

University of Portsmouth's Master of Optometry (MOptom) programme

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) v2

January 2020

1. What is the role / remit of the GOC in approving optical programmes?

One of our main regulatory functions is to assess and approve the quality and content of education programmes in optometry and dispensing optics in the UK. We do this in four ways:

- promote and enforce high standards of education, training and conduct to protect the public;
- set standards for all optical qualifications (referred to as programmes) in optics that lead to full registration with the GOC (and entry to our speciality registers);
- approve courses and qualifications that meet these education standards;
- carry out quality assurance activities to check that education and assessment/awarding bodies are meeting our education standards.

2. How does the GOC decide which programmes to approve?

We review paper-based applications for new programmes and conduct site visits to educational institutions offering these programmes to determine whether a programme is ready to receive provisional approval. Programme providers must provide evidence on how they meet our standards and requirements as set out in our quality assurance [handbooks](#). Once we are satisfied that our standards have been met, our Council makes the decision to approve programmes.

3. The GOC granted provisional approval to the University of Portsmouth optometry programme, what does that mean?

We grant two types of approval to education programmes:

- **Provisional approval** – this means that the education provider has been granted initial approval by the GOC to run a programme. Education providers remain provisionally approved until the first cohort of students have successfully completed the course and all standards and requirements have been met. During the provisional approval phase the GOC conduct regular site visits and assessments of the course performance and management.
- **Full approval** – this is only granted to courses when they have been running for a period of time and we are satisfied that the course has met all of our standards for its students to achieve full registration.

4. Why has the GOC withdrawn provisional approval for the MOptom course?

The University of Portsmouth failed to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that it met our standards and requirements, and therefore the decision to withdraw provisional approval was taken.

5. What evidence did the GOC consider before this decision was made?

When reviewing whether a provider or programme has met our standards and conditions, we consider an extensive range of evidence – including student focus groups and surveys, staff and management interviews, university policies, confirmation that policies are being applied, staffing ratios, complaints, examination papers, student attainment, governance structures, facilities and resourcing – against our handbook requirements.

We also look for evidence that all relevant policies, processes, or documentation are in place and are effective.

6. How many students will be affected by this decision?

The University of Portsmouth confirmed that 33 students are affected by this decision and that they will be supported in line with their student protection plan.

7. What does the withdrawal of GOC provisional approval mean for year 2 (level 5) students?

The University is currently implementing its student protection plan (SPP) and will support the students to explore the options for them to continue their studies.

8. What does the withdrawal of GOC provisional approval mean for year 3 (level 6) students?

The University is currently implementing its student protection plan (SPP) and will support the students to explore the options for them to continue their studies.

A further request has been submitted by the university for the current year 3 (level 6) students to be permitted to undertake further teaching, revision and assessment to achieve a BSc in Optometry. This is being considered by the GOC separately. We will continue to liaise with the University during this time.

9. What does the withdrawal of GOC provisional approval mean for year 4 (level 7) students?

As part of the withdrawal decision, the GOC has permitted the current year 4 (level 7) students to receive a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Optometry. This will allow them to continue their studies and undertake a clinical placement under the College of Optometrists' Scheme for Registration which could lead to registration with the GOC.

10. Can students transfer to other programmes to finish their studies?

Students may transfer to another programme. For students wishing to consider this option, please speak to the university. For any queries about other programmes or the College of Optometrists' Scheme for Registration please contact them directly.

The University of Portsmouth has committed to supporting students looking to study elsewhere.

11. Is the Office for Students, the independent regulator for Higher Education in England, aware?

The GOC have informed the Office for Students.

12. Does the GOC have any responsibility for the students affected?

The University of Portsmouth is solely responsible for the programme and the welfare of its students. The University is required by the Office for Students to effectively implement their Student Protection Plan, which is available [here](#). The University have informed us that that plan is now being implemented and they are taking all steps to ensure that students' interests are protected.

13. What will the GOC do to help students impacted by this decision?

In order to facilitate transfers of affected students into other optometry programmes, we will temporarily lift our cap on student numbers and staff: student ratios for any providers who offer fully approved GOC programmes to accommodate these students.

Please note, the GOC does not have degree-awarding powers (i.e. the GOC does not issue degrees/qualifications), the GOC grants approval for qualifications to form all or part of the route to registration. The University is fully responsible for awarding qualifications therefore students will need to discuss their situation with the University. Should a student wish to continue to work towards a Masters, they need to raise this with the university.

14. What should a student do if they agree to transfer to a different course/university?

Please email registration@optical.org to let us know what you have decided to do. If you have secured agreement to continue studying optometry at a different provider, please provide details of the course and start date and we will update the student register. If you have decided not to continue studying optometry, we still need to know, so that we can remove you from the student register.

15. Where can students go for help or queries?

We would encourage students affected to contact the University in the first instance.