

University of Portsmouth's Masters in Optometry (MOptom) programme

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) v.1

December 2019

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

One of our main regulatory functions is to assess and approve the quality and content of education provided for those training to practise 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 maintaining and improving on our education standards.

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

We review applications and evidence and conduct site visits to determine whether a course is ready to receive provisional approval. Course providers must provide evidence on how they meet our standards and requirements as set out in our [handbooks](#). Once we are satisfied that our standards are sufficiently 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 which is considered as all or part of a route to registration. 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 issued a notice of intent to withdraw provisional approval?

In September 2019 the GOC made the decision to impose a condition to suspend the recruitment of new students to the optometry programme. This was to enable the University to focus their resources on addressing its outstanding concerns.

Following this decision, the GOC conducted a quality assurance visit in November 2019 and found that the concerns had not been sufficiently rectified. Following consideration of the visit report on 5 December 2019, the GOC Council decided to give notice of its intention to withdraw provisional approval for the MOptom programme. The University now has one month to appeal this decision.

The University is working on a range of contingency options for the students and the GOC is in regular communication with the University and the Office for Students.

If the University successfully appeals, then the MOptom programme will still have provisional GOC approval and students will be able to continue their studies on this course.

If the University chooses not to appeal, on 10 January 2020, the GOC will withdraw provisional approval from the MOptom programme and grant provisional approval for a BSc Optometry exit award only for the current level 7 students if they are eligible to receive it, but this will not exclude those students from continuing their studies elsewhere. The BSc Optometry's provisional approval will cease after this time.

If the University would like to run a GOC-registered course in future, they will be required to seek a new approval and complete our full approval process.

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

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

6. What does the potential withdrawal of GOC provisional approval mean for year 2 (level 5) and year 3 (level 6) students?

The University will implement their student protection plan (SPP) and will support the students to continue their studies at a different university, should they wish to.

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

The University will implement their student protection plan (SPP) and will support the students to continue their studies at a different university should they wish to.

For the current Level 7 students, the university may offer the opportunity to graduate with a BSc Optometry degree and/or these students will have the choice to enrol with another university to finish their studies should they wish to complete a Masters.

- The University has degree-awarding powers which means that it can decide whether a student should be awarded a degree, and what classification they have achieved.
- By granting provisional approval to a qualification, this means that the GOC will recognise the qualification as forming part or all of a route to GOC registration. (The university is responsible for *awarding* a degree).

8. What does the potential withdrawal of GOC provisional approval mean for pre-registration placements?

There may be implications for students who transfer to another provider to continue their current pre-registration placements. It is important the students contact the University for all matters related to their qualification and the College of Optometrists for queries regarding the Scheme for Registration.

9. What does this decision mean for the University?

The University has a calendar month to submit any commentary or objections regarding the findings and the reason that GOC has issued the notice of withdrawal.

Should no representations be made, the GOC intends to formally withdraw provisional approval from the MOptom and the BSc Optometry exit awards on 10 January 2020.

10. 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.

All the above factors were covered in an up-to-date report to Council.

11. Is the Office for Students 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 courses to accommodate these students.

As the GOC were sufficiently assured of the attainment of the level 7 students to date, in the event of withdrawal, the GOC has decided to grant provisional approval to a BSc Optometry exit award for these students who have obtained a 2:2, so that they may continue on the Scheme for Registration.

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 each student will be required 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.