inform us of their cohort sizes at the beginning of the academic year;
- remind providers that they must notify us of any reportable events and changes to their programmes, including departure of staff, and their contingency plans to ensure our standards are met, in line with our policy;
- work with awarding bodies to request attainment data in a format that allows easier assessment of student attainment; and
- remind providers to explain anomalous and unexpected data in their AMR submission particularly, but not limited to, student admissions, progression, attainment and feedback.

2. Background

2.1. The GOC (also referred to as “we” in this document) are required to “keep informed of the nature of the instruction given by any approved training establishment to persons training as optometrists or dispensing opticians and of the assessments on the results of which approved qualifications are granted”, under s.13(1) Opticians Act 1989. Qualifications leading to a registrable therapeutic / independent prescribing (IP) or contact lens optician (CLO) specialism are also included within the GOC’s regulatory scope.

2.2. In executing this duty, we regulate and quality assure all elements of a ‘route to registration’. The term ‘route to registration’ describes all elements of training, learning and assessment that a provider(s) must deliver for its students to meet the GOC’s requirements, and to enable students to be eligible to register with the GOC as an optometrist (OO) or dispensing optician (DO), or with an IP or CLO specialty, upon successful completion of their training and assessment. A route to registration must be comprised of the following elements:

- an academic qualification (academic study and practical experience);
- practice-based learning (supervised external placement(s)); and
- qualifying assessments.

2.3. A route to registration may be delivered by one or more provider. For example, a student may study for an academic award at a university or college, followed by undertaking practice-based learning and/or qualifying assessments with a different provider, typically an awarding body. There are also alternative models such as integrated models whereby one provider is responsible for the student’s progression all the way through to their final assessments where they become eligible to apply to join the GOC fully-qualified register or specialty register.

2.4. As part of our approval and quality assurance (A&QA) of education establishments and qualifications (referred to as ‘providers’ and ‘programmes’ respectively in this report), all providers are required to demonstrate how their programme(s) satisfy our requirements, as currently listed in our handbooks.

2.5. We seek assurance from providers in several ways, including quality assurance visits, notification of reportable events and changes to programmes, conditions management, and the annual compulsory AMR submission.

2.6. Failure by a programme to submit an AMR form on time, or submitting incomplete or inaccurate data, is treated seriously, and may result in us undertaking additional quality assurance activities in relation to that programme. This may include actions that may ultimately lead to a withdrawal of GOC approval for a programme.

3. Annual Monitoring and Reporting process

3.1. Providers were required to report information pertaining primarily to the period 1 September 2018 – 31 August 2019.

3.2. All GOC-approved programmes (OO, DO, IP and CLO programmes and awarding bodies) were required to complete and submit a standard form. The form requested information relating to programme changes, programme delivery (including risks to delivery), lessons learned and good practice.

3.3. We issued AMR forms to providers on 15 October 2019. Providers were required to submit a completed form by 17 January 2020. The period from 15 October 2019 – 17 January 2020 is referred to as the 'reporting period'.

3.4. Every AMR return must be signed by a 'Responsible Officer'. The Responsible Officer is a staff member with sufficient authority to represent and bind the institution and bears ultimate responsibility for the information submitted in the return. The Responsible Officer must only sign off the form when they are satisfied that the information gives a true and fair account of the programme.

3.5. Following the end of the reporting period, we analysed the information to identify:

- updates regarding key events and changes at individual programmes;
- current risks and issues relating to individual programmes;
- themes, strengths, and risks within the optical education sector;
- the diversity of students within the optical sector;
- examples of good practice and lessons learnt within the sector; and
- ways in which the GOC's approval and quality assurance activities could be further developed.

3.6. This sector report provides a high-level summary of the outcomes of the 2018/19 AMR process in order to identify key themes. In addition to this report, we will produce a short report for each programme (referred to as a 'programme report') to provide specific feedback regarding the programme's submission.

3.7. The analysis and outcomes are based upon the information and data as calculated and submitted by the programmes. We have not sought to externally verify the information submitted.

3.8. We will consider feedback from stakeholders regarding the 2018/19 AMR process and use this to help refine the AMR process for 2019/20 and subsequent years. We seek to develop our data capabilities to enable effective oversight and assurance of optical education programmes, which will include standardising the data submitted to allow effective comparison between programmes. At present, we have analysed the data submitted by programmes to identify trends and undertake statistical analysis.

3.9. The publication of this report closes the 2018/19 AMR process.

4. Themes

4.1. Compliance with this year's AMR process was very good, with all 33 returns submitted and 30 (91%) submitted by the 17 January 2020 deadline. This represents an improvement from the 2017/18 AMR process, when 27 (87%) returns were submitted by the deadline. Responses to additional queries were generally prompt. No significant compliance breaches occurred.

Student applications, progression, and attainment

4.2. Academic (non-awarding body) programmes appear to have high rates of student progression and student attainment. For those programmes offering honours degrees, performance in the National Student Survey (NSS) remains high. OO and DO programmes' average scores across most NSS categories exceeded both the national average and the average for 'Subjects Allied with Medicine' (as defined by Unistats).

4.3. On average, OO programmes reported robust application and entry figures. DO programmes have reported declining admissions. Both types of programme demonstrate high levels of student progression and attainment.

4.4. IP and CLO programmes provided limited information regarding student progression and attainment because they are one-year programmes preparing students for awarding body exams. The data provided by academic programmes raised no significant concerns as applications remained steady and most students completed the programmes. Attainment data provided by the IP awarding body shows that pass rates remain high among IP students. However, the pass rate for the CLO awarding body raises concerns because it is much lower than the completion rates for the CLO programmes.

4.5. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) was used by a minority of programmes in 2018/19. Nine academic programmes and two awarding body programmes reported applying RPL in the period, most of which were used for a small number of applications. For example, RPL was awarded to 59 applicants across six OO programmes, and to 62 applicants across three DO programmes, with 58 of the DO applicants receiving RPL at one DO institution.

Student numbers

4.6. Student numbers were identified by programmes as an area of risk to the optical education sector. Whilst OO programmes nevertheless continued to report good student application numbers, DO programmes reported lower application numbers and declining cohort sizes. Low student numbers were identified as a risk to the sustainability of DO programmes, with new optometry provision cited as a significant factor.

4.7. Student numbers for programmes with a student number cap are generally below that cap, with numbers for DO programmes markedly below the cap.

Resourcing and investment

4.8. Resourcing of programmes, in terms of maintaining adequate staffing, accommodation and clinical equipment, has been highlighted as a significant risk. External factors, such as Brexit and COVID-19, have the potential to exacerbate this risk. It is important for providers to be mindful of this and to ensure that we are fully sighted on any significant events or changes that arise, in line with our notification of reportable events and changes policy.

Risk and information management

4.9. Risk analyses were generally more comprehensive than those accompanying the 2017/18 AMR process. However, two programmes omitted risk analyses and appeared confused by the concept.

4.10. This year, providers were asked to include a SWOT analysis. All providers complied with this request and most SWOT analyses were comprehensive.

4.11. Key strengths emerging from the SWOT analysis included the longstanding reputations and excellent NSS scores of many programmes. Programmes' high operating costs were identified as a weakness. The GOC's Education Strategic Review was seen as presenting opportunities as well as threats to providers.

4.12. There was variance in the reporting of data regarding the admission, progression and attainment of students on programmes. For example, surprising or anomalous figures sometimes lacked proper discussion or explanation.

Student progression and attainment data

4.13. There were differences in how student attainment has been measured and reported across different programmes, in particular between 'academic' programmes and 'awarding body' programmes. These differences have meant that we are unable to accurately capture and compare student progression through the different elements of a route to registration (other than for fully integrated (single provider) routes to registration). This problem, resulting from routes to registration consisting of several elements delivered by different providers was identified following the 2017/18 process and has not yet been resolved.

4.14. It is recommended that the GOC should set out a standardised format for awarding bodies to report attainment, to align as closely with established reporting data sets already used in higher education.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) data

4.15. Providers were asked to submit EDI data together with any widening participation initiatives in operation.

4.16. EDI data showed that most OO and DO students were female and of asian ethnicity.

4.17. Data submitted provided limited information concerning students' ages because some age groupings were very broad. This is a particular limitation when examining the age profiles of IP and CLO student cohorts. We will address this matter for the 2019/20 AMR process.

5. Recommendations & actions

5.1. In order to monitor/mitigate the risks identified in this report and continue to improve our AMR process, we will:

- request that programmes inform the GOC of cohort sizes at the beginning of the academic year;
- remind providers that they must immediately notify us of any reportable events and changes to their programmes, including departure of staff, and their contingency plans to ensure our standards are met, in line with our policy;
- work with awarding bodies to request attainment data in a format that allows easier assessment of student attainment;
- remind programmes to use the AMR form's free text sections to discuss anomalous and unexpected data particularly, but not limited to, student admissions, progression, attainment and feedback;
- consider taking additional steps across IP programmes to gain greater assurance over risk management, quality assurance and governance (including the availability and management of data) of programmes;
- review how the 2018/19 AMR reporting process has operated and seek feedback from key stakeholders. Based on this, we will make appropriate refinements and enhancements for the 2019/20 AMR process;
- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities of quality assurance visits and annual monitoring; and
- use the information obtained in the AMR to contribute to our Education Strategic Review.

6. Programme findings

Set out below is a summary of our findings for each programme type, as follows:

- Optometry
- Independent prescribing
- Ophthalmic dispensing
- Contact lens opticians
- Awarding bodies (OO and IP)
- Awarding bodies (DO and CLO)

Optometry

Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all optometry (OO) programmes, excluding the optometry awarding body programme.

1. Themes

1.1. Overall, the information submitted indicates good performance amongst optometry programmes in several academic metrics. However, resources for staff, equipment and facilities present risks across programmes.

1.2. Applications for OO programmes remain buoyant and there remains a considerable range of small, medium and large cohort sizes.

1.3. In general, student progression through OO programmes remains high. Student attainment is very high, with a mean of 95.6% of students obtaining a 2.2 or better. This is similar to the corresponding figure of 96.9% for 2017/18.

2. Key data – Optometry programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Proportion of applicants admitted	9.8%	20.1%	64.6%
Average UCAS points offer	116.5	135.6	162.0
First year progression	77.0%	92.3%	100.0%
Progression to following year	77.9%	92.5%	98.0%
Successful completion	88.0%	97.7%	100.0%
Degree – 2:2 or better	83.5%	95.6%	100.0%

3. Observations

3.1. Admissions to OO programmes remain buoyant, with applications far exceeding the number of places available. OO programmes admitted a mean of 20.1% of applicants, which was similar to the figure for 2017/18.

3.2. With one exception, all OO programmes admitted between 9.8% and 23.3% of applicants to their programme. The outlier admitted 64.6% of applicants: this was a new provider whose programme gained provisional approval only shortly before the beginning of the academic year and recruited all students through the UCAS clearing process.

3.3. The mean academic offer made by OO programmes to prospective students was 135.6 UCAS tariff points which approximately equates to AAB grades at A-Level. This was slightly lower than the mean of 146.1 points (AAA) in 2017/18. The range was from 116.5 UCAS points (equivalent to BBB) to 162 UCAS points (equivalent to A*A*A).

3.4. The strength of OO programmes' admissions is shown by the large number of programmes whose cohort sizes are close to the GOC's cap on student numbers: In 2018/19, the Year 1 cohorts were large enough to fill 90% of the GOC's cap

in six programmes. Eight programmes recruited 90% of their Year 1 cap for the 2019/20 academic year.

3.5. The size of individual optometry programme cohorts varies significantly. For example, the 2018/19 Year 1 cohort size varied from 30 to 137 students. The mean cohort sizes across 2018/19 was 80 students (Year 1), 84 students (Year 2), 78 students (Year 3), and 27 students (Year 4 where relevant).

3.6. The combined Year 1 cohort size for all OO programmes remains stable: there were 905 Year 1 OO students in 2017/18, 885 in 2018/19, and 933 in 2019/20.

3.7. Student performance remains strong on OO programmes. A mean of 92.3% (89.2% in 2017/18) of students progressed to the second year, and a mean of 92.5% (89.9% in 2017/18) of students progressed to the following year of the programme overall. An average of 97.7% (96.9% in 2017/18) of students successfully completed the programme. There is a low variance for these three categories, with overall progression rates exceeding 85% for all providers except one.

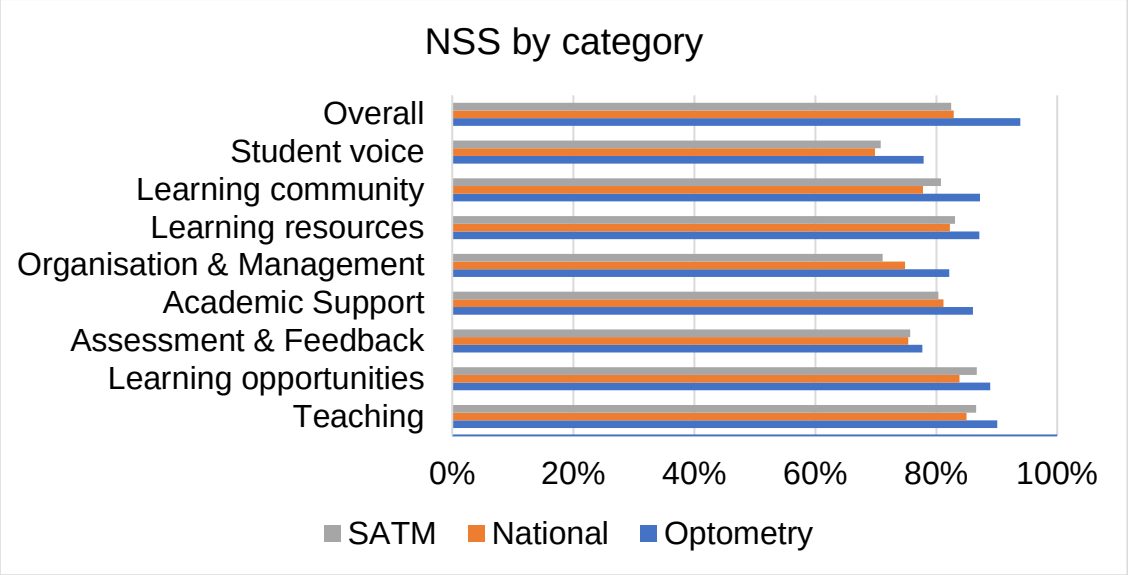
3.8. All programmes provided EDI data, although the quality of data was variable. For example, some programmes adopt different, often broader, classifications for age group and ethnic group when collecting this data.

3.9. EDI data showed that 67% of students were female, and 56% of students were Asian. However, there is evidence of local variation (reflecting the local demographic) with one provider reporting that 76% of its students were white.

3.10. Student attainment was excellent. A mean of 95.6% (96.9% in 2017/18) of students obtained a 2.2 degree or better, with over 90% of students attaining this standard in nine programmes. Few students failed the programme: an average of 2.6% (1.3% in 2017/18) of students failed, and all but one institution had fewer than 4% of students failing. The outlying programme had 16.5% of students failing, but many of these students are expected to successfully complete their degrees after resitting the failed elements.

3.11. Student satisfaction was high. By category[1], the OO mean score in the National Student Survey (NSS) for all categories exceeded both the national average and the average for 'Subjects Allied to Medicine' (SATM), which includes OO programmes. The averages by category are illustrated in in the chart below.

[1] An explanation of the category groupings is provided at Appendix 2.



3.12. OO programmes perform particularly well in the NSS in relation to teaching, learning opportunities, academic support, learning resources, and learning community, as well as on overall student satisfaction. NSS scores relating to student voice and assessment & feedback were poorer, but this observation seems to mirror that of students on other programmes.

3.13. There do not appear to be any significant systemic risks to OO programmes at present, however all programmes have identified competition from new OO provision as a risk to their own programme.

3.14. External factors, such as Brexit and COVID-19, have the potential to increase systemic risk amongst OO programmes.

3.15. All providers cited uncertainties and costs created by GOC's Education Strategic Review as a potential threat, but many also noted that it could lead to more opportunities to develop their programmes.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities; and
- consider taking additional steps across OO programmes to gain greater assurance over risk management and governance (including the availability and management of data) of programmes.

Independent Prescribing

Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all independent prescribing and therapeutic prescribing programmes (IP) programmes, excluding the IP awarding body programme.

1. Themes

1.1. The quality and depth of the risk analyses and data submitted by IP programmes is variable.

1.2. IP programmes are not covered by the National Student Survey and few programmes reported the results of internal surveys.

2. Key data – IP programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Applicants admitted	82.8%	92.2%	100.0%
Attainment – pass or better	93.0%	98.4%	100.0%

3. Observations

3.1. IP programmes continue to admit a high proportion of applicants: 92.2% of applicants (compared to 90.4% in 2017/18) were admitted in 2018/19.

3.2. The size of IP programme cohorts varies significantly: the average Year 1 cohort size was 41 in 2018/19, but varied from 14 to 136 students.

3.3. An average of 98.4% of students passed the IP programme, with 3 of the 5 programmes having a pass rate of 100%. This represents a high level of success and exceeds the figure of 91.3% for 2017/18.

3.4. There was however some variance in the amount of data submitted regarding the admission, progression and attainment of students on IP programmes, This variance probably results from the structure of some IP programmes, with some providers admitting students to specific modules rather than full programmes, and the final examination being set by an external awarding body.

3.5. The range of EDI data provided was also variable, with some providers adopting broader classifications for ethnic group. However, the data showed that most IP students were white and aged 30 years or above.

3.6. IP programmes do not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS). A number of IP programmes have indicated that they undertake alternative work to obtain feedback and monitor student satisfaction with the programme, but few reported these results.

3.7. The quality and depth of the risk analyses provided for IP programmes were variable.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- consider taking additional steps across IP programmes to gain greater assurance over risk management, quality assurance and governance (including the availability and management of data) of programmes. Steps might include offering more advice on risk analysis and reminding programmes to discuss anomalous and unexpected statistics more explicitly;
- remind IP programmes of the expectation to collect student feedback information and that these programmes are required to include this as part of AMR; and
- work with IP programmes to improve the comparability of their student progression and attainment data.

Ophthalmic Dispensing

Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all ophthalmic dispensing (DO) programmes, excluding the DO awarding body programme.

1. Themes

1.1. DO programmes demonstrate good student progression throughout the programmes. Student attainment is also good.

1.2. DO programmes generally performed well in the National Student Survey (NSS) and, in most categories, out-performed both the national average and the average for Subjects Allied with Medicine.

1.3. DO programmes highlighted that student numbers were an ongoing concern at several DO programmes. This view was expressed in the 2017/18 annual monitoring process and is reinforced by low student recruitment to many DO programmes this year.

1.4. DO programmes believe that student recruitment is being challenged by a range of factors, including new optometry provision and Brexit.

1.5. Programmes also noted high rates of staff turnover and difficulties in recruiting, retaining, and replacing programme staff.

2. Key data – DO programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Applicants admitted	21.3%	60.4%	76.6%
Average UCAS points offer[2]	0	57.4	105.0
First year progression	59.5%	78.1%	97.4%
Progression to following year	66.7%	89.0%	100.0%
Successful completion	46.0%	88.3%	100.0%
Award – 2:2 or better / pass or better (see 3.12 below)	86.0%	91.7%	100.0%

3. Observations

3.1. DO programmes admitted a mean of 60.4% of applicants. This is similar to the figure for 2017/18 (59.3%), however there is significant variance across DO programmes, with one programme admitting over 90% of its applicants, three between 50% and 76%, and one below 22%.

3.2. There is wide variance in the mean UCAS tariff points offer made to students entering DO programmes, but the offer for 2018/19 appears to be slightly lower than 2017/18. The average UCAS offer was 57.4 points (equivalent to DEE at A-

[2] DO programmes that do not require UCAS points for entry are recorded as a zero value.

Level) in 2018/19. This compares to an average of 64 points (DDE) in 2017/18. However, the mean offer for individual DO programmes varies from 105 UCAS points (BCC at A-Level) to 24 points (D at A-Level). This wide range was also noted in 2017/18, when the range extended from 180 UCAS points (AAAB – AABB at A-level) to 24 points (D at A-Level). Two DO programmes do not require UCAS tariff points for entry to the programme but rather base entry requirements on GCSE attainment and/or professional experience.

3.3. The mean cohort sizes across 2018/19 were 58 students (Year 1), 62 students (Year 2), and 63 students (Year 3). The size of individual DO programme cohorts varies significantly. For example, the 2018/19 Year 2 cohort size varies from 7 to 229 students. However, this variance is caused by two outlier programmes, and the cohort size of the remaining five programmes are broadly similar.

3.4. Admissions to DO programmes almost always fell far below the GOC's cap on student admissions, showing that admissions are low. One programme admitted sufficient students in 2018/19 to fill 90% of the permitted intake, but all others admitted between 43% and 68% of the cap. These figures fell further for the 2019/20 academic year, with all programmes admitting only 42% to 58% of the cap. Year 1 cohorts on most DO programmes were 26% to 39% lower in 2019/20 than in 2018/19.

3.5. The combined Year 1 cohort size of all DO programmes has also fallen. There were 405 Year 1 DO students in 2017/18, 346 in 2018/19, and 304 in 2019/20, i.e. a decline of 25% between 2017/18 and 2019/20.

3.6. The Year 2 cohort of one provider is augmented by the admission of some applicants directly to year 2. However, the Year 2 cohort of this provider remained 15% lower in 2019/20 than in 2018/19.

3.7. The admissions data demonstrates that DO programmes are struggling to recruit students, which presents a significant risk to the workforce.

3.8. All programmes provided EDI data.

3.9. EDI data showed that 65% of DO students were female. Students' age ranges and ethnicity varied according to the programme, with distance-learning programmes recruiting higher proportions of mature students and white students.

3.10. Student performance remains good, although less impressive than the performance on OO programmes, and the performance of Year 1 cohorts was less than in the previous year. A mean of 78.1% (89.3% in 2017/18) of students on DO programmes progressed to the second year of the programme. A mean of 89% (90.5% in 2017/18) of all DO students progressed to the following year of DO programmes, and a mean of 88.3% (85.9% in 2017/18) of students successfully completed their programmes.

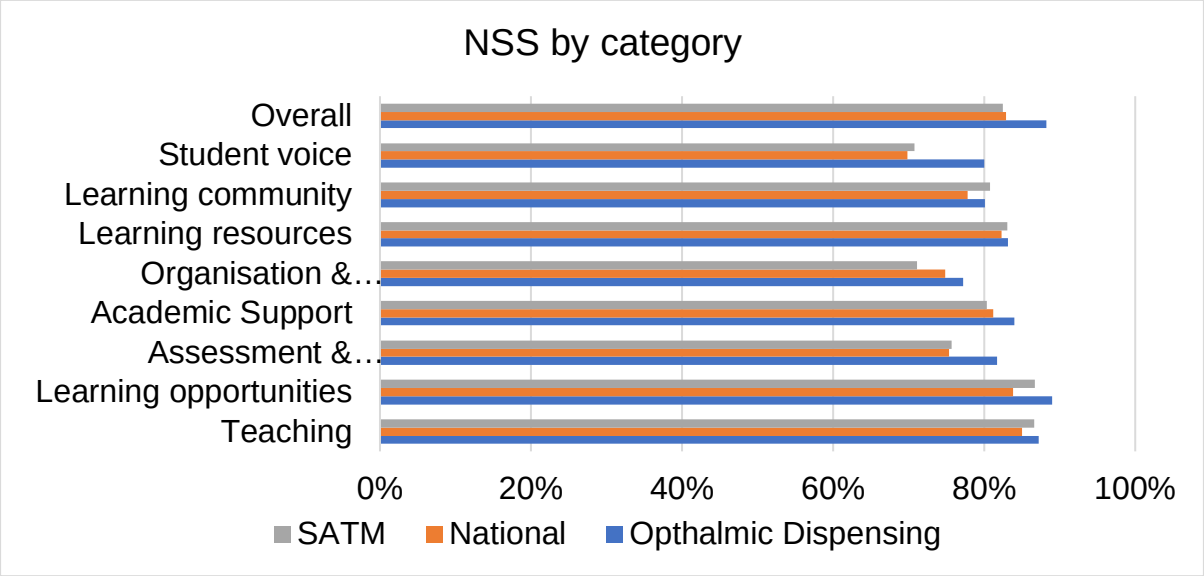
3.11. There was greater variance in progression rates for DO programmes than for OO programmes. One DO programme saw an improvement of 13 percentage points

from the previous year, but another saw a sharp drop of 25 percentage points. Progression from year 1 to year 2 declined in four of the six programmes by between 9 and 25 percentage points, in contrast to OO programmes whose Year 1 to Year 2 progression rates improved in 6 programmes by between 4 and 11 percentage points.

3.12. Analysis of student attainment is difficult for DO programmes because not all awards are classified in the same way (Foundation Degrees use 'pass', 'merit', and 'distinction' grades) and some are not classified at all. A mean of 91.7% (89.4% in 2017/18) of students obtained either a 2:2 or better (for honours degrees), or a pass or better (for non-honours qualifications). Attainment of 2:2 degrees and above varied from 86% to 100% at institutions where degrees were awarded.

3.13. By category[3], the average score for DO programmes in the National Student Survey (NSS) is above both the national average and the average for 'Subjects Allied to Medicine' (SATM), which includes DO programmes for all categories except 'Learning community'. The average by category are illustrated in the chart below.

3.14. DO programmes perform particularly well in the NSS in relation to teaching, and learning opportunities, as well as for overall student satisfaction.



3.15. DO programmes identified declining student numbers as a risk to the sustainability of the programme. This risk is being driven mainly by new optometry provision. It was suggested that widening access to OO could reduce the potential DO student population, further impacting student numbers.

[3] An explanation of the category groupings is provided at Appendix 2.

3.16. In addition to student numbers, staffing was highlighted as a risk in several submissions. Some programmes noted a high turnover of programme staff, with further difficulties in recruiting or replacing staff.

3.17. Several programmes identified infrastructure-related risks to the programme. A number noted ageing equipment and challenges in replacing the equipment required to deliver the programme.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- consider taking additional steps across DO programmes to gain greater assurance over risk management, quality assurance and governance (including the availability and management of data) of programmes. Steps might include offering more advice on risk analysis and reminding programmes to discuss anomalous and unexpected statistics more explicitly; and
- consider taking additional steps to obtain greater assurance in relation to specific risks identified within this report, such as student numbers, staffing and investment for programmes.

Contact Lens Opticians

Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all contact lens optician (CLO) programmes other than the CLO awarding body programme.

1. Themes

1.1. CLO programmes submitted limited data regarding the admission, progression, attainment and number of students on CLO programmes.

1.2. There are considerable differences in cohort size amongst CLO programmes (with a cohort size between 8 and 91 students), with one large provider and the other two programmes being significantly smaller. This wide range was noted in 2017/18, when cohorts varied from 9 to 76 students.

2. Key data – CLO programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Applicants admitted	81.3%	88.0%	100%

3. Observations

3.1. All CLO programmes admitted over 80% of their applicants, with one admitting all its applicants.

3.2. Cohort sizes vary. One provider recruited a cohort of 91 students, but the cohort size for both of the other CLO programmes was fewer than 14 students.

3.3. CLO programmes do not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS). All programmes have indicated that they undertake alternative work to obtain feedback and monitor student satisfaction with the programme but did not disclose any relevant data.

3.4. The range of EDI data provided was variable, with some providers adopting broader classifications for age group and ethnic group. However, the data showed that a majority of CL students were white and aged 30 years or above. The age bracket is in line with expectation considering the average age for DO cohorts.

3.5. It is difficult to obtain meaningful student attainment data for CLO programmes because students take examinations set by the awarding body, not the training providers. Furthermore, many students ‘stagger’ their theoretical and practical examinations, taking different parts of the examination at different times. However, two CLO programmes submitted details of their students’ pass rates in the professional exams. These showed that attainment is variable, with pass rates in different theory papers varying from 59% to 89% for one provider, and 73% to 91% for another.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- consider taking additional steps across CLO programmes to gain greater assurance over risk management, quality assurance and governance (including the availability and management of data) of programmes. Steps might include offering more advice on risk analysis and reminding programmes to discuss anomalous and unexpected statistics more explicitly; and
- work with CLO programmes to improve the comparability of their student progression and attainment data.

Awarding Body (Optometry and Independent Prescribing)

Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to the (standalone) OO and IP awarding body programmes.

1. Themes

1.1. The pass rates submitted by awarding bodies were calculated on differing bases from each other and from academic programme pass rates. To some extent this reflects the different nature of their roles. We will continue to discuss this with programmes to ensure the comparability of student progression and attainment data.

2. Key data – 2018/19 attainment data

Programme	Pass rate
Optometry (27-month)	96.1%
Independent prescribing	93.1%

3. Attainment data

3.1. Due to the nature of the awarding body programmes and the format of this year's AMR form, each awarding body has provided attainment data on differing bases, i.e. the basis for each calculation has been different. This makes comparison with academic programmes, and between awarding body programmes, challenging and restricted.

3.2. For clarity, an explanation of the attainment data for the OO and IP awarding bodies is set out below.

3.3. The OO awarding body programme pass rate is calculated on a different basis and for an alternative time period to all other programmes. This is due to the structure and timing of the programme. Reporting attainment data on this basis allowed the OO awarding body programme to report data that they consider to be most reflective of attainment on the programme.

3.4. The 27-month pass rate reported above for the OO awarding body programme is the overall pass rate for students[4] completing the programme during the 2018/19 period, i.e. enrolling on the programme in the enrolment year running 1 June 2016 – 31 May 2017. The pass rate represents the proportion of students that successfully completed the programme within 27 months of their date of enrolment.

3.5. The average time taken to complete the OO awarding body programme was 15 months. However, other than the 27-month limit, time taken to complete the OO

[4] Individuals attending the IP and OO awarding body programmes are referred to by the awarding body as 'trainees'. The term 'trainees' is equivalent to 'student' on other programmes, as used elsewhere in this document.

awarding body programme is not considered to be a measure of student performance by the OO awarding body programme. Time taken to complete the programme may be affected by a range of factors such as supervisor or assessor availability, a change in practice or supervisor, and a student's personal circumstances. In addition to this, final assessment sessions are available at fixed points in the year and not at regular intervals (January, March, July, September). A student may take longer to complete the programme due to the timing of the next available assessment. The GOC is interested in the success rates for each assessment which could indicate particular concerns regarding specific areas of education and training which require more focus, or regarding the quality of support available to students during their education and training.

3.6. The IP awarding body programme reported a high average pass rate of 93.1% across three sittings (November 2018, April 2019, and June 2019) in the 2018/19 period. This is a slight improvement from the figure for 2017/18 (90.7%). The first-time pass rate in 2018/19 was 86.8%.

4. Observations

4.1. The OO and IP awarding body programmes do not take part in the National Student Survey (NSS). These awarding body programmes undertake alternative activities to capture and monitor trainee feedback on the programmes but did not provide data from these activities. We understand that feedback is used to continually improve the programmes. The awarding body is planning to introduce online surveys and reference groups for students and employers in 2020, in response to the outcomes of a recent GOC visit.

5. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- consider taking additional steps across IP programmes to gain greater assurance over risk management, quality assurance and governance (including the availability and management of data) of programmes; and
- work with awarding body programmes with the view to ensure the comparability of their student progression and attainment data, and to identify any trends in the examinations data.

Awarding Body (Dispensing & Contact Lens Opticians)

Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to the (standalone) DO and CLO awarding body programmes.

1. Themes

1.1. The pass rates submitted by awarding bodies were calculated on differing bases from each other and from academic programme pass rates. To some extent this reflects the different nature of their roles and the complexity of the awarding bodies' examination structures. We will continue to discuss this with programmes to ensure the comparability of student progression and attainment data.

2. Key data – 2018/19 student attainment data

Programme	Pass rate
Dispensing – Practical	17%
Contact Lens – Practical	38%

3. Student attainment data

3.1. Due to the nature of the awarding body programmes and the format of this year's AMR form, each awarding body has provided student attainment data on differing bases, i.e. the basis for each calculation has been different. This makes comparison with academic programmes, and between awarding body programmes, challenging. It also limits the value of such comparisons.

3.2. For clarity, an explanation of the student attainment data for the DO and CLO awarding bodies is set out below.

3.3. The DO awarding body programme reported a (first time) pass rate of only 17% for the 2018/19 sittings of the full final qualifying practical examination (FQE). This pass rate excludes theoretical examinations, which are set by training institutions, and rises to 24% when students re-sitting part of the FQE are included.

3.4. The pass rate reported above was lower than the awarding body expected and was attributed to a recent change to the FQE which now requires candidates to successfully pass all core competencies covered by each section of the FQE. This was not previously required, and candidates could previously pass a section of the FQE despite being weaker in some areas. The change to the FQE appears to place greater demands on candidates and reduces the likelihood of their passing the FQE at a single sitting There was a higher pass rate for candidates resitting sections of the FQE: 47% of candidates passed one or more sections at resit, confirming that the low pass rate among candidates sitting the full FQE is strongly affected by the complex task of passing all sections at the same sitting.

3.5. The DO awarding body programme also provided useful summaries of the Summer 2019 results, broken down by academic institution.

3.6. The DO awarding body is aware that the pass rate was much lower than expected and is working with academic institutions to identify the most problematic sections of the practical examinations.

3.7. The CLO awarding body programme reported a pass rate of 38% over the 2018/19 period. This figure is similar to that for 2017/18 and refers to the proportion of candidates passing the practical examination during the period. It omits the theory examinations. The awarding body provided additional commentary detailing the number of students sitting part or all of the examination in Winter 2018/19 and Summer 2019, and the number of students passing at these sittings. In addition, a spreadsheet was provided by the programme, setting out examination entry data for Winter 2018/19 and Summer 2019. The low pass rate results from the complex structure of the exam which includes three theory papers and a practical examination with multiple sections. Students must pass each theory paper and each section of the practical examination, and this requirement is hard to achieve at a single sitting.

4. Observations

4.1. Awarding body programmes do not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS). These programmes undertake alternative activities to capture and monitor student feedback on the programme. We understand that this feedback is used to continually improve the programme. Feedback showed that students were generally satisfied with the DO exams, however the awarding body reported that there was no response to the feedback activities from CLO students in 2018/19.

5. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities; and
- work with awarding body programmes with the view to ensure the comparability of their student progression and attainment data, and to identify any trends in the examinations data.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Data

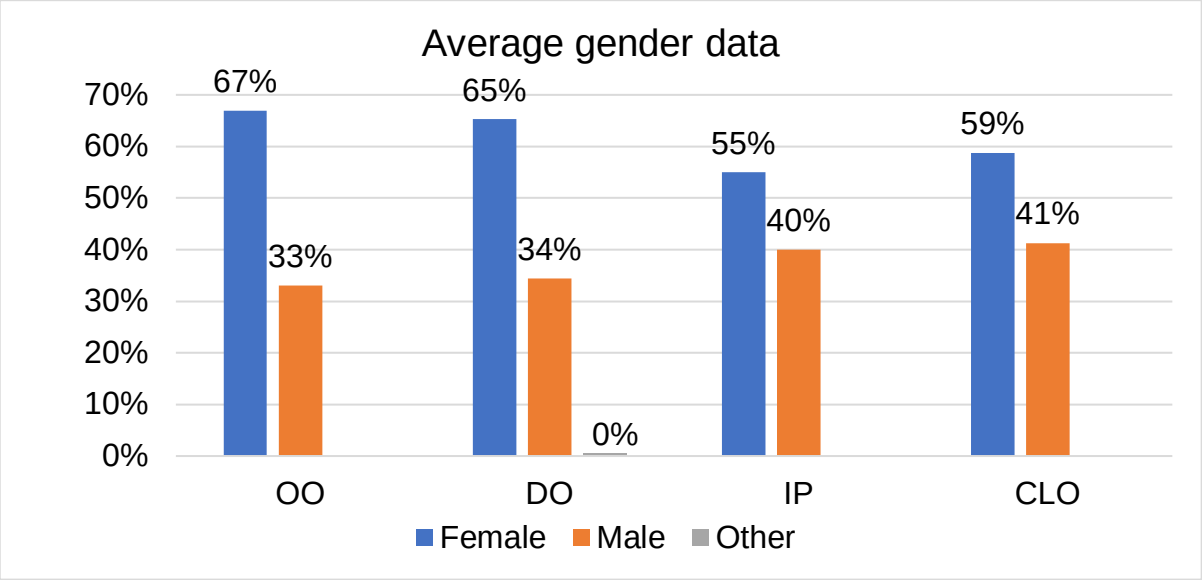
Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all programmes (OO, DO, IP, and CLO)

1. Themes

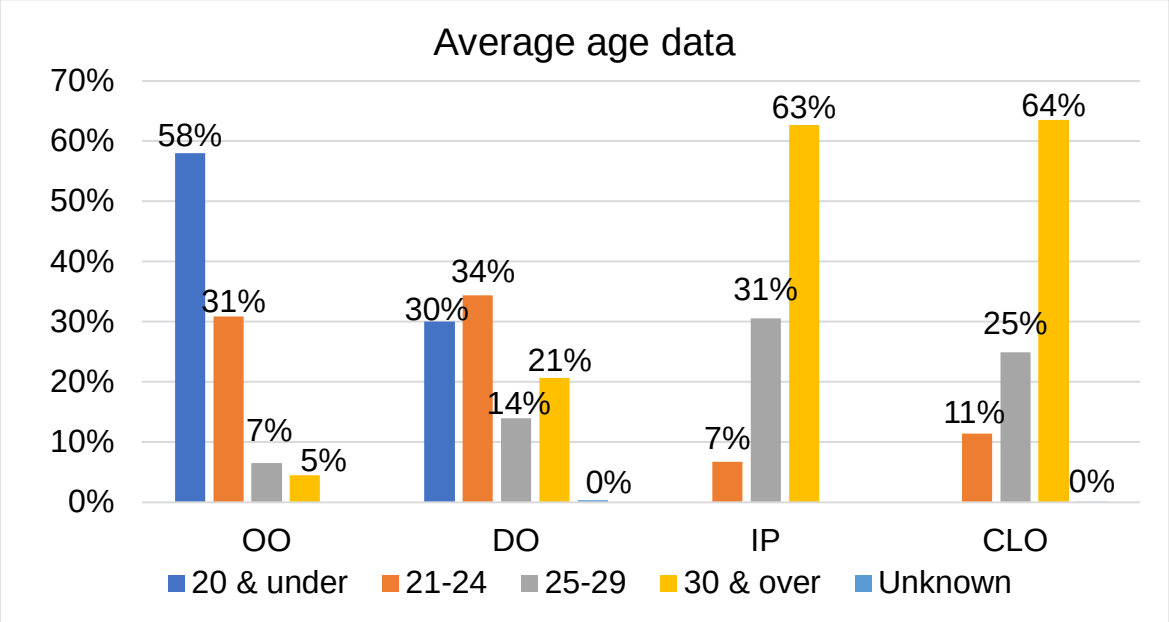
1.1. Some courses did not provide EDI data which was sufficiently precise to facilitate analysis – these have been discounted.

2. Key data

2.1. Data tables can be found in Appendix 1.

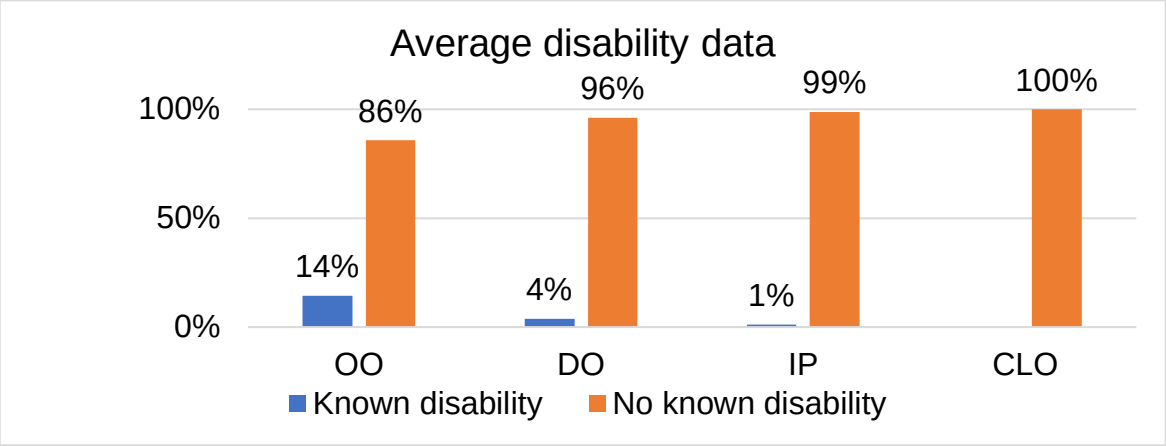


2.2. All programmes, particularly OO and DO programmes at entry level, have more female than male students.

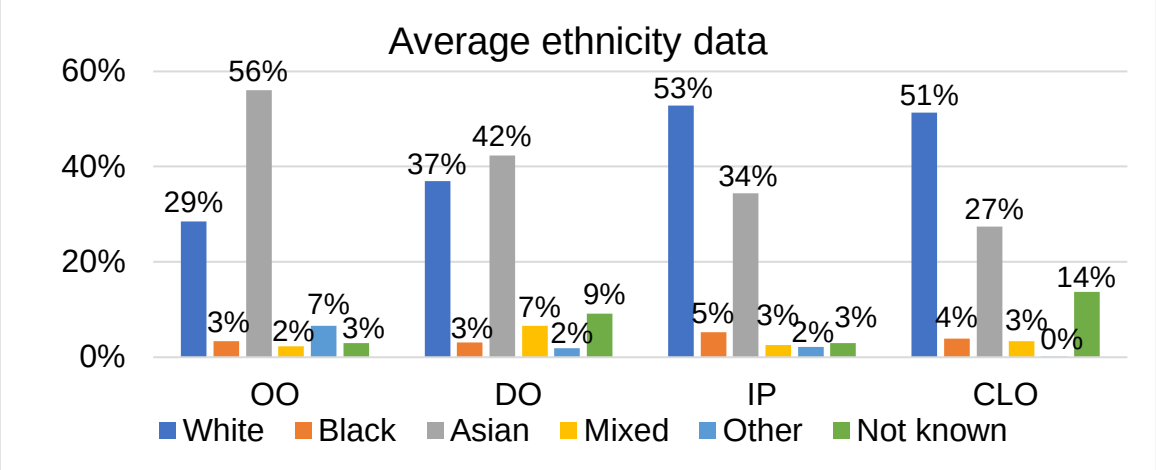


2.3. OO programmes have mostly students aged 20 and under (58%). DO programmes have a wider distribution of ages and a particularly high proportion

of students aged 30 years and over. This reflects the larger proportion of mature students enrolling on part-time DO programmes. IP and CLO programmes are only open to qualified practitioners and their age ranges are therefore dominated by students aged 30 and over.



2.4. Optometry programmes have an average of 14.2% disabled students. All other programmes have less than 4% disabled students.



2.5. Most OO and DO programmes have high proportions of asian students although white students predominate in a small number of programmes. IP and CLO programmes have mostly white students.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Data tables

Unless otherwise specified, the data reported below relates to the period 1 September 2018 – 31 August 2019.

Unless otherwise specified, the data reported below relates to 'academic' (non-awarding body) programmes.

A. Application data

	Admissions Ratio (Applications:Admissions)		UCAS Points Offer (equivalent)	
	Mean	**Median**	**Mean**	**Median**
All Programmes	52.8%	56.7%	109.5	133.6
Optometry	20.1%	15.1%	135.6	136.0
Ophthalmic Dispensing	60.4%	62.5%	57.4	64.0
Independent Prescribing	92.2%	94.6%	n/a	n/a
Contact Lens Opticians	88.0%	82.7%	n/a	n/a

B. Cohort data – mean student cohort size (2018/19 – 2019/20)

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**
Optometry	82.6	81.9	79.1	26.2
Ophthalmic Dispensing	54.2	61.0	61.1	n/a
Independent Prescribing	47.4	23.3	n/a	n/a
Contact Lens Opticians	40.0	n/a	n/a	n/a

C. GOC mean student cap utilisation (2018/19 – 2019/20)

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**
Optometry	95.2%	90.1%	85.8%	48.9%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	57.3%	68.4%	75.1%	n/a
Independent Prescribing	69.5%	40.6%	n/a	n/a
Contact Lens Opticians	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

D. Student progression

	Progression from first year (mean)	**Progression to the following year (mean)**	**Students completing the programme (mean)**
Optometry	92.3%	92.5%	97.7%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	78.1%	89.0%	88.3%

E. Student attainment

	Good Pass (mean)[5]	Fail (mean)
All programmes	94.5%	6.4%
Optometry	95.6%	2.6%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	91.7%	1.6%
Independent Prescribing	98.4%	1.6%
Contact Lens Opticians	n/a	n/a
Awarding Body (Dispensing & Contact Lens Opticians)	27.5%	72.5%
Awarding Body (Independent Prescribing & Optometry)	94.6%	5.4%

F. National Student Survey – mean score by category

	All programmes	Optometry	Ophthalmic Dispensing	National Average	Subjects Allied to Medicine
Teaching	89.05%	90.16%	87.21%	85.03%	86.64%
Learning Opportunities	88.43%	88.69%	87.99%	83.86%	86.68%
Assessment & Feedback	79.25%	77.23%	82.61%	75.35%	75.71%
Academic Support	85.60%	85.88%	85.12%	81.16%	80.35%
Organisation & Management	79.63%	79.59%	79.70%	74.80%	71.10%
Learning Resources	85.52%	86.27%	84.26%	82.26%	83.07%
Learning Community	84.28%	86.64%	80.35%	77.78%	80.79%
Student Voice	78.36%	77.46%	79.86%	69.88%	70.79%
Overall	90.59%	92.20%	87.89%	82.85%	82.47%

[5] Defined as 2.2 or better (honours degrees) OR a pass or better (all other programmes)

G. EDI – Average gender data

	Female	Male	Other
All programmes	63.0%	35.9%	0.1%
Optometry	66.9%	33.0%	0%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	65.3%	34.4%	0.4%
Independent Prescribing	55.0%	40.1%	0%
Contact Lens Opticians	58.7%	41.3%	0%

H. EDI – Average age data

	20 & under	21-24	25-29	30 & over	Unknown
All programmes	29.3%	23.7%	15.3%	27.8%	0.1%
Optometry	58.0%	30.9%	6.6%	4.5%	0.0%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	30.1%	34.4%	13.9%	20.7%	0.3%
Independent Prescribing	0.0%	6.7%	30.6%	62.7%	0.0%
Contact Lens Opticians	0.0%	11.5%	24.9%	63.5%	0.10%

I. EDI – average disability data

	Known disability	No known disability
All programmes	6.5%	93.4%
Optometry	14.2%	85.7%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	3.9%	96.1%
Independent Prescribing	1.2%	98.8%
Contact Lens Opticians	0%	100%

J. EDI – Average ethnicity data

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Not known
All programmes	37.5%	3.6%	42.2%	3.5%	3.4%	9.8%
Optometry	28.5%	3.3%	56.1%	2.3%	6.6%	3.0%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	37.0%	3.1%	42.3%	6.6%	1.9%	9.1%
Independent Prescribing	52.9%	5.2%	34.5%	2.5%	2.2%	2.9%
Contact Lens Opticians	51.3%	4.0%	27.4%	3.4%	0.1%	13.8%

Appendix 2 – National Student Survey categories

#	Question	Category
1	Staff are good at explaining things	**Teaching**
2	Staff have made the subject interesting	
3	The course is intellectually stimulating	
4	My course has challenged me to achieve my best work	
5	My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth	**Learning Opportunities**
6	My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics	
7	My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt	
8	The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance	**Assessment & Feedback**
9	Marking and assessment has been fair	
10	Feedback on my work has been timely	
11	I have received helpful comments on my work	
12	I have been able to contact staff when I needed to	**Academic Support**
13	I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course	
14	Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course	
15	The course is well organised and running smoothly	**Organisation & Management**
16	The timetable works efficiently for me	
17	Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively	
18	The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well	**Learning Resources**
19	The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well	
20	I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to	
21	I feel part of a community of staff and students	**Learning Community**
22	I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course	
23	I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course	**Student Voice**
24	Staff value students' views and opinions about the course	
25	It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on	
26	The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests	
27	Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course	**Overall**

Appendix 3 – Caveats

1) The AMR process remains in development and will make refinements and improvements for each year of the process.

2) The findings, analysis and outcomes of this year's AMR process will be fed into the GOC Education team's approval and quality assurance activities.

3) Please note that the findings outlined in this report are indicative and do not represent a formal position or policy of the GOC. The findings in this report should not be relied upon for advice or used for any other purpose and may not be representative.

4) The analysis and outcomes contained within this report are based solely upon the information and data as calculated and submitted by the programmes. The GOC has not sought to externally verify the information and data submitted. The responsible officer for each programme has attested that the information submitted in the AMR return gives a true and fair view of that programme.

5) The information provided by each awarding body programme in relation to student attainment (assessment pass rates) has been calculated on different bases (i.e. the basis for each calculation has been different). to the other awarding body programmes and the academic qualification programmes.