General Optical Council

Annual Monitoring & Reporting – 2019/20

Sector Report

April 2021

Annual Monitoring and Reporting Sector Report 2019/20

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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 its response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Programmes also demonstrated continued strength in many metrics.

1.2. Optometry (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 a low ratio of applications to admissions, as well as high levels of student progression and attainment. National Student Survey (NSS) scores for OO programmes outperform both the national average and the 'Subjects Allied to Medicine' (SATM). National Student Survey (NSS) scores for DO programmes outperform the national average, and the 'Subjects Allied to Medicine' (SATM) for all categories except 'Learning Resources'.

1.3. Independent prescribing (IP) programmes provided more useful information than in previous years owing to the greater number of IP programmes and students in 2019/20. These programmes showed increasing numbers of applicants and a very high level of student attainment in exams.

1.4. Contact lens optician (CLO) programmes provided limited comparable information in this year's process. Student attainment is hard to assess in most CLO programmes as, with one exception, they prepare students for awarding body exams and do not set their own internal final exams.

1.5. The pandemic impacted awarding bodies significantly in 2019/20, and fewer candidates were examined. This hinders interpretation of the data. However, a high proportion of OO and IP students passed the awarding body exams within the permitted timescale. Pass rates for DO and CLO awarding body exams were lower but showed an improvement compared to previous years.

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

- the sustainability of student numbers, particularly for DO programmes;
- the availability of placements for some students; and
- the quality of information provided to the GOC.

1.7. 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;
- work with the sector to consider ways of mitigating the risks caused by the scarcity of placements; and
- 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.

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 for the period 1 September 2019 – 31 August 2020.

3.2. All GOC-approved programmes (OO, DO, IP, 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 14 October 2020. Providers were required to submit a completed form by 14 January 2021. The period from 14 October 2020 – 14 January 2021 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:

- responses by each programme to the current COVID-19 pandemic;
- 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 2019/20 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 2019/20 AMR process and use this to help refine the AMR process for 2020/21 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 2019/20 AMR process.

4. Themes

4.1. Compliance with this year's AMR process was very good, with all 34 returns submitted and 30 (88%) submitted by the 14 January 2021 deadline. Responses to additional queries were generally prompt. No significant compliance breaches occurred.

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the sector

4.2. The lockdown imposed by the UK Government in March 2020 significantly impacted the education sector.

4.3. Providers adapted efficiently to the lockdown, adopting contingencies to continue their teaching and assessments, and maintaining good governance of their teaching and assessment processes.

4.4. Providers generally adopted online teaching but had to cancel clinical sessions. Practical sessions were either postponed (with providers aiming to hold them later in the year) or cancelled.

4.5. Theoretical assessments were held online with measures taken to reduce the likelihood of collusion or cheating. Proctoring software was commonly used. Most providers tried to replace at least some practical assessments with online assessments. For example, some practical assessments were replaced by online viva voce assessments, or with students discussing video recordings of clinical examinations.

4.6. All providers used their governance systems effectively to ensure contingencies met their own academic standards and the GOC's requirements. Measures included:

- seeking advice from external examiners; and
- using proctoring software for online assessments.

4.7. Some providers compared assessment marks with those from previous years to determine whether online assessments had led to higher marks being awarded. Only one provider noted that some assessments produced higher marks than had been expected.

4.8. Most providers implemented no detriment policies (also called 'safety net' policies) to ensure students were not disadvantaged by the lockdown. These were implemented at university level. These policies typically included:

- automatic progression to the next academic year; and
- basing degree classifications on students' best module marks.

4.9. There is a risk that some students would be awarded higher degree awards under the no detriment arrangements than under conventional arrangements, but degree classifications appeared to be in line with previous years.

4.10. Some providers awarded 1st Class and 2:1 degrees to a higher proportion of students than in 2018/19, but were confident that no student received a good degree unless it was merited.

4.11. Following discussions between the GOC, OO providers and the OO awarding body, OO students who had not been able to complete the required competency assessments or clinical experience before graduating were allowed to trail incomplete competencies and clinical episodes into the pre-registration period.

4.12. Awarding bodies were severely affected by the pandemic. Pre-registration periods were suspended, and practical examinations and practice visits were cancelled. This led to fewer students qualifying as OOs or DOs in the 2019/20 year and is expected to create a backlog for future years if pre-registration places become scarce. The backlog may result from a lack of supervisory capacity or trainees from 2019/20 not completing pre-registration periods in time for 2020/21. The OO awarding body estimates that approximately 11% of OO students leaving university in 2020 had been unable to find pre-registration placements by March 2021.

4.13. Few providers received complaints about their response and any complaints that did arise were handled efficiently using standard processes.

4.14. One provider's online exams were affected by an IT failure which prevented many students from completing the exam. Students were offered alternative written papers.

4.15. Providers made many important observations about their responses to the pandemic and the lockdown. Many providers have seen the benefits of online or recorded lectures and may use these more regularly in future.

4.16. One provider, however, noted that it was essential to ensure all students have equitable access to online resources, taking into account differences in internet connectivity, for example.

4.17. Providers cited several other measures which helped them to respond to the pandemic and the lockdown. These included:

- clear communication with students;
- support for staff, including adjustments to workload models where necessary;
- ensuring IT support is available when online exams are in progress;
- using external examiners to ensure good governance of modified assessments; and
- thinking laterally to implement contingencies.

4.18. The GOC Education Team responded to the lockdown by:

- processing proposals by providers for temporary changes to their programmes to enable them to meet GOC requirements, ensuring decisions were reviewed by the Education Manager and Head of Education;
- authorising temporary changes to the Optometry Handbook and Supervision Policy to permit more providers more flexibility in providing clinical experience and supervision during the 2020/21 academic year;
- permitting OO graduates to trail incomplete requirements into the pre-registration period (see 4.11); and
- continuing planned quality assurance work, including remote quality assurance visits.

4.19. Providers were asked to comment on the GOC's response as part of their AMR submission. Most expressed satisfaction with the GOC's response, although one provider felt the response was poor, stating that our response times had been too slow. We endeavoured to process all notifications as quickly as possible but regret that some notifications inevitably took longer to process than others, owing to staff availability and the complexity and completeness of the proposal.

4.20. The pandemic has continued to impact the sector in 2020/21 and is likely to do so in the future.

4.21. The GOC's Temporary Optometry handbook will help OO programmes provide clinical experience even if real patient appointments are scarce.

4.22. A backlog of pre-registration OO trainees is emerging and there is a risk of delays to some trainees' qualification, even though the GOC's Temporary Optometry handbook will have mitigated this risk.

4.23. Recruitment to most OO programmes has not been affected by the pandemic, but many DO programmes offering day-release or blended-learning programmes have suffered poor recruitment owing to employers furloughing staff or being reluctant to fund their studies at a time of economic uncertainty.

Student applications, progression, and attainment

4.24. Most academic (non-awarding body) programmes appear to have high rates of student progression and student attainment. For those programmes offering 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'.

4.25. On average, OO programmes reported strong application and entry figures. Both OO and DO programmes generally demonstrate high levels of student progression and attainment, although some work-based programmes reported lower student progression because students were furloughed during the pandemic.

4.26. Attainment data provided by the IP awarding body shows that pass rates remain very high among IP students. The pass rates for the OO, DO and CLO awarding bodies are harder to interpret because the COVID-19 pandemic delayed the exams for these programmes.

Student numbers

4.27. Student numbers were identified by programmes as an area of risk to the optical education sector, and this risk was noted as a manifest problem for many DO programmes following the pattern reported in the 2018/19 sector report. Whilst OO programmes continued to report strong student application numbers, and collectively admitted more students than in 2018/19, DO programmes reported lower application numbers and declining cohort sizes. Low student numbers were again identified as a risk to the sustainability of DO programmes, with new optometry provision cited as a significant factor.

4.28. Student numbers for OO programmes are generally close to the GOC number cap for that programme, with numbers for DO programmes often markedly below the cap.

4.29. One DO provider reported that its programme will close to new applicants after the 2020/21 academic year, owing to declining interest.

Resourcing and investment

4.30. Resourcing of programmes, in terms of maintaining adequate staffing, accommodation and clinical equipment, has again been highlighted as a significant risk. External factors, such as Brexit and COVID-19, have the potential to exacerbate this risk. Many providers identified the GOC's Education Strategic Review (ESR) as a risk to resourcing, owing to the uncertainty surrounding the funding of its implementation. It is important for providers to be mindful of their resourcing requirements and to ensure that we are informed of any significant events or changes that arise, in line with our notification of reportable events and changes policy.

Risk and information management

4.31. All programmes submitted risk analyses. Risk analyses were also more comprehensive than those accompanying the 2018/19 AMR process.

4.32. All providers included a SWOT analysis and most SWOT analyses were comprehensive.

4.33. Key strengths emerging from the SWOT analysis included the longstanding reputations and excellent NSS scores of many programmes. The GOC's ESR was seen as presenting opportunities as well as threats to providers.

4.34. Some programmes noted reportable events and changes which occurred at early stages of the 2019/20 academic year but were not reported promptly to the GOC. These included significant events such as staff being furloughed and programmes being proposed for closure.

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) data

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

4.36. Most OO students were female and of Asian ethnicity aged 20 & under. Most DO students were female and of White ethnicity aged 21-24, but there were notable demographic differences between programmes, with many work-based programmes recruiting more mature students.

4.37. IP and CL programmes recruit students who are already qualified practitioners. Most IP and CL students were over the age of 30, but some IP programmes recruited younger practitioners which shows an increasing interest of achieving an IP qualification among more recently qualified optometrists.

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, in line with our policy;
- review how the 2019/20 AMR reporting process has operated and consider appropriate refinements and enhancements for the 2020/21 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 strong performance amongst optometry programmes in several academic metrics. However, competition for students was identified as a risk across programmes. Programmes also identified the ESR's funding implications as a risk.

1.2. Applications for OO programmes remain strong 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 98.1% of students obtaining a 2.2 or higher. These are similar to the corresponding figures of 95.6% for 2018/19, and 96.9% for 2017/18.

2. Key data – Optometry programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Proportion of applicants admitted	9.8%	22.9%	77.8%
Average UCAS points offer	112.3	134.5	147.0
First year progression	87.6%	96.4%	100.0%
Progression to following year	90.4%	95.9%	100.0%
Successful completion	69.0%	96.2%	100.0%
Degree – 2:2 or higher	85.5%	98.1%	100.0%

3. Observations

3.1. Admissions to OO programmes remain strong, with applications far exceeding the number of places available. OO programmes admitted a mean of 22.9% of applicants.

3.2. With two exceptions, all OO programmes admitted between 9.7% and 21.1% of applicants to their programme. The outliers admitted 46.5% and 77.8% of applicants, but these were provisionally-approved programmes which only received approval to recruit students very late in the conventional admissions cycle and consequently drew students from a smaller pool of applicants.

3.3. The mean academic offer made by OO programmes to prospective students was 134.5 UCAS tariff points which approximately equates to AAB grades at A-Level. This was similar to the mean of 135.6 (AAB) in 2018/19, and only slightly lower than the figure of 146.1 points (AAA) in 2017/18. The range extended from 112.3 UCAS points (equivalent to BBC) to 148 UCAS points (equivalent to A*AA/AAA).

3.4. The strength of OO programmes' admissions is shown by the large number of programmes whose cohort sizes are close to, or slightly greater than, the GOC's

cap on student numbers. In 2019/20, year 1 cohorts filled between 87.5% and 120.0% of the GOC's cap. Similar numbers, with the exception of one outlier, can be found in year 2. Year 3 figures ranged from 72.0% to 97.3%.

3.5. The size of individual optometry programme cohorts varies significantly. For example, the 2019/20 Year 1 cohort size varied from 20 to 138 students. The mean cohort sizes across 2019/20 were 77 students (Year 1), 81 students (Year 2), 81 students (Year 3), and 27 students (Year 4 where relevant).

3.6. The combined year 1 cohort size for all OO programmes has increased since the 2017/18 academic year: there were 892 year 1 OO students in 2017/18, 885 in 2018/19, 996 in 2019/20, and 1089 in 2020/21. This represents a rise of 22% in the year 1 OO cohort across the UK between 2017/18 and 2020/21.

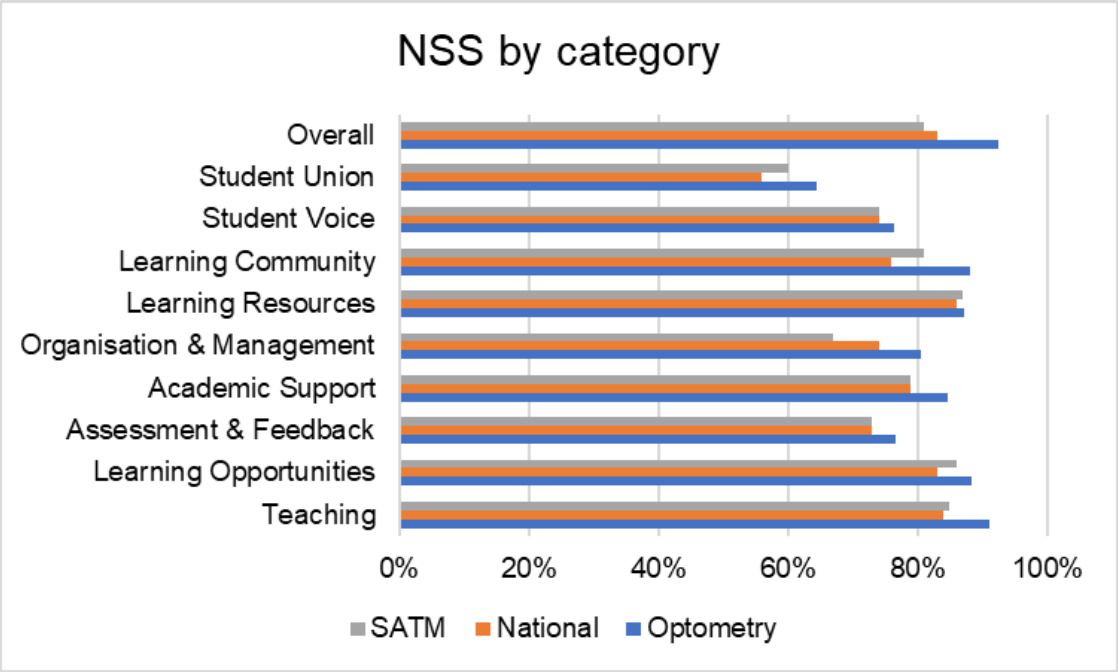
3.7. The GOC permitted OO programmes to exceed the GOC cap by more than 10% in 2020/21, provided that suitable arrangements were made to ensure the adequacy of teaching. This decision was made in the light of the UK Government's changes to the grading of 2020 A-Level exams. This may have contributed to the rise in admissions reported in 3.6. However, only three programmes exceeded their cap by more than 10% and it is likely that the introduction of new programmes, and the expansion of some existing programmes since 2017, have contributed to this rise.

3.8. Student performance remains strong on OO programmes. A mean of 96.4% (92.3% in 2018/19 and 89.2% in 2017/18) of students progressed to the second year, and a mean of 95.9% (92.5% in 2018/19 and 89.9% in 2017/18) of students progressed to the following year of the programme overall. An average of 96.2% (97.7% in 2018/19 and 96.9% in 2017/18) of students successfully completed the programme. There is a low variance for these three categories, with completion rates exceeding 87% for all providers except one. The one exception was a programme which integrates pre-registration training within its structure and was therefore more significantly affected by the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.9. All programmes provided EDI data. This data showed that 67% of students were female (the same as in 2018/19), and 58% of students were Asian (56% in 2018/19). There is evidence of local variation, probably reflecting the demography of the local population, with one provider reporting that 75% of its students were white but another that 93% of students were Asian. Most (54%) students were aged 20 years or under, with 87% aged 24 or under, indicating that most are recent school leavers.

3.10. Student attainment was excellent. A mean of 98.1% (95.6% in 2018/19 and 96.9% in 2017/18) of students obtained a 2.2 degree or higher, with 70% of institutions having all students obtain a 2:2 degree or higher. Few students failed the programme: an average of 1.4% (2.6% in 2018/19 and 1.3% in 2017/18) of students failed, and all but one institution had fewer than 2% of students failing.

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.



3.12. OO programmes perform particularly well in the NSS in relation to 'Teaching', 'Learning Opportunities', 'Learning Resources', and 'Learning Community', as well as for 'Overall' 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.

[1] The figures refer to the proportion (%) of students expressing satisfaction in each category of their university experience. An explanation of the category groupings is provided at Appendix 2.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities.

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 showed an improvement from the 2018/19 process.

1.2. IP programmes noted that the current COVID-19 pandemic posed a risk to the availability of clinical placements.

1.3. IP programmes are not covered by the National Student Survey but most programmes reported the results of internal processes capturing student views. These showed high satisfaction with IP programmes.

2. Key data – IP programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Applicants admitted	78.4%	87.3%	100.0%
Attainment – pass or higher	94.0%	98.0%	100.0%

3. Observations

3.1. IP programmes continue to admit a high proportion of applicants: an average of 87.3% (92.2% of applicants in 2018/19 and 90.4% in 2017/18) were admitted in 2019/20.

3.2. The size of IP programme cohorts varies significantly: the average Year 1 cohort size was 61 (41 in 2018/19) but varied from 5 to 139 (14 to 136 in 2018/19) students.

3.3. An average of 98.0% (98.4% in 2018/19) of students passed the IP programme, with two of the five programmes having a pass rate of 100%.

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 results from the structure of some IP programmes, with some providers admitting students to specific modules rather than full programmes.

3.5. EDI data showed that most IP students were white females aged 30 years or above. However, the IP programmes admitted students with a wide range of ages in 2019/20: students aged in their 20s made up over 40% of the cohort at three of the five IP programmes. This shows that these programmes are attractive to recently qualified practitioners.

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, and reported high satisfaction among students.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities; and
- remind IP programmes of the expectation to collect student feedback information and that these programmes are required to include this as part of AMR.

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).

1.3. DO programmes highlighted that student numbers were an ongoing concern at several DO programmes. This view was expressed in the last two annual monitoring processes 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 new optometry provision.

1.5. Recruitment to many DO programmes in the 2020/21 academic year is particularly low. This appears to have affected distance-learning and day-release programmes and has been caused by the ongoing pandemic which has deterred employers from funding students' studies or led to students being furloughed from their work.

2. Key data – DO programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Applicants admitted	34.0%	73.7%	100.0%
Average UCAS points offer[2]	20	36.0	64.0
First year progression	75.0%	87.7%	100.0%
Progression to following year	73.0%	91.4%	100.0%
Successful completion	13.6%	84.1%	100.0%
Award – 2:2 or higher / pass or higher (see 3.12 below)	85.7%	96.9%	100.0%

3. Observations

3.1. DO programmes admitted a mean of 73.7% (compared to 60.4% in 2018/19 and 59.3% in 2017/18) of applicants. There is significant variance across DO programmes, with one programme admitting 100% of its applicants, two over 89%, two between 60% and 65%, and one below 35%.

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

3.2. Only three ophthalmic dispensing programmes required A Levels for entry. The average UCAS points offer data quoted includes only these three programmes. Other programmes require other qualifications, typically at GCSE Level with practical experience also required.

3.3. There is some variance in the mean UCAS tariff points offer made to students entering DO programmes. The average UCAS offer was 36 points (equivalent to DE/EE at A-Level) in 2019/20. This compares to an average of 57.4 points (DEE) in 2018/19 and 64 points (DDE) in 2017/18. The average UCAS offers were 20, 24, and 64 points on the three programmes requiring A-Levels. There has been great variance in the offers in recent years: in 2018/19, the average offer for individual DO programmes varied from 105 UCAS points (BCC) to 24 points (D); in 2017/18 the range extended from 180 UCAS points (AAAB – AABB) to 24 points (D).

3.4. The mean cohort sizes across 2019/20 were 45 students (year 1), 55 students (year 2), and 58 students (year 3). These were smaller than those in 2018/19, when the mean cohort sizes were 58 students (year 1), 62 students (year 2), and 63 students (year 3). The size of individual DO programme cohorts varies significantly – the 2019/20 ranges being 10 to 152 (year 1), 21 to 176 (year 2), and 7 to 213 (year 3). However, this variance is caused by one outlier programme, and the cohort sizes of the remaining programmes are broadly similar.

3.5. Cohort sizes for DO programmes often fell far below the GOC's cap on student numbers, showing that admissions are low. No programme admitted sufficient students in 2019/20 to fill 90% of the permitted intake. Two programmes admitted between 25% and 27% of the permitted intake, one admitted 40%, and two admitted between 60% and 64%.

3.6. The combined year 1 cohort size of all DO programmes has fallen to 141 for the 2020/21 academic year. This compares with 405 year 1 DO students in 2017/18, 346 in 2018/19, and 304 in 2019/20.

3.7. The low year 1 recruitment in 2020/21 is likely to have been influenced strongly by the COVID-19 pandemic. Numbers may recover as the pandemic recedes, but the longer-term decline evident in 3.6 was not caused by the pandemic and may persist.

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

3.9. DO programmes identified declining student numbers as a risk to the sustainability of their programmes. This risk is being driven mainly by new optometry provision.

3.10. One DO provider notified us that their programme will be closed to new entrants after the 2020/21 academic year, owing to declining enrolment in recent years.

3.11. All programmes provided EDI data, however two sets from two institutes were not applicable to our standards, categorizing age as either ‘Under 21’ or ‘Over 21’, and ethnicity as ‘White’ or ‘BAME’. These were discounted from calculations.

3.12. EDI data showed that almost 65% of DO students were female and 53% were white. However, students’ age ranges and ethnicities varied according to the programme, with blended-learning programmes recruiting higher proportions of mature and white students. For example, 91% of students on one full-time programme were aged 24 years or under, and 87% were Asian, but 70% of students on one blended-learning programme were aged over 25 years and 86% were white.

3.13. An average of 87.7% (78.1% in 2018/19 and 89.3% in 2017/18) of students on DO programmes progressed to the second year of the programme. A mean of 91.4% (89% in 2018/19 and 90.5% in 2017/18) of all DO students progressed to the following year of DO programmes, and a mean of 84.1% (88.3% in 2018/19 and 85.9% in 2017/18) of students successfully completed their programmes.

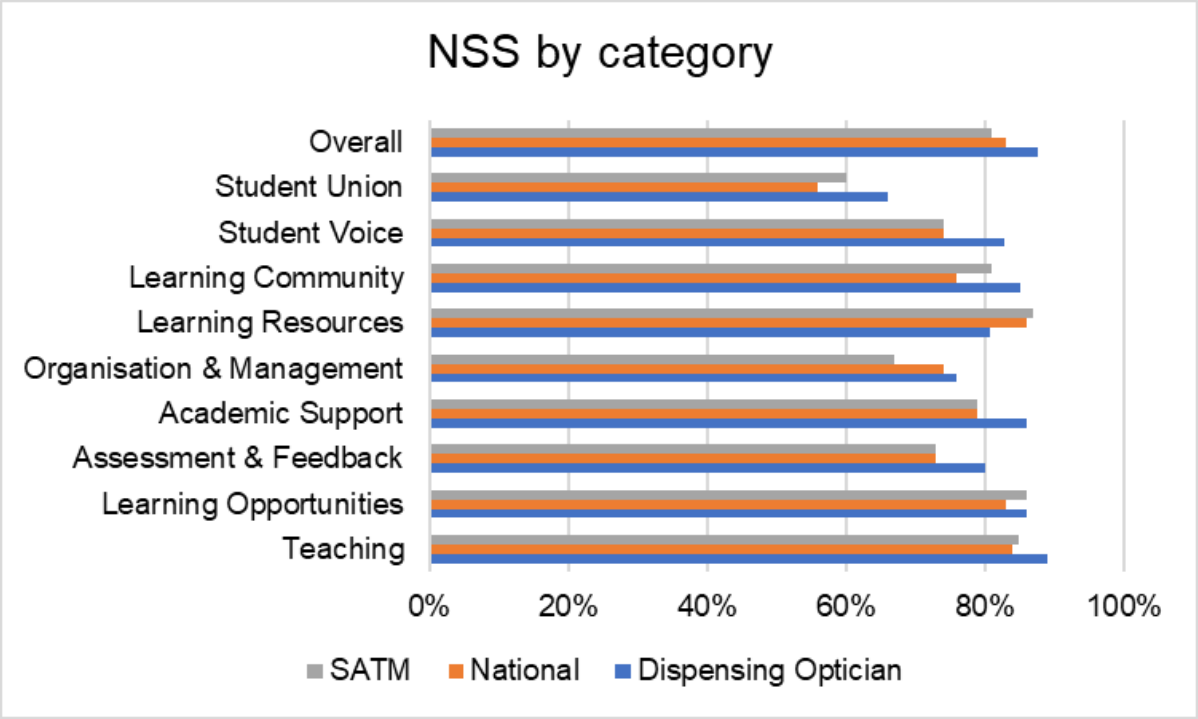
3.14. Only 13.6% of students at one provider completed their programme. However, this provider noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had led to many students being furloughed or unable to travel to theoretical or practical exams, and that only 20% of final year students had sat practical exams.

3.15. There progression rates for DO programmes is lower than for that of OO programmes, and there is great variability across DO programmes. One programme saw an improvement of almost 46 percentage points from the previous year, but another saw a sharp drop of 22 percentage points.

3.16. 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 96.9% (91.7% and 2018/19 and 89.4% in 2017/18) of students obtained either a 2:2 or higher (for honours degrees), or a pass or higher (for non-honours qualifications).

3.17. By categoryP2[3]P, 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) for all categories except ‘Learning Resources’. The averages by category are illustrated in the chart below.

[3] The figures refer to the proportion (%) of students expressing satisfaction in each category of their university experience. An explanation of the category groupings is provided at Appendix 2.



4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- consider taking additional steps to obtain greater assurance in relation to specific risks identified within this report, such as student numbers.

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 11 and 77 students), with one large provider and the other two programmes being significantly smaller. This wide range was noted in 2018/19 when cohorts varied from 8 to 91, and in 2017/18 when cohorts varied from 9 to 76 students.

2. Key data – CLO programmes

Metric	Lowest	Mean	Highest
Applicants admitted	61.9%	79.6%	92.3%

3. Observations

3.1. All CLO programmes admitted over 61% of their applicants, with one admitting over 92% of all its applicants.

3.2. Cohort sizes vary. One provider recruited a cohort of 77 students, but the other providers recruited 11 and 13 students.

3.3. CLO programmes do not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS). All programmes have indicated that they use alternative methods to obtain feedback and monitor student satisfaction with the programme. These include internal surveys and the use of WhatsApp groups which allow students to raise concerns or give feedback to the programme team. The information provided by programmes suggested strong satisfaction with the programmes.

3.4. EDI data showed that 71% of CLO students were white. Most (65%) were aged 30 years or above, which is unsurprising for a programme taken after initial qualification.

3.5. One CLO programme is a registerable award which incorporates qualifying exams into the academic programme. Students on other CLO programmes take examinations set by the awarding body, not the training providers. Many students stagger their theoretical and practical examinations, taking different parts of the examination at different times, making it difficult to compare achievement in the professional examination. However, two CLO programmes submitted details of their students' pass rates in the professional exams. These results showed that there is considerable variation in attainment. For example, pass rates at one provider varied from 38% to 64% depending on the exam paper being taken.

4. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- 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.

2. Key data – 2019/20 attainment data

Programme	Pass rate
Optometry (27-month)	95.8%
Independent prescribing	94.9%

3. Attainment data

3.1. Due to the nature of the awarding body programmes and the format of the AMR form, each awarding body has provided attainment data on differing bases, i.e. the basis for each calculation has been different.

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 pass rate reported above for the OO awarding body programme is the overall pass rate for students[4] who were scheduled to complete the programme during the 2019/20 period, i.e. enrolling on the programme in the enrolment year running 1 June 2017 – 31 May 2018. 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 15.9 months, and 64% of students completed it within 13-18 months after enrolment. However, other than the 27-month limit, time taken to complete the OO 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

[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.

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. A student may take longer to complete the programme due to the timing of the next available assessment.

3.6. The OO awarding body reported that enrolment to the 2020/21 programme, which would have opened on 31 May 2020, was delayed until September 2020 owing to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.7. The OO awarding body also reported the progress of students enrolling on the programme between 1 June 2019 and 31 May 2020 has also been affected by COVID-19, with assessments suspended between March and July of 2020, and the majority of trainees put on furlough by their employers.

3.8. The OO awarding body also estimates that approximately 18% of OO students leaving university in 2020 were unable to start their pre-registration periods by February 2021. Although some of these students were expected to start their pre-registration placements between March 2021 and July 2020, approximately 11% of students graduating from university in 2020 had still not found placements for the programme by March 2021. The backlog may result from a lack of supervisory capacity or trainees from 2019/20 not completing pre-registration periods in time for 2020/21.

3.9. The IP awarding body programme continues to report a high average pass rate of 94.9% (93.1% in 2018/19 and 90.7% in 2017/18).

4. Observations

4.1. The OO and IP awarding body programmes do not take part in the National Student Survey (NSS), but instead use alternative methods to capture and monitor student feedback on the programmes. The awarding body had intended to introduce more extensive methods for collecting feedback from students, supervisors and examiners in the 2019/20 period but these were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we understand that feedback systems will be resumed and that other initiatives, such as the formation of student reference groups, are being implemented.

5. Recommendations & actions

We will:

- continue to monitor risk to programmes through our existing quality assurance activities;
- 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.

2. Key data – 2019/20 student attainment data

Programme	Pass rate
Dispensing – Practical	43.8%
Contact Lens – Practical	49%

3. Student attainment data

3.1. Due to the nature of the awarding body programmes and the format of the AMR form, each awarding body has provided student attainment data on differing bases, i.e. the basis for each calculation has been different.

3.2. The DO awarding body reported that practical exam sittings were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and were only resumed when safe to do so. This reduced the number of students undergoing final exams,

3.3. A total of 159 students passed their DO qualifying exams during the reporting period but 183 students were still awaiting examination at the end of the reporting period.

3.4. The DO awarding body programme reported a pass rate of 43.8% for the 2019/20 sittings of its examinations. This is higher than the proportion of students passing its final examinations in 2018/19 (17%).

3.5. The CLO awarding body reported that exam sittings were delayed by the COVID-19 pandemic and were only resumed when safe to do so. This reduced the number of students undergoing final exams, and only 14 students qualified during the period.

3.6. The CLO awarding body programme reported a pass rate of 49% (38% in 2018/19) for 2019/20 period.

4. Observations

4.1. These awarding body programmes do not participate in the National Student Survey (NSS) but instead use alternative methods to capture and monitor student feedback on the programmes. These include issuing surveys to students at the time of their exams, but we understand these methods were suspended

during the COVID-19 pandemic to avoid cross-contamination. Candidates were instead encouraged to provide feedback by email, but no results were reported.

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

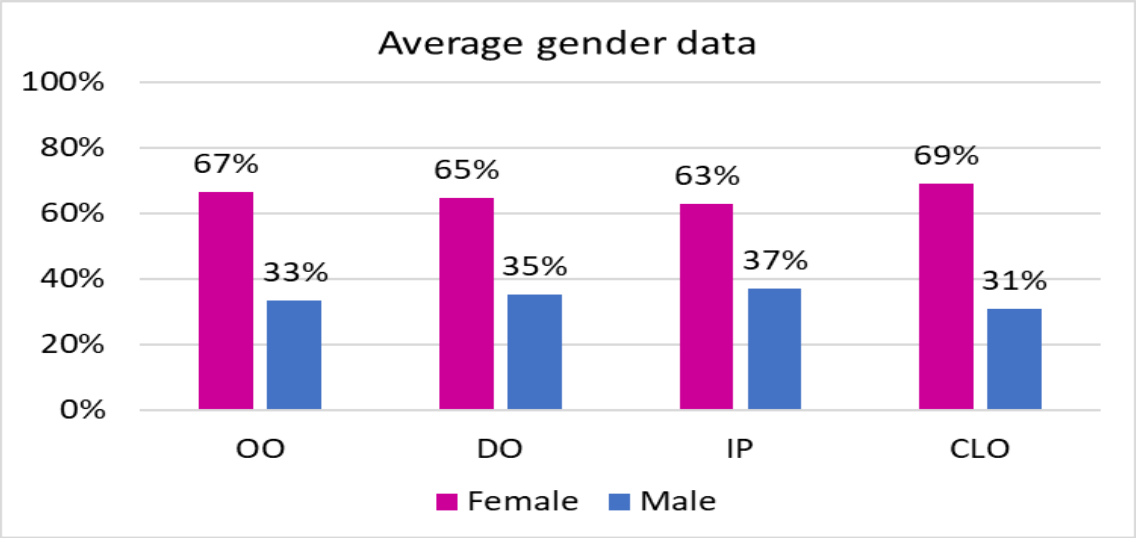
Unless otherwise indicated, the comments in this section relate to all programmes (OO, DO, IP, and CLO)

1. Themes

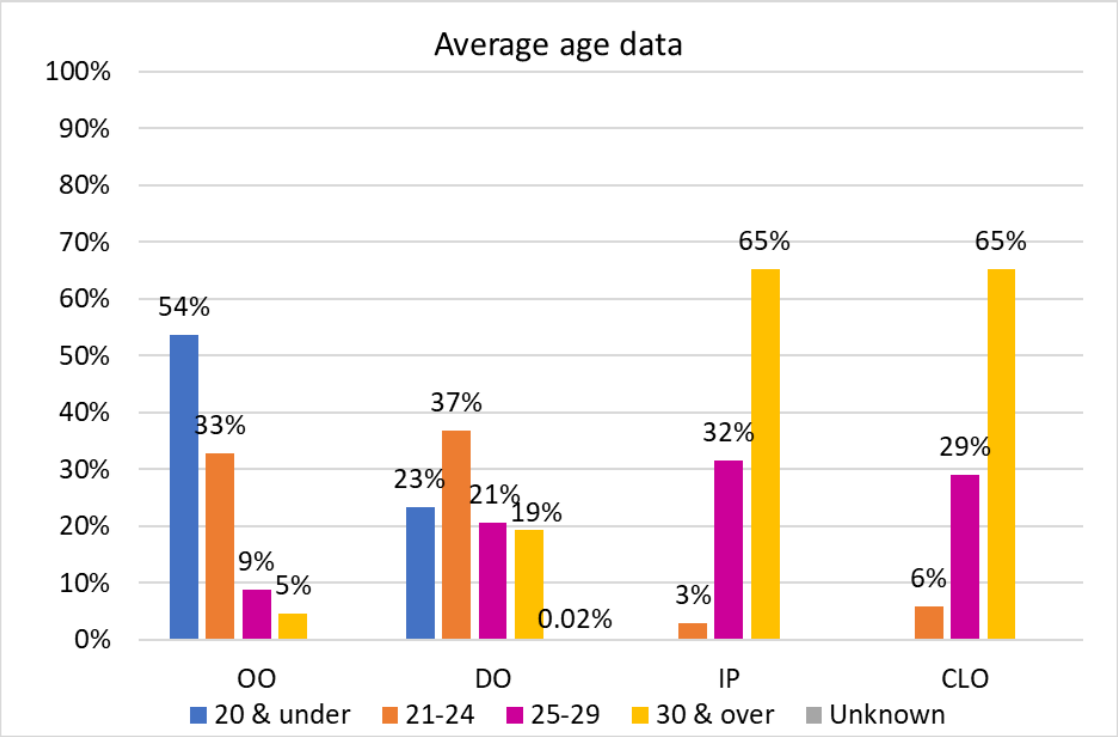
1.1. Some courses did not provide EDI data which was sufficiently precise to facilitate analysis – these have been discounted.

2. Key data

2.1. Data tables can be found in Appendix 1.

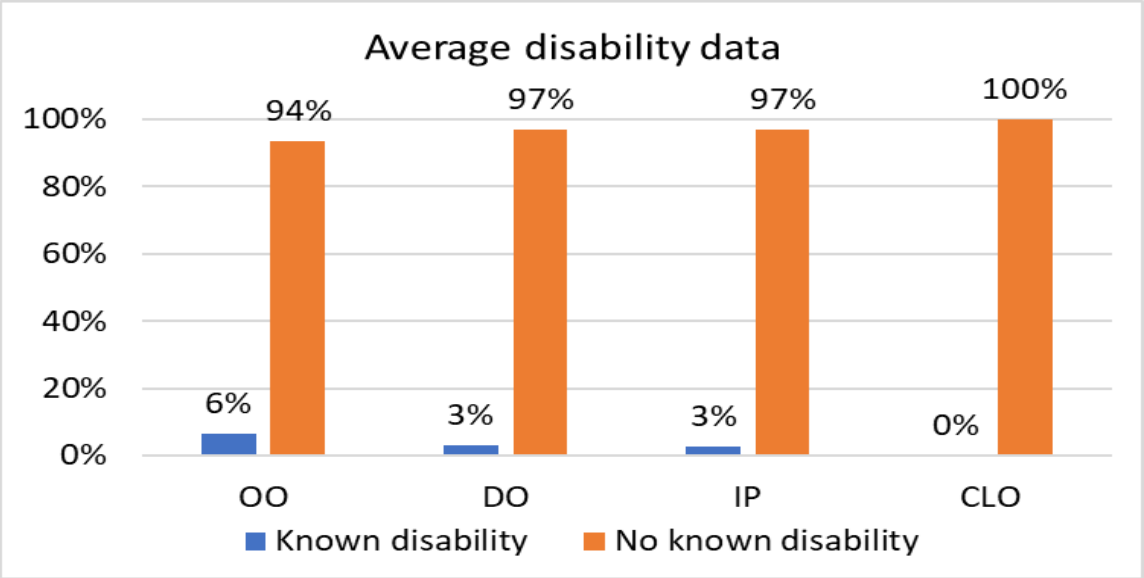


2.2. All programmes have more female than male students. All figures are very similar to those reported for the 2018/19 annual monitoring process.

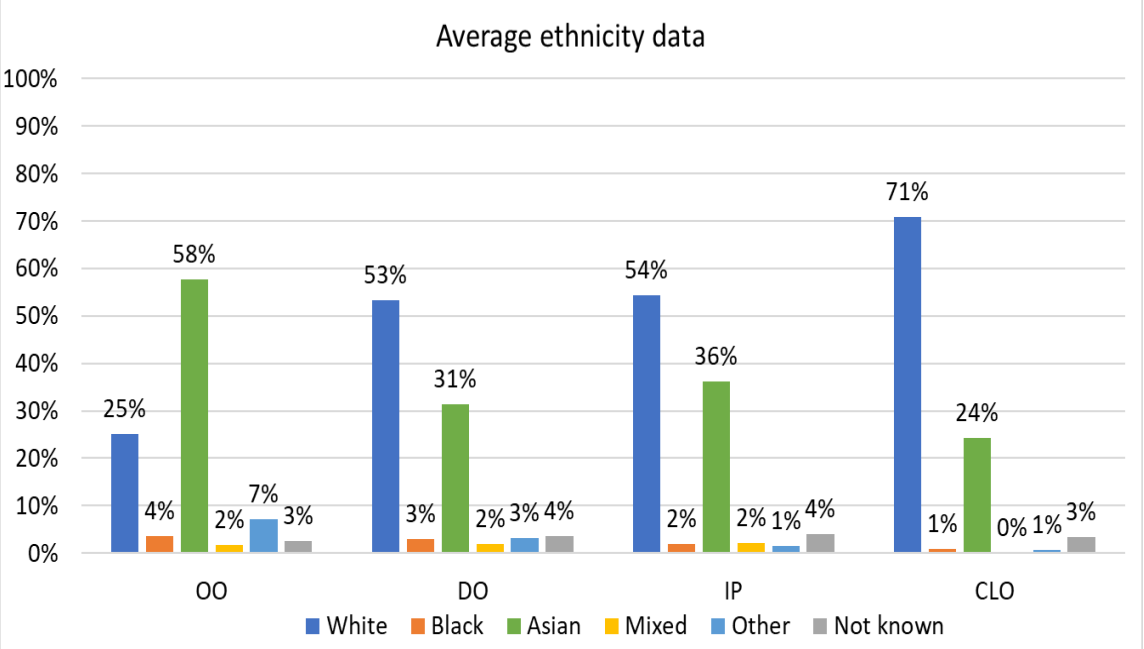


2.3. Most students (54%) on OO programmes are aged 20 and under. DO programmes have a wider distribution of ages and a higher proportion of students aged 30 years and over: this reflects the larger proportion of mature students enrolling on part-time DO programmes.

2.4. IP and CLO programmes are only open to qualified practitioners and their age ranges are therefore dominated by students aged 30 and over, but it is encouraging that over 30% of IP and CLO students are aged under 30: this shows these programmes are attractive to recently-qualified practitioners.



2.5. Optometry programmes have an average of 6% (14.2% in 2018/19) disabled students. All other programmes have less than 4% disabled students.



2.6. 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 2019 – 31 August 2020.

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	53.7%	62.2%	114.8	136.0
Optometry	22.9%	17.8%	134.5	136.0
Ophthalmic Dispensing	73.7%	76.5%	36.0	24.0
Independent Prescribing	87.3%	85.2%	N/A	N/A
Contact Lens Opticians	79.6%	84.6%	N/A	N/A

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

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**
Optometry	76.6	81.0	80.5	26.8
Ophthalmic Dispensing	44.9	55.3	58.3	N/A
Independent Prescribing	61.2	N/A	N/A	N/A
Contact Lens Opticians	33.7	N/A	N/A	N/A

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

	Year 1	**Year 2**	**Year 3**	**Year 4**
Optometry	101.0%	92.1%	86.4%	52.1%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	43.0%	56.9%	64.8%	N/A
Independent Prescribing	230.4%	N/A	N/A	N/A
Contact Lens Opticians	63.54%	N/A	N/A	N/A

One IP institute was granted permission to recruit a very large cohort, hence the large value.

D. Student mean progression

	Progression from first year	**Progression to the following year**	**Students completing the programme**
Optometry	96.4%	95.9%	96.2 %
Ophthalmic Dispensing	87.7%	91.4%	84.1%

E. Student mean attainment

	Good Pass[5]	Fail
All programmes	93.8%	5.9%
Optometry	98.1%	1.4%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	96.9%	9.3%
Independent Prescribing	98.0%	1.0%
Contact Lens Opticians	100.0%	0.0%
Awarding Body (Dispensing & Contact Lens Opticians)	46.4%	53.6%
Awarding Body (Independent Prescribing & Optometry)	95.4%	4.7%

F. National Student Survey – mean satisfaction score by category

	All programmes	Optometry	Ophthalmic Dispensing	National Average	Subjects Allied to Medicine
Teaching	88.07%	91.11%	85.03%	84.00%	85.00%
Learning Opportunities	86.11%	88.36%	83.86%	83.00%	86.00%
Assessment & Feedback	76.01%	76.66%	75.35%	73.00%	73.00%
Academic Support	82.90%	84.63%	81.16%	79.00%	79.00%
Organisation & Management	77.67%	80.54%	74.80%	74.00%	67.00%
Learning Resources	84.75%	87.23%	82.26%	86.00%	87.00%
Learning Community	83.00%	88.21%	77.78%	76.00%	81.00%
Student Voice	73.11%	76.34%	69.88%	74.00%	74.00%
Student Union	65.17%	66.00%	64.33%	56.00%	60.00%
Overall	87.68%	92.51%	82.85%	83.00%	81.00%

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

G. EDI – Average gender data

	Female	Male
All programmes	63.37%	36.63%
Optometry	66.63%	33.37%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	64.80%	35.30%
Independent Prescribing	63.02%	36.98%
Contact Lens Opticians	69.20%	30.80%

H. EDI – Average age data

	20 & under	21-24	25-29	30 & over	Unknown
All programmes	26.45%	23.03%	19.02%	31.44%	<0.01%
Optometry	53.68%	32.77%	8.84%	4.65%	0.00%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	23.37%	36.74%	20.55%	19.32%	0.02%
Independent Prescribing	0.00%	3.00%	31.62%	65.18%	0.00%
Contact Lens Opticians	0.00%	5.84%	28.93%	65.23%	0.00%

I. EDI – average disability data

	Known disability	No known disability
All programmes	4.44%	95.50%
Optometry	6.36%	93.64%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	3.21%	96.79%
Independent Prescribing	2.70%	96.80%
Contact Lens Opticians	0.00%	100.00%

J. EDI – Average ethnicity data

	White	Black	Asian	Mixed	Other	Not known
All programmes	46.32%	2.27%	40.49%	2.00%	3.53%	3.48%
Optometry	25.01%	3.63%	57.68%	1.76%	7.20%	2.51%
Ophthalmic Dispensing	53.24%	3.03%	31.30%	1.99%	3.17%	3.59%
Independent Prescribing	54.40%	2.00%	36.20%	2.06%	1.46%	4.06%
Contact Lens Opticians	70.77%	0.89%	24.23%	0.00%	0.63%	3.48%

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) from the other awarding body programmes and the academic qualification programmes.