

GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL

**Report of the Visits to
College of Optometry
Independent Prescribing
Qualification**

31 May 2012

1a Acknowledgements

The Visitors wish to express their grateful thanks to Bryony Pawinska, Chief Executive, Jackie Martin, Director of Education, Dvaid Maun, Education Co-ordinator and Dr John Foulkes who gave up their time to meet with the Panel. The Panel would also like to thank Dr Stuart Roxburgh, Dr Paul Spry and Mary-Ann Sherratt who all made themselves available to speak to the Panel by teleconference.

1b Background Information

1c Introduction

This Report is of the Visit by the General Optical Council to the Optometry Independent Prescribing Final Qualifying Examination provided by the College of Optometry. The Visit took place on 31st May 2012.

The Visitors were:

Professor David Whitaker – Educationalist and Chair

Mrs Sally Powell – Lay Person

Dr Paul Baines – Ophthalmologist

Mt Robert Harper – IP Qualified Optometrist

Mrs Linda Ford, GOC Head of Education and Standards

The GOC is required to undertake such Visits in order to obtain assurance that the standards of assessment and quality assurance are compliant with the GOC's standards, and that the qualification can continue to be accredited by the GOC for the entry of successful optometrists onto the GOC Therapeutic Specialty Register.

During the Visit the GOC Handbook, 'Guidelines for the approval of Specialty Qualifications (the Handbook)' was used by the visitors. The Visitors conducted their assessment during the Visit applying the criteria and requirements as set out in the Handbook and the associated Regulations.

Prior to the Visit, the GOC received comprehensive pre-visit information from the College of Optometrists based on the GOC's Handbook and in response to the GOC's request for a Monitoring Report following the November 2011 examination.

The Visitors found the pre-visit information to be very useful in understanding the College's processes for handling appeals, the action taken to review the conduct of the November 2011 examination and the processes and methodology used for standards setting.

2 Evaluation

During the Visit the Panel held a tele-conference with the External Examiner and considered his involvement with the programme. The Panel noted that under existing arrangements his involvement is limited to reviewing the e questions in advance of the examination. The Panel concluded that the College had missed an opportunity to make greater use of this role to include provision of external quality assurance of all stages of the examination including the standards setting process.

The Panel had the opportunity to also speak to both the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Colleges Education Committee regarding the process used by the College to handle the appeals and associated complaints received in respect of the November 2011 examinations. Having reviewed these processes the Panel concluded the process had been managed in line with the Regulations and the outcomes communicated to the parties concerned in a timely manner. The Panel were particularly pleased to note the action taken by the College to improve the guidance and advance information given to candidates to ensure they were aware of the requirements of the examination, including explicit reference to the Clinical Management Guidelines. The Panel considered the level of feedback provided to candidates following the examination results to be good practice and a positive example of learning gained from the review undertaken in respect of the November 2011 examination results. The

Panel would encourage further feedback to universities regarding the performance of their candidates to ensure courses continue to evaluate how they prepare their students for the examinations.

The Panel reviewed the logbook used to capture patient experience gained during the practice placement element of the programme. The Panel were concerned that although an administrative check is undertaken to verify the placement complied with the requirements no quality check occurs to verify that the placement enabled the trainee to experience a sufficiently broad range of patients and conditions.

3 Conclusions

The Panel recognised the improvements that have been implemented following the November 2011 examination and the subsequent investigations. In particular, the Panel were impressed by the provision of feedback to candidates and the greater availability of advance material to assist candidates in preparing for the examination. The Panel commended the College's willingness to work with training providers to support candidates in understanding and preparing for the examination and to ensure the qualification retains its credibility.

Overall, the Panel concluded that the Independent Prescribing Final Qualifying Examination continues to meet all of the requirements of the Therapeutic Specialist Training Handbook.

4a Approval

The Visitors therefore recommend that the IP Final Qualifying Examination be approved for a further three years until May 2015 subject to annual monitoring submissions in the interim years and the following conditions and recommendations:

4b Conditions

1. The appointment of an IP qualified Optometrist as the second External Examiner.
2. The External Examiners role be extended to include provision of evaluation and feedback as to the suitability of the examination in advance of each assessment and of the standards setting process following each examination.
3. Annual Monitoring submissions to include the following:
 - a. Achievement statistics broken down by training provider and showing pass rates and re-sits with number of attempts where relevant.
 - b. External examiner reports and associated action plans.
 - c. Notification of any changes made or proposed to any of the following:
 - i. Assessment structure
 - ii. Standards setting process

iii. Members of the standards setting panel

iv. External Examiners

4c Recommendations

- Review of the format of the logbook / portfolio used to record the patient experience gained during the practice placement with a view to identifying improvements.
- Greater involvement of members of the standards panel in the development of exam questions
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- Provision of improved guidance for candidates on the requirements of the clinical placement.
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- Further collaboration with training providers to offer candidates a greater understanding of the nature and requirements of the examination and the importance of the Clinical Management Guidelines.
- Consideration be given to the adoption of good practice processes used in the Pre-Registration Scheme For Registration assessment model for use in the assessment of this specialist qualification.