

## **1a ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The Visitors wish to record their thanks for the kind hospitality shown by Professor Kathryn Saunders – Head of Subject during the visit.

In addition, the Panel were very grateful to the Head of School of Biomedical Sciences – Professor Neville McClenaghan and Dr Karen Breslin – Course Director for the Undergraduate Programme who gave up their time to meet with the Panel during the Visit.

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

## **1b BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

The BSc Optometry undergraduate programme at the University of Ulster was established in 1995 within the School of Biomedical Sciences and the Faculty of Life and Health Sciences. It has become an established and high profile component of the University's portfolio of nursing and allied health professions undergraduate programmes. The academic staff in Optometry also use their professional and research expertise in optometry and vision science to contribute to post-graduate education and training and in widening the optometric scope of practice within Northern Ireland and further afield. Many of the academic staff are research active and were submitted in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework.

The Optometry programme at the University attracts high calibre students from traditional A-level and Irish Leaving Certificate backgrounds and, in line with the University's commitment to widening access to education, students entering from the Further Education sector. The number of students remains small allowing teaching staff to focus close attention on individuals at all levels of the programme. The graduates perform very successfully at pre-registration level, securing placement positions in a variety of settings and demonstrating above average success in the Professional Qualifying Examinations. The programme has scored highly in the National Student Survey since its inception. Overall satisfaction with the course has ranged between 96% satisfied to 100% satisfied and has put Ulster consistently in the top three of UK Optometry programmes in this regard.

## 2a INTRODUCTION

This Report is of the Visit by the General Optical Council to The University of Ulster BSc (Hons) Optometry Undergraduate programme. The Visit took place over two days, from **9-10 April 2014**.

The Visitors were:

Dr Navneet Gupta – Optometrist  
Ms Sally Powell – Lay Person  
Mr Markham May – Lay Person  
Mrs Christine Harm – Dispensing Optician (CL)  
Dr Paul S Baines – Ophthalmologist  
Mr Richard Allen – Optometrist

The Visitors were accompanied by Ms Linda Ford, Head of Education & Standards and Ms Lisa Venables, Accreditation Officer for the General Optical Council.

The timetable for the visit is attached at **Appendix 1** of this report.

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 competencies and standards, and that the course can continue to be recognised by the GOC for the entry of successful students into the pre-registration period of supervised practice.

During the Visit the GOC Handbook, 'Visit Guidelines for the Approval of Training Establishments for United Kingdom Degrees in Optometry' ('the Handbook') was used by the Visitors. The Visitors conducted their assessments during the Visit applying the criteria and requirements as set out in the Handbook. A copy of the Aide Mémoire used by the Visitors is available on request to the GOC.

The BSc Optometry Undergraduate Programme entry requirements are 3 A Levels grades AAB (to include grades AA in two science subjects from Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics or Physics OR Grades AA in Applied Science Double Award). Irish Leaving Certificates grades AAAB (to include grades AA in two science subjects from Chemistry, Physics, Mathematics, Biology). Applicants are also required to have Irish Leaving Certificate Higher Level English and Maths grade D or above OR Irish Leaving Certificate Ordinary Level English Grade C or above and Maths at grade B or above.

Prior to the visit, the GOC received pre-visit information from the University based on the GOC's Handbook (Visit Guidelines for the Approval of Training Establishments for United Kingdom Degrees in Optometry).

In addition to the pre-visit information provided in advance; the visitors reviewed further documentation relating to the programme during the visit.

Pre-visit documents provided:

Visit Agenda  
Student timetables  
Information regarding changes to the programme, staffing and student statistics  
External examiner reports and accompanying documents  
Student logbooks (template) and related feedback documents  
Student Handbooks  
Patient experience/hospital attendance tracking logs  
Supervisor/Clinic Handbook and relating documents  
Annual monitoring reports

Documents provided during the visit:

Completed exam scripts  
Completed student logbooks  
Course Module descriptors  
Student/staff consultative meeting minutes  
Internal quality reports and documentation  
Competency mapping

## **2b DEFINITIONS**

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

- Programme Team: All staff involved in the development and delivery of the programme. This includes managers, decision makers and teaching staff collectively.
- University: The University or institution as a whole, incorporating all facilities, central teams, administrative support, and policies decided centrally.
- Students & Post-graduates: Current students or post-graduates that were interviewed by the Panel.
- Employers: Local employers who are familiar with Ulster University and its optometry students and who have previously employed or currently employ Ulster graduates.
- Clinic Staff: All staff involved in the running of the university's eye clinic.
- Clinic Supervisors: All staff who supervise students in the university's eye clinic.
- Hospital Staff: Staff based at local hospitals that are involved with supervising and mentoring university students during their hospital placements.
- Teaching Staff: Staff involved in the delivery of each module in the programme, including theoretical aspects and practical labs but not supervised clinical sessions.
- External Examiners: Examiners contracted by the university for the purposes of ensuring quality control of programme content, who were interviewed by the Panel.

## 10 CONDITIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the visit, the Panel recommend that the BSc (Hons) Optometry undergraduate degree continue to be accredited by the GOC for a further **five years** subject to adequate annual monitoring submissions and providing the following conditions and recommendations are implemented:

### 10.1 Conditions

- i. Existing resourcing levels are to be maintained explicitly including part-time hours budget, permanent posts and administrative/technical support. All staffing updates or vacancies that arise are to be reported to the GOC via the annual monitoring process.
- ii. Given concern has been raised by both external examiners and students regarding the amendment of regulations to award degrees on the final year marks only and the risk of the adverse impact of student engagement in earlier parts of the programme. The department is asked to keep the impact of this change under review and report on stakeholder feedback regarding this via future annual monitoring submissions.

### 10.2 Recommendations

- i. To include an attendance record for hospital visits to be signed by supervising ophthalmologists. The hospital visit should also include the opportunity to observe cataract surgery.
- ii. The department should provide students with a template for their patient experience logbooks to ensure consistency of records.
- iii. Continue to develop and implement an electronic system for recording and tracking clinical experiences.
- iv. To review the format of the BV and LV clinics with the intention of increasing the opportunities for students to gain more hands-on experience rather than just observing.