

**ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH DISPENSING OPTICIANS EXAMINATIONS
(ABDO EXAMINATIONS)**

GOC Quality Assurance Visit

OPHTHALMIC DISPENSING EXAMINATIONS

**11-12 September 2019
(2 days)**

Date report completed	29 November 2019
Report confirmed by GOC	11 December 2019

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PART 1 – VISIT DETAILS

1.1 PROVIDER DETAILS	
Address	ABDO Examinations and Registration The Old Dairy Godmersham Park Godmersham Canterbury Kent CT4 7DT
Responsible officer	Mark Chandler
Responsible officer telephone	01227 732920
Responsible officer email address	mchandler@abdo.org.uk

1.2 PROGRAMME DETAILS	
Programme title	Ophthalmic Dispensing Examinations
Programme type	Level 6 Diploma
Current approval status	Full Approval
Approved/current student numbers	Not applicable

1.3 GOC EDUCATION VISITOR PANEL	
Chair	Jane Andrews
Visitors	Maryna Hura, Dispensing Optician Sally Powell, Lay Member Graeme Stevenson, Dispensing / Contact Lens Optician David Whitaker, Optometrist
GOC representative	Richard Calver, Approval and Quality Assurance Officer
Observers	None

1.4. PURPOSE OF THE VISIT	
Visit type	Quality Assurance Visit
<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. To perform a full quality assurance visit in accordance with routine quality assurance processes.2. To confirm that the assessment stages of the Route to Registration for Dispensing Opticians remain fit for purpose, and ensure that students have reached the expected levels of knowledge, competence and experience to be registered by the GOC as Dispensing Opticians.	

1.5 PROGRAME HISTORY

Set out a chronology of the key events affecting the programme in the last FIVE years, including any visits and key events.

Date	Event type	Overview
2014	Event	The GOC's Education Committee approved the 2013 visit report. This was the most recent full quality assurance visit.
2015	Change	ABDO Examinations introduced a new syllabus: the first candidates were examined in 2016 at Preliminary Qualifying level and 2018 at Final Qualifying level.
2017	Other	A full quality assurance visit was planned, but postponed by the GOC.

PART 2 – VISIT SUMMARY

2.1 Visit outcomes	
The GOC Education Visitor Panel (the EVP) recommended that approval of the ABDO Ophthalmic Dispensing Examinations should continue as part of an approved route to registration for Dispensing Opticians, subject to three conditions.	
Summary of recommendations to the GOC	
Previous conditions – met/not met	Conditions 1 and conditions 3-8 have been met. ABDO Examinations argued that condition 2 could not be realistically met because candidates must apply to sit their Final Qualifying Examinations several months in advance. The EVP acknowledged this point and agreed that the existing system is adequate.
New conditions	3
New recommendations	1
Commendations	1
Student numbers	Not applicable.
Approval/next visit	A routine two-day quality assurance visit to be held between 3 September 2024 and 17 September 2024.
Factors to consider when scheduling next visit e.g. when students are in, hospital, audit etc.	The EVP will be required to observe examinations, practice visits, and the Examinations Board before the final visit.

2.2 Previous conditions (Reference numbers refer to the relevant section of the previous report)				
The conditions listed below are extracted from the report of 13 June 2017				
Ref No.	Condition	Requirement number	Due date	Met?
1	A copy of the new syllabus and supporting documentation to explain the context of the document, what the changes are and who was consulted (externally) to be submitted to the GOC by end of November 2013.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2	Implementation of the GOC requirement that Students should not be permitted to sit the final practical exam until their Core Competency Tracking sheet is received from the training provider and they have submitted a completed Portfolio of Practical Experience.			<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No See 2.1 above.

3	The Core Competency Tracking document to be reviewed, revised and renamed to highlight its importance to training providers.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4	Revision of the supervisor declaration in the PQP portfolio to include more explicit wording highlighting that supervisors GOC registration will be at risk should the declaration not be adhered to.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5	Revision of the pink declaration form within the PQP portfolio to explicitly include a declaration confirming provision of specified equipment.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6	Further consideration to be given to the use of External Examiners in addition to External Moderators to support standards development, continuous improvement and benchmarking.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
7	Establish a formalised mechanism for capturing stakeholder perspectives to specifically include patients, industry, employers, students and graduates to inform curricula and syllabus development with particular focus on the elderly, given the challenges facing healthcare with regard to the aging population.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
8	Review the process and audit trail for exemptions of examinations. Define what criteria need to be satisfied in order for an exemption to be authorised.			<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No

2.3 Previous recommendations	
The recommendations listed below are extracted from the report of Click or tap to enter a date.	
Description	Comments
Consideration to be given to including the Competency Tracking Sheet within the Pre - Qualification Portfolio.	This recommendation was considered by ABDO Examinations but considered impractical to avoid unreasonable delay to students. The EVP agreed delays should be avoided, and was satisfied that the current competency tracking process was adequate.
Practice visits to be scheduled as early as possible within the student's pre-registration placement to identify any issues with supervision, completion of portfolio or suitability of the placement at the earliest opportunity.	Progress had been made but scheduling remained variable. See new requirement D3.21.
Publication of both the student and supervisor handbooks and any other relevant guidance documents on the website.	Actioned.
More explicit publication of the Complaints Process and appeal criteria on the ABDO Examinations website.	Actioned.
All complaints and challenges, including those from students who have passed the examination, to be documented so that recurring issues can be more easily identified and improvements made.	Actioned.
Publication of achievement data broken down by training institution to support transparency and to allow students and employers to make informed decisions as to their preferred course of study.	Progress had been made, but the EVP considered that early further improvements were required. See new requirement D4.4

Consideration to be given to publication of the syllabus in a student friendly format, with reference to learning outcomes rather than learning objectives to avoid encouraging a tick list mentality from both students and course providers.	Actioned.
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2.4 Conditions set at this visit

Conditions are applied to training and assessment providers if there is evidence that the GOC requirements are not met. The conditions (unmet requirements) for this visit are set out at 3. below.

2.5 Recommendations made at this visit

The Panel offers the following recommendation(s) to the provider. Recommendations indicate enhancements that can be made to a programme but are not directly linked to compliance with GOC requirements.

Ref.	Description
1	The EVP recommends that ABDO Examinations considers seeking the appointment of an External Moderator with ophthalmic dispensing expertise that would facilitate comparison and benchmarking of the ABDO examinations with other programmes, and dispensing practice.

2.6 Commendations

The Panel identifies the following areas of good practice where the programme exceeds the GOC requirements.

The EVP noted positively the use of paediatric heads in the Final Qualifying Examination.

PART 3 – CONDITIONS

GOC REQUIREMENT	
D2.3	The programme must be provided with appropriate administrative and technical support.
Condition	<p>ABDO Examinations must submit to the GOC an action plan to include plans for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ensuring the technical support required to adequately maintain and iteratively improve the existing database, and; 2. to maintain and support the development of online digital services, mobile apps and accurate complete progression data reporting. <p>The action plan must specify:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a plan for stabilising and improving the current systems, mapped to deadlines, and; 2. sources of acquiring and financing the additional technical support required. <p>Implementation of this plan must provide more effective reporting systems, enabling ABDO Examinations to meet 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' requirements, and enabling more effective monitoring of examination results and candidate progression. (See also Requirement D4.4).</p>
Date Due	1 April 2020
Rationale	<p>The EVP was impressed by the dedication of the administrative staff, but remain concerned that there is insufficient support for the delivery of time-bound strategic change projects (e.g. the new database, the improvements in examination statistics, and intended online solutions for examination applications and results). Existing staff are ambitious for improvement but may lack the technical skills to implement and maintain these projects, in which case specialist technical support will be needed.</p> <p>The Examinations team suggested that an IT specialist was being sought for these projects, and would be in post by April 2020. The team also stated that formal proposals for IT improvements would be submitted to the ABDO Board for consideration and approval, and that new systems could then be implemented for existing and new students. The EVP viewed that as a welcome development.</p>

GOC REQUIREMENT	
D3.21	Effective quality assurance measures must be in place.
Condition	ABDO Examinations must provide the GOC with evidence that they have fully implemented plans for ensuring that practice visits are carried out earlier in the Pre-Qualification Period, ahead of the exams, in accordance with information provided during the visit.
Date Due	31 December 2019
Rationale	<p>The timing of practice visits is currently variable, with some taking place too late in the pre-qualification period to benefit candidates.</p> <p>The Examinations team explained that candidates will now be advised by letter to apply for their practice visits before the January of the pre-qualifying period, will receive reminder emails if they do not apply in good time, and will not be allowed to take the exam before the practice visit. This is a welcome development but has only recently been decided, and the EVP requires evidence that the system has been implemented.</p>

GOC REQUIREMENT	
D4.4	The provider must demonstrate the use of effective mechanisms for the monitoring of student achievement and progression.
Condition	<p>ABDO Examinations must implement a system for providing more effective data reporting in time for the Summer 2020 examinations. The new systems must provide richer data which will:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. meet ABDO Exams' obligation to monitor 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' statistics; 2. allow more effective monitoring of examination results and progression rates. <p>ABDO Examinations must also submit the Summer 2019 Exam Board minutes to the GOC, once finalised.</p>
Date Due	1 April 2020
Rationale	The EVP studied examination statistics provided by the Examinations team and concluded that the data does not currently permit adequate analysis of exam achievement. For example, it was hard to deduce the proportion of candidates passing all sections at the first attempt or by the first resit, or within a specific length of time. No data exists to investigate the examination success rates in candidates of different gender, ethnic background or age, for example, and it is imperative that better data can be shared with training institutions to help them ensure that students are well prepared for their professional examinations, and to demonstrate the fairness and equality of the examinations.

The EVP appreciated the complexity of that task, and noted positively the significant IT investment to improve systems for results reporting. However, the EVP also noted the Examinations team's acknowledgement that data analysis systems were still not ideal for the task, and there was an aim to raise the quality of data.

The GOC's Annual Monitoring Report data requirements are due to be published in October 2019, and the 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' requirements are to allow the Examinations team to be able to demonstrate that the results show that there has been no discrimination against the protected characteristics set out in the Equality Act.

APPENDIX – VISIT SCHEDULE

1. This GOC quality assurance visit consisted of the following events:
 - 1.1 Observation of the ABDO Preliminary Qualifying Examinations (PQEs) by a sub-panel of the EVP.
 - 1.2 Observation of the ABDO Final Qualifying Examinations (FQEs) by a sub-panel of the EVP.
 - 1.3 Observation of a selection of practice visits by clinicians from the EVP.
 - 1.4 Observation of the Examinations Board by a sub-panel of the EVP.
 - 1.5 Surveys of examination candidates and examiners.
 - 1.6 Visit to the ABDO Examinations office (the 'Visit') by the full EVP.

2. PQE Observations – 5 June 2019
 - 2.1 A sub-panel of the EVP, consisting of the Lay Chair, a dispensing optician and an optometrist, observed the PQEs at the ABDO's National Resource Centre, Birmingham. The sub-panel agreed that the examinations were well-organised, and candidates received a comprehensive briefing talk at the beginning of the day.
 - 2.2 Candidates had access to a wide selection of equipment, including sample lenses and frames. Equipment was sometimes faulty, but could easily be replaced by examiners, and did not affect the meeting of any GOC requirement.
 - 2.3 Each section was examined efficiently, and the Panel noted examples of double marking and peer observation.

3. FQE Observations – 26 June 2019
 - 3.1 A sub-panel of the EVP, consisting of the Lay Chair and two dispensing opticians, again observed an efficiently run examination.
 - 3.2 External assessment was evident: the external practical Exam Moderator attended the event and was introduced to the candidates. The external moderator's presence meant that some visitors could not observe all the sections, as all parties wanted to avoid an excess of observers in the same section. All sections were observed by at least one visitor, however.
 - 3.3 The sub-panel was satisfied that all competencies were effectively examined.

4. Observations of practice visits

4.1 Clinician members of the EVP observed five practice visits in various locations and across various dates.

4.2 Practice visits included audits of equipment and facilities, audits of a selection of candidates' case records, and assessment of certain competencies.

4.3 Members of the EVP observed that practice visits were carried out efficiently and were a valuable way to assess competencies centring on communication skills and paediatric dispensing.

5. Examinations Board – 13 August 2019

5.1 A sub-panel of the EVP, consisting of the Lay Chair and a dispensing optician, observed the Examinations Board which was held at the National Resource Centre. The Board included ABDO Examinations staff and three external moderators. An independent lay Chair presided over the Board. Discussions were minuted, and the Board discussed matters arising from the previous Board meeting.

5.2 The Board considered both practical and theory results, discussing pass rates and the range of marks.

5.3 External moderators contributed by moderating borderline marks and pointing out errors in marking.

5.4 The Board formally confirmed the award of the FBDO diploma.

5.5 The sub-panel agreed that the Board was a suitable forum for the discussion and confirmation of examination results.

6. Surveys

6.1 The GOC distributed surveys to practice visitors, and recent candidates, between July and August 2019.

6.2 In response, practice visitors agreed that practice visits were useful, permitting the assessment of competencies, such as communication skills and professionalism, that were more appropriately examined in practice.

6.3 Candidates responding to the survey were generally pleased with the new examinations venue, and were broadly satisfied with their examinations experience. No issues of concern to the GOC were raised.

6.4 Practice visitors and candidates were also generally satisfied with the level of communication from ABDO Examinations, although some candidates mentioned that they would prefer to receive their results electronically rather than by post.