City & Islington College
GOC Re-visit
Contact Lens Programme
24 April 2019

Report confirmed by GOC Education Committee: TBC

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PART 1

1   Acknowledgements

The Panel wish to thank the College and Programme Team for their help in co-ordinating the visit and the kind hospitality provided. The Panel also wished to thank those who took the time to meet with the Panel during the visit.

2   Introduction

This report is in relation to revisit to City & Islington College's Contact Lens programme which took place on 24 April 2019. This report should be read in conjunction with the reports relating to the visits that took place on 11-13 October 2017.

The Visitor Panel:
- Sally Powell (Lay, Chair)
- Paula Baines (Contact Lens Optician)
- Christine Harm (Contact Lens Optician)

The Visitors were accompanied by Richard Calver, GOC Approval & Quality Assurance Officer.

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 core competencies and standards.
The Visit was conducted in accordance with the Handbook: 'Guidelines for the Approval of Training Institutions and Providers of Schemes for Registration for United Kingdom Trained Contact Lens Opticians' (2007).

2.1   Background

The Contact Lens programme at City and Islington College (CANDI) has been established for many decades. The programme is a one-year part-time day release course, and prepares students for the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO)'s Contact Lens examinations.

The GOC conducted a quality assurance visit in February 2016 as part of a wider review that included all other institutions providing training in contact lens fitting. This visit set five Conditions. The college was re-visited in October 2017 to assess its progress against these Conditions. The Visitors found that four of the five Conditions had been met, but identified new areas of concern, setting four new Conditions and making four Recommendations. The college's responses to these Conditions, and its Annual Monitoring Report submitted in December 2018, led the GOC to recommend a further visit to examine the resilience of the college's quality assurance systems as well as the college's ability to recruit staff and students to the programme.

The current re-visit therefore examined the college's progress against the Conditions set in October 2017, but also looked at the staffing levels, leadership and quality assurance of the programme.

2.2   Documentation

Prior to the visit, the GOC received pre-visit information from the provider based on the requirements outlined in the GOC Handbook.

3   Visit Outcomes

The Panel concluded that:

- three Conditions set in October 2017 had not been met and should remain in place;
- one ongoing Condition should remain in place;
- two new Conditions should be set;
- one new Recommendation should be made.

3.1 Previous Conditions

The Conditions listed below are extracted from the report of the visit of **11 – 13 October 2017**

Ref.	Description	Due by	Met/Not met?
1.	The College must put in place a robust quality assurance framework which as a minimum must include formalised, recorded Programme committee meetings using an action planning approach to provide an audit trail of course developments and decisions. This framework must then be clearly applied and embedded. [see section 5 (Teaching Institution Monitoring & Evaluation) of the Handbook].	**31 October 2018** Documentary evidence to be provided to the GOC electronically.	**Not met**
2.	The College must ensure that the staffing structure is sufficient to deliver and maintain the Contact Lens Programme. This will require action on: • Evidenced leadership and management support • Skill mix of the team • Succession planning/future proofing • Career development of staff • Risk management	**31 October 2018** Documentary evidence to be provided to the GOC electronically.	**Not met**
3.	To provide documentary evidence (for example, a policy document identifying a named responsible person) that admissions processes are in place to conform to legal requirements of GOC registration.	**31 March 2018** Documentary evidence to be provided to the GOC electronically.	**Not met**
4.	To notify the GOC of any planned or actual changes to the structure, delivery, resourcing, staffing, student numbers and accommodation for each route to registration.	**With immediate and ongoing effect**	**Ongoing**

3.2 Previous Recommendations

The Recommendations listed below are extracted from the report of the visit of **11 – 13 October 2017**

Description

1. Consider obtaining external advice to assist with development of the Contact Lens provision.
2. Consider taking a more focused approach to marketing the Programme.
3. Enhancements to Information Learning Technology (ILT) across the Optics department should be reflected in the Contact Lens Programme.
4. Consider becoming a CET provider to allow students attending the course to gain CET points.

3.3 Commendation(s)

None.

3.4 Conditions

Conditions are applied to training and assessment providers if there is evidence that the GOC requirements are not met. In order to ensure that the programme meets the GOC requirements, the Panel propose the following condition(s):

Ref.	Description	Due by

1	The college must put in place a robust quality assurance framework which, as a minimum, must include:
	
	   a. formalised, recorded programme committee meetings using an action planning approach to provide an audit trail of course developments and decisions;
	   b. evidence that programme committee meetings will be held each term, and will include agenda which allow for substantial and meaningful discussion of academic matters;
	   c. evidence that programme committee meetings are properly minuted with details of attendees, agenda and actions;
	   d. evidence that programme committee meetings are embedded in the college's overarching quality assurance systems;
	   e. a system for ensuring that decisions made at programme committee meetings are implemented within timescales clearly defined by the programme committee or college.
	
	This framework must then be clearly applied and embedded.
	
	[see section 5 (Teaching Institution Monitoring & Evaluation) of the Handbook].
		1 November 2019

2	The college must ensure that the staffing structure is sufficient to deliver and maintain the Contact Lens Programme. This will require an action plan demonstrating the college's proposed measures on: • Evidenced leadership and management support • Skill mix of the team • Succession planning/future proofing • Career development of staff, with the college adopting a more pro-active approach to staff development and training • Risk management, including consideration of the risks to teaching quality	**1 November 2019**
3	To provide documentary evidence (for example, a policy document identifying a named responsible person) that admissions processes are in place to conform to legal requirements of GOC registration. This must include a process to verify the GOC registration of students on entry to the programme and their continued registration when this requires renewal.	**1 September 2019**
4	The college should provide the GOC with evidence that contact lens Competencies are taught. This must include an accurate, robust audit trail to correctly track the Competencies, to demonstrate that all students have covered all Competencies.	**1 November 2019**
5	The college should optimise the use of Moodle for this course, to allow students greater support for their studies (e.g. lecture material, sample questions and answers), ensuring that uploaded material corresponds to that used in classes.	**1 November 2019**
6	To notify the GOC of any planned or actual changes to the structure, delivery, resourcing, staffing, student numbers and accommodation for each route to registration.	**Ongoing**

3.5 Recommendations	
The Panel offers the following recommendation to the provider. Recommendations indicate enhancements that can be made to a programme but are not directly linked to compliance with GOC requirements.	
Ref.	**Description**
1.	The college should ensure that IT systems are adequate and are being used efficiently to support the programme. This includes systems governing student registration and data keeping.

PART 2

4	Progress Against Previous Conditions

4.1	Condition 1: Quality Assurance

1. The Panel discussed the college's progress in meeting this condition with the course team and college's management team. The Panel also viewed minutes of the programme committee meetings that the college provided in advance of the visit. Discussions centred on the following points:
    i. The place of the programme committee meetings in the college's over-arching quality assurance system;
    ii. Systems for obtaining student feedback;
    iii. Systems for monitoring student achievement.

2. The management team explained that the college's recent merger with other institutions has led to the introduction of new quality assurance systems which operate across the college. For example, the City & Islington College Committee oversees the Ophthalmic Dispensing Programme, and the Group Quality Committee oversees quality assurance across the three colleges. The Head of Applied Optics represents Ophthalmic Dispensing on the College Committee and the Deputy Director for Higher Education, Partnerships and Skills represents the college on the Group Quality Committee. The programme team informed the Panel that, while these committees oversaw the quality assurance of the Ophthalmic Dispensing programme, they had not yet included the quality assurance of the Contact Lens programme. However, the team was confident that the Contact Lens programme would be brought under the remit of this new system.

3. The programme team supplied the Panel with minutes of programme team meetings. These meetings are held weekly during term time, during the programme team's lunch break to avoid disrupting classes. This means that the meetings are typically approximately ten minutes in duration. The meeting minutes show that few matters are raised at the meetings, and that little discussion takes place. The Panel welcomed the regular meetings, but was concerned that the meetings are too short to allow meaningful discussion of important topics, and believe that the team should hold longer, more substantial meetings which would encourage proper discussion of academic matters. These could be held termly rather than weekly.

4. The Panel heard that the college's quality assurance committees will consider student views: the committees will include student representatives and will also examine the results of the student questionnaires and focus groups which the college uses to gain student opinions. However, the programme team reported that such formal systems are not in place for Contact Lens students: they do not receive questionnaires and are not included in focus groups, and some questions on the college's questionnaires were inappropriate for part-time students, including those taking the Contact Lens programme. Students informed the Panel that they had no formal mechanism for feeding their views back to the programme team. However, they also said that they were able to speak to the programme team informally if necessary, and that their tutors were responsive and approachable. The Panel welcomed the programme team's efforts to discuss student affairs so helpfully, but believes that more formal systems for providing a student voice would support the programme's quality assurance.

5. The Panel heard that there is no formal way to gauge student achievement. For example, the college sets no examinations for these students who instead take the Association of British Dispensing Opticians' contact lens examinations. The programme team teaches the

GOC's Core Competencies for contact lenses, but there was some uncertainty regarding the way these Competencies are recorded. For example, the team currently records Competencies on a spreadsheet. However, the spreadsheet merely records that Competencies have been taught rather than that they have also been assessed. This means that there is no reliable way of verifying students' academic or practical achievement on the programme.

6. Staff also explained that copies of the spreadsheet are saved on USB sticks and are taken home by staff, because of repeated IT failures at the college. The Panel was concerned that staff take the USB sticks home, and urges the team and the college to find a more secure way to record Competencies: the Promonitor system recently developed for the college's Ophthalmic Dispensing programme would seem ideal for this purpose.

7. Therefore, the Panel concluded that the programme still lacked formal quality assurance systems, and requires the programme team to ensure that the college's new quality assurance systems encompass the programme as a matter of priority. These should include:

   i.   More substantial programme committee meetings, whose minutes and decisions should be scrutinised by the college committee system;
   ii.   more formal methods to acquire student views;
   iii. more formal methods to judge student progress.

4.2   Condition 2: Staffing

8. The programme's staffing levels have not changed since the visit of October 2017: the programme is taught by two part-time hourly-paid lecturers and one member of the college's full-time staff. No staffing changes are currently planned or expected.

9. The programme admits very few students: there are only eight in the current cohort and the programme team reported that they would not expect to recruit more than twelve students to any one cohort. While the Panel is satisfied that current staffing levels are sufficient for the current student intake, the Panel remains concerned that the programme depends heavily on part-time hourly-paid staff, and that the college's current full-time staff includes only one optometrist and no contact lens optician. This means that few current staff can contribute to the programme.

10. The programme team was aware of the need for succession planning but reported that it was hard to approach practitioners to teach on the programme when there was currently no vacancy. The team also believed that potential staff were more strongly attracted to careers as locum practitioners.

11. The Panel was also concerned that teaching staff are not taking advantage of career development opportunities. For example, the college permits teaching staff to take formal teaching qualifications but neither of the hourly-paid staff on this programme had taken advantage of this. The Panel urges the college to support staff who want to take formal teaching qualifications.

12. Discussions with the programme team and college management team showed that staff are aware of the risks to the programme from the small intake. For example, the teams explained that the contact lens lab was currently in use for only one day per week, but that the college was planning to furnish part of the lab, allowing it to be used for other classes when not required by the contact lens programme. This would make better use of the space available.

13. The Panel welcomed the college's awareness of the risks to the programme and their plans to mitigate these risks, but is concerned that there is still no formal risk management policy and that the risks considered relate to the space allocated to the programme rather than its dependence on a small number of staff.

4.3 Condition 3: Admissions Policy

14. The Panel discussed the programme's admissions policy with the Director of Optics who explained that students are required to hold GOC registration on enrolment to the course, and that he is responsible for checking this information.

15. The Panel was therefore confident that there is a system in place for checking applicants' registration, but remained concerned that there is no written policy. The Panel was also concerned that the system did not include re-checking students' GOC registration in April, i.e. once it has been renewed.

16. The Panel therefore urges the team to adopt a more rigorous policy which includes registration checks at the beginning of the course and after GOC registration is renewed, to ensure that students remain registered throughout the programme. There should also be a written policy statement to this effect.

4.4 Condition 4: Changes

17. The Panel noted that this is an ongoing condition.

5 Other points

5.1 Competency Tracking

18. The programme team teaches the GOC's Competencies for contact lens practice and records the date when each student has completed a given Competency using a spreadsheet. The Panel was concerned about several aspects of this system.

19. Firstly, there were no clear criteria governing the signing-off of the Competencies. For example, some tutors told the Panel that Competencies were signed off when they students had been assessed as competent, but others said that they were signed off merely to indicate that they had been taught (see also para. 5, above).

20. Secondly, the Panel was concerned about the method used to store the tracked Competencies. Signed-off Competencies are saved on a spreadsheet which is saved on USB sticks taken home by tutors because the tutors lack confidence in the college's IT systems. The Panel regards this as an insecure way to save Competency records (see also para. 6, above).

21. The Panel noted that the college has developed an online system to track GOC Ophthalmic Dispensing Competencies using its Promonitor student portal, but that this has not been applied to the contact lens programme.

22. Therefore, the Panel urges the programme team to clarify its criteria for signing-off Contact Lens Competencies and to use the Promonitor system to record Competency signing.

5.2	**Moodle**

23. The programme team uses the Moodle Virtual Learning Environment to support its teaching, but the Panel heard that it is not being used efficiently. For example, students reported that materials uploaded to Moodle did not always correspond with lecture materials.

24. Therefore, the Panel expects the programme team to improve their use of Moodle to enhance the students' learning experience. This is particularly important for a part-time programme whose students are frequently away from the college.

6	**Recommendations**

6.1	**IT Systems**

25. The Panel heard evidence that the college's IT systems had recently been unreliable and had hindered the programme team and students. For example, the programme team reported that IT malfunctions had interfered with student registration, leaving class registers incomplete. Students reported being unable to access Moodle or email at times.

26. Staff reported that persistent IT problems had moved them to store Competency records on their own USB sticks and take them home, which constitutes a potential lapse in IT governance and shows that staff lack confidence in the college's IT systems.

27. Therefore, the Panel recommends that college improves its IT support to properly assist staff and students, and to avoid compromising IT governance.

10   DEFINITIONS

For the purpose of this document, the following terms used throughout this report are defined as follows:

GOC: General Optical Council

College: City & Islington College

Panel: All members of the visiting Panel representing the General Optical Council.

Programme(s): Unless specified, this refers to the Contact Lens programme.

Programme Team/Team: Senior members of staff such as programme leads, heads of department, decision makers and budget holders who are responsible for managing the programme(s).

Programme Staff: Staff involved in the delivery of the programme that were interviewed by the Panel.

Supervisors/Employers: Qualified/Registered Contact Lens Opticians and Optometrists who supervise students whilst they are working in practice.

External Examiner/Examiner: Examiner(s) contracted by the College for the purposes of ensuring quality control of programme content.

City & Islington College – Contact Lens Programme
Re-visit – Wednesday 24 April 2019 – Agenda

Time	Agenda item	Location	Attendees
08:45 – 09:00	Panel arrives		
09:00 – 09.30	Private meeting of Panel	TBC	
09:30 – 10:00	Meeting with Head of Department to discuss the response to the Conditions set at earlier visits	TBC	Peter Dobson
10:00 – 11:00	Observation of classes and facilities (lectures will be taking place) / Private meeting of Panel	TBC	
11:00 – 11:30	Private meeting of Panel	TBC	
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch	TBC	
13:00 – 14:00	Meeting with staff	TBC	Course lecturers
14:00 – 14:30	Observe practical class and speak to students	TBC	
15:00 – 15:45	Meeting with College management to discuss facilities and commitment to the course	TBC	Dr Ramin Narimani
15:45 – 16:30	Private meeting of Panel	TBC	
16:30 – 17:00	Final feedback meeting	TBC	Peter Dobson
17:00	**Close**		