



# **The European Council of Optometry and Optics**

**Re-Accreditation of the Department of Optometry**

**University of South-Eastern Norway,  
Kongsberg, Norway**

**Against the Knowledge Base, Competencies  
and Portfolio of the  
ECOO European Diploma in Optometry**

**22-24<sup>th</sup> November 2021**

## 1. Background

The Department of Optometry in Kongsberg was one of the first programmes in the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry Accreditation scheme to undertake the accreditation process, and achieved full accreditation of their programme in 2014.

Since then, organisational changes and mergers mean that Buskerud College was amalgamated into the University of South-Eastern Norway (USN), and full University status was granted in 2018. The Department of Optometry sits within the Department of Optometry, Radiography & Lighting Design, and Dr Bente Monica Aakre is the Head of Department

The Department of Optometry continues to run the BSc Optometry programme plus additional courses and Master's programmes. To meet the requirements of the European Diploma, candidates must complete the BSc, and also undertake a further 30 ECTS at Masters level. This is split into the following three components (10 ECTS each) that BSc graduates need to complete in order to graduate with the European Diploma in Optometry.

- MPRA4119 Clinical optometrical Practice for authorized Optometrists
- MOKU019 Advanced ocular Pathology
- MSKL019 Advanced Contact Lenses

The first course includes completion of a Portfolio of Clinical Experience for the European Diploma in Optometry, including documentation of the 150 cases, 20 of which are presented as detailed case studies covering a variety of requirements. These three modules are undertaken part-time while the candidate is working in clinical practice, and once complete, students that have attained a grade of C or above in their undergraduate programme are able to continue on other MSc courses to complete a Masters in Optometry. The three modules typically take 10-12 months to complete post-BSc graduation.

The timing of the re-accreditation visit was delayed by the global pandemic COVID-19. There were significant disruptions to delivery of education and restrictions on work and travel throughout 2020 and 2021. In response to this the European Qualifications Board for ECOO extended the accreditation period until such time as a face-to-face visit could be conducted. Through ongoing discussions with the course team, this was scheduled for Autumn 2021. Prior to the re-accreditation visit, teleconference meetings helped prepare and communicate between the Visitors and the course team, and all documentation was prepared by the end of October, 2021. The Visitors had access to Canvas, the University virtual learning environment, through which students access learning material, receive communications and instructions, submit assessments and access feedback.

Optometrists in Norway number approximately 1,600 and they provide the majority of primary eyecare. The cost of eye examinations for children under 16 years of age are met through public health system funding, along with older adults and those with visual impairment. Optometrists in Norway have had the right to use diagnostic drugs since 2004 and operate on Level 3 of the World Council of Optometry Scope

of practice. The Norwegian Association of Optometry promote and support the optometric profession and there is an Association for employers.

The Visitor Panel consisted of:  
Prof Brendan Barrett  
Dr Robert Chappell  
Dr Julie-Anne Little

## **2. Overarching analysis of the programme**

There are ~34 staff in the Department of Optometry, including full Professors, Associate and Assistant Professors, and clinically focused academics with MScs. This is a research active department, with a successful PhD programme

Student numbers are approximately 75-80 per year on the BSc programme. This academic year (2021-22), there are 14 students taking the European Diploma modules. Education costs for the BSc and MSc programmes are almost completely met by the Government, so are virtually free to students.

Since moving locations in 2015, the clinical facilities for optometry have expanded, and offer significant space for 'pre-clinical' practice for 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> year students on the BSc programme, enabling practice in refraction, keratometry, slit lamp and Volk techniques. There are also laboratories for basic optics and for the glazing and assembly of spectacles. The volume of space that the Department has access to appears appropriate for the delivery of the course and the quality, range and volume of clinical equipment shown to the Visitors was impressive.

The USN National centre for optics, vision and eye care has 20 fully equipped clinical testing rooms with additional access to perimetry and retinal imaging facilities, including OCT and Optos. This clinical facility is open to the public. It does not have dispensing capacity to supply spectacles, but does supply contact lenses and low visual aids for patients. Patients who have been issued with a prescription can take this to a local optometry practice. In the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the programme, students undertake 7-8 complete eye examinations and observe 7-8 others. Diagnostic drugs are frequently used in the clinic and encouraged in external clinical practice. There are approximately ~17,000 patients on the USN clinic database with a spread across all age groups.

During the visit, the Visitors met with a sample of students (5-6 from each year of the BSc programme) and with the entire group of MSc/European diploma candidates. There was a mixed profile of ages and backgrounds, with most currently

working or with previous experience in optometric practice and a sizeable proportion are undertaking the BSc optometry course as a 2<sup>nd</sup> qualification. There were largely positive contributions regarding the course teaching and feedback on assessments and progress, and a clear demonstration of active and wider engagement with the optometry profession, with all students having good awareness of the value of student membership of the Norwegian Association of Optometry. Students reported that the first year was found to be quite general and covers basic science. Students reported that they see 7-10 patients in the University clinic in the 3<sup>rd</sup> year, along with observations and additional specialist clinics including contact lenses and binocular vision. The Department runs a school vision initiative and this gives students experience of conducting visual assessments outside the USN eye clinic and practice. Children that require follow up are invited to the USN eye clinic and thus there is good opportunity for experience of paediatric eye testing.

The students undertake three placements during their BSc: one week each in semester one (1<sup>st</sup> year) and in semester four (2<sup>nd</sup> year); and a longer, 8-week placement in semester six (3<sup>rd</sup> year). Students organise these placement opportunities themselves and while there are a number of students who work as optical assistants and undertake their placements in the same practice, they are encouraged to seek different opportunities. There is a comprehensive protocol for these placements. Speaking with the students, they were aware of the value in attending a variety of placements.

The Department is active in engaging with employers and industry and with the Norwegian Association of Optometry, and the University hosts continuing professional development lectures and workshops for qualified optometrists. During the visit the Visitors met a number of external lecturers from clinical practice, both independents and chains. The Masters programme in optometry is described as an 'industry MSc', and is part-time with content reflecting upskilling in clinical techniques, critical reflection and management of patients. The MSc/EDO students the visitors conversed with reported that they undertake the course for reasons to do with self-motivation, encouragement from employers or a combination of the two.

The structure of the programme across three years builds on knowledge of optics and human anatomy and physiology to develop clinical skills and in-depth knowledge of ocular disease. The Visitors had access to Canvas and were able to view in detail the content and assessment for modules and gain a good understanding of how the programme is delivered.

### **3. Analysis of the self-assessment document**

## **Part A**

A number of modules, chiefly in years 1 and 2 of the BSc Optometry programme, support the subject areas and learning outcomes for Part A with sufficient depth. Practical competencies are achieved through successful completion of assessments and evidenced in logbooks in Dispensing practice module and Clinical Practice and externship modules.

*Decision: Standard Met*

## **Part B**

A large range of modules, across years 1, 2 and 3 of the BSc Optometry programme support the subject areas and learning outcomes for Part B with sufficient depth. These include modules on clinical investigative techniques and optometric practice, paediatric optometry and binocular vision, visual perception, ocular pathology and low vision. Some learning outcomes are met through completion of Master's level modules specific to the European Diploma, e.g. Advanced Contact Lenses and Advanced Ocular Pathology.

Practical competencies are achieved through: Clinical Practice modules in Years 2 and 3, Externships, in USN clinics, Contact lenses 1 and 2 modules and the vision examination in school initiative. A few competencies are achieved in Clinical Optometric Practice for Authorized Optometrists Masters module.

*Decision: Standard Met*

## **Part C**

A large range of modules, across years 1, 2 and 3 of the programme, support the subject areas and learning outcomes for Part C with sufficient depth. These include ocular anatomy and physiology, human biology, pharmacology and pathology, investigative techniques and clinical practice, and ocular pathology.

Practical competencies are achieved through: Clinical Practice modules in Years 2 and 3, Clinical Optometric Practice for Authorized Optometrists Masters module, Contact Lenses 2 module, Externships, in USN clinics, and in the vision screening in school initiative.

*Decision: Standard Met*

## **Part D**

A year 2 module, Optometry and Society, supports the subject areas of professional conduct and communication and delivers learning outcomes for Part D with sufficient depth. Practical competencies are achieved through experience gained in Clinical Optometric Practice module in year 3 of the programme.

*Decision: Standard Met*

For the Practical competencies in Parts B and C, the panel noted a few discrepancies and gaps in the Self-Assessment document: these were resolved with the course Team during the visit.

#### **4. Analysis of the Clinical Portfolio**

The Visitors reviewed a random sample of portfolios. They viewed the instructions the student receives, and the support they get in the process of completing their clinical portfolio through the Clinical Optometric Practice for Authorized Optometrists Masters module. Instructions include detailed descriptions of the nature and type of patient profiles required to show a breadth of experience, and also cite the Norwegian clinical guidelines for what is necessary within particular types of eye examinations.

Staff responsible for delivery of this course have deadlines for completion of a portion of detailed case reports, and provide feedback to candidates on whether there is sufficient detail to deem each a complete and reflective record of a patient encounter. This iterative process ensures that candidates learn the required depth of description. The staff responsible for this module then assess the final submitted portfolio and determine whether it meets the requirements of the module benchmarked against the European diploma Portfolio of clinical experience requirements.

While the Visitors deemed the Clinical Portfolios satisfactory and were content with the assessment process to determine candidates' achievement of a robust and consistent standard, there were some aspects which require improvement. In some cases, there was a lack of supplementary material such as retinal imaging or perimetry results to aid the comprehensive presentation of the case description. The visitors did not find any instances where assessments such as perimetry had not been conducted in cases where there was a clinical reason to do so, but the clinical portfolio would benefit from more than a written description of this. Furthermore, building in a sampling requirement to check a number of the other 130 examinations would be important.

*Decision: Standard Met subject to fulfilment of condition*

## 5. Conclusions

Part A:	<i>Standard Met</i>
Part B:	<i>Standard Met</i>
Part C:	<i>Standard Met</i>
Part D:	<i>Standard Met</i>
Portfolio:	<i>Standard Met subject to fulfilment of condition</i>

The Visitors would like to thank Bente Monica Aakre, Irene Langeggen and the whole Department for their accommodation and organisation of the Re-accreditation visit.

The Visitors noted that graduates from the BSc Optometry programme, while gaining a licence to practise and become a registered health care professional, are relatively in-experienced on graduation and require significant support in their early career. Undertaking the additional modules for the European Diploma gives a network of support beyond an employer for graduates to gain confidence and autonomy in their clinical decision making. It would seem that Norwegian optometry sector should consider the value of increasing the clinical experience as part of optometry training prior to their qualification as an optometrist. This would mean that the scope of practice in Norway would more closely align with the standard of European Diploma in Optometry.

We conclude that re-accreditation is successful and that subject to the conditions stated above accreditation is granted for another 5 years. This will be recommended to the ECOO European Qualifications Board who will formally ratify this.

### Commendations

- The Visitors commend the facilities for the Optometry programme and the quality, range and volume of clinical equipment that the students have access to.

### Conditions

- Ensure the standards for the Clinical Portfolios are maintained and achieved to ensure that they meet the level of the European Diploma in Optometry (see commentary above). The team are asked to update the Chairs of the Accreditation Agency on actions taken to during the current academic year and report this in the annual monitoring form.

- The course team indicated that the University are requiring some changes to learning outcomes to embed more generic LOs into the BSc Optometry programme. They discussed that some aspects of the BSc programme timing may change from the 3<sup>rd</sup> year to the MSc programme. The team are asked to keep ECOO updated on any incoming changes and report this in the annual monitoring form.

## **Recommendations**

- The Visitors note that the majority of learning outcomes are met through BSc modules, and the upcoming revalidation of the programme may give the opportunity to re-align content and better integrate the European Diploma wholly within the BSc programme. This may mean that training would be required beyond the traditional 3-year format.
- Consider greater opportunity for students to gain experience of ophthalmology and the treatment of ocular pathology.
- While students seem to get good experience in paediatric optometry, more directed content on the visual assessment of those with learning disability would be valuable.