The European Council of Optometry and Optics

Accreditation of the

Bachelor Study Programme (BSP) “Optometry” & Professional Master Study Programme (PMSP) “Clinical Optometry” at the University of Latvia, Riga, Latvia

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

14-16th November, 2023

1. Background

The Faculty of Physics, Mathematics and Optometry at the University of Latvia offers the Bachelor Study Programme "Optometry" and the Professional Master Study Programme "Clinical Optometry". The Optometry team at the University is led by Prof. Gunta Krūmiņa, who is also the Director of the Bachelor study programme (BSP). The Professional Masters Study Programme (PMSP) is led by Assoc. Prof. Aiga Švede.

The University of Latvia first began the process of seeking European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) accreditation back in 2021. However, the process was interrupted by the pandemic. A full visit to the University of Latvia took place in November, 2023 (14th to 16th). Full details of the accreditation process for the EDO by the Accreditation Agency are available at: ECOO Accreditation Agency | ECOO

The University of Latvia is the largest university in the country, with around 20,000 students and the University has a very prominent standing in the country. The University consists of 13 Faculties and runs over 150 study programmes. The University has an annual budget of around 120 million euros, with 25-30% of this coming from the state. There is a strong research tradition in the University and the University is highly-rated, both within the country and internationally. The BSP began in 1993 and the PMSP began in 1999. The University of Latvia is the only higher education institution in Latvia which provides training in optometry.

A number of graduates from the PMSP have gone on to complete a PhD in Medical Physics and several of the staff teaching on the programme have gained their PhD degrees via this route, conducting research on eye and vision topics. A large number of the optometrically-qualified staff (including visiting staff) in the Department of Optometry and Vision Science have completed both programmes (BSP and PMSP) at the University and because these are the only training courses in the country, the overwhelming majority of optometrists in Latvia also undertook their training at the University of Latvia. There are approximately 270 optometrists in Latvia that are registered as medical practitioners in the Health Inspection, though not all are members of the Association of Latvian Optometrists and Opticians. There is a larger number of ophthalmologists (330) for a country population of 1.8 million, less than half of whom perform ophthalmic surgery procedures. There are only around 40 paediatric ophthalmologists in the country, and only around half of them will examine children under 6 years of age.

Two optical professions are regulated within Latvia, 'Optometrists' (in English 'Optometrist') and 'Optometrista asistents' (in English 'Dispensing Optician'). An optometrist is defined as 'a medical practitioner who offers primary vision care, assesses the patient visual function and the structure of the visual organs, diagnose refractive and functional abnormalities of vision, appoints, manufacturers and adjust vision correction tools (glasses, contact lenses or special devices), implement vision therapy to restore the visual system, advises on preventive healthcare and ergonomics as well as carrying out scientific research. The scope of practice for optometrists is described in the Latvian Professional Standard for Optometrists (version dated 11th December 2019[1], Protocol no. 8). Optometrists must use optometry medical technologies approved in accordance with the procedures specified in the regulations[2]. Optometrists are not permitted to use diagnostic or therapeutic drugs, but the use of diagnostic dyes (e.g. Fluorescein, Rose Bengal) for eye examination is permitted. Legislation does not restrict an optometrist from examining children (i.e. no minimum age is specified). In fact, an optometrist can perform an eye examination on patients of any age. However, these examinations are not covered by state fees, unlike ophthalmology-driven exams. The national association of optometrists and opticians is in the process of trying to change this situation. Mostly, optometrists themselves will decide the minimum age in children from which they are willing to conduct an

[1] https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-128.pdf (in Latvian)
[2] https://dati.zva.gov.lv/mtdb/8-oftalmologijas-mediciniskie-pakalpojumi/optometristu-mediciniskie-pakalpojumi (in Latvian)

examination. If a cycloplegic refraction needs to be conducted by an optometrist, they will need to co-operate with an ophthalmologist.

The first, national professional standard for 'Optometrist' dates from 2000, and the standard was revised in 2019. The title is protected and the practice of optometry is regulated by the law on 'the Regulated Professions and the Recognition of Professional Qualifications', by the 'Medical Treatment Law' and by six medical technology documents which set out what the public can expect in relation to the following named areas of optometric practice: (i) the assessment of visual function in the optometric practice; (ii) prescription of vision correction and aftercare in optometric practice; (iii) health assessment of eye structures in optometric practice; (iv) vision rehabilitation in optometric practice; (v) assessment of vision and prescription of vision correction tools for visually impaired patients & (vi) preventive vision testing for children in optometric practice.

The term 'Optometrista asistents' translates to 'dispensing optician' and the role is defined as follows: 'a dispensing optician advises patients on the choice of spectacle frame and optical spectacle lenses, incorporates optical lenses into spectacles, adjusts and corrects spectacle frames, demonstrates the use and care of contact lenses, monitors vision training, performs technical measurements according to directions of a certified vision specialist. Dispensing opticians are also involved in trade of vision correction tools and visual health care products'. As with 'optometrist', the standard for this profession dates from 2019[3] and the professional title is protected. The term 'Optician' is a slightly historical term describing those who are dedicated to the glazing of spectacles. 'Optometrista asistents' now include this as part of their job description. There exists no defined role for orthoptists in Latvia.

Since January 1st 2020, optometrists are officially defined as medical practitioners who may work in medical institutions. There is no legal scope regarding the profession of Dispensing Optician. Owing to the medical practitioner status of Optometrists, optical outlets in Latvia are now designated as medical institutions. This has meant that many new rules and regulations now apply. Currently, only some outlets in Latvia have been officially recognised as 'medical institutions' and the others are in the process of seeking this status. There are a number of complications associated with gaining this official recognition. These relate to the requirements for equipment and to the environment of the proposed medical institution. The national association of optometrists and opticians is in the discussion with the involved ministries trying to find a solution for this situation.

An eye examination in Latvia will typically include history and symptoms, objective and subjective refraction, examination of ocular health (anterior and posterior structures, via ophthalmoscopy), tonometry (non-contact or i-care methods) and referral to other professionals, if required. Additional scope of practice includes low vision patient assessment and management, further examination methods (e.g. OCT, perimetry), myopia management, amblyopia treatment and vision training, occupational visual assessment, and special prescribing (e.g. for athletes). The relationship between optometrists and ophthalmologists in Latvia is collaborative, with optometrists referring cases of real or suspected pathology being referred to ophthalmologist colleagues, and patients taking the opposite path if a refraction is needed. Increasingly, optometrists work alongside ophthalmologists in eye clinic settings, in particular in private settings.

The Bachelors and PMSP programmes are offered on a part-time and full-time basis. There is also an option to take the part-time programmes intra- and extra-murally. Finally, the University runs the programmes both in English and in Latvian. It should be noted that intra-mural part-time studies are offered only in PMSP in Latvian. Despite all this choice in provision for prospective students, the University has a minimum number of

[3] https://registri.visc.gov.lv/profizglitiba/dokumenti/standarti/2017/PS-121.pdf (in Latvian)

students for each programme modality before it can run and, where there are too few students, the programme will not run.

On successful completion of the PMSP "Clinical Optometry" and registration as a medical practitioner with the Health Inspectorate of Republic of Latvia, graduates have to enter practice under supervision for a minimum period of three months, at the end of which they take a certification examination, which is completely independent of the University. The examination is not run by the University of Latvia and is instead organised by a commission from the Association of Latvian Optometrists and Opticians. The exam consists of a theoretical and a practical element. The theory exam consists of MCQs with a pass mark of 75%. Only those who pass the theory exam can take the practical exam which takes place later on the same day and which consists of the full examination of a patient and includes a contact lens element. The following are also required to take these theory and practical examinations: (i) optometrists who are not on the register and have no certificate, (ii) those who have not been in practice for a sufficiently long period during the last cycle, (iii) those who have not met the mandatory continuing professional development (150 CPD or TIP in Latvian) requirements (which run on a 5-year cycle).

Students entering the PMSP are typically graduates from the BSP who join directly following their graduation from the Bachelor programme. However, graduates from other programmes are also eligible to apply to join the PMSP. Such applicants include graduates of optometry programmes from outside Latvia (e.g. Estonia, Italy, Iran), and graduates from science-based Latvian degree programmes. Whilst the University of Latvia is seeking EDO accreditation for the combined route of their BSP in Optometry plus PMSP in Clinical Optometry, ultimately, they have indicated that they also wish to seek accreditation for graduates of the PMSP who have not joined the programme having completed the University of Latvia's BSP in Optometry. For such students, the Department of Optometry and Vision Science will offer a course titled 'OptoBasic' which will cover the EDO learning outcomes contained within the BSP. Thus, students who wish to gain the EDO would need to complete the OptoBasic (1-year) followed by the PMSP (i.e. total duration 3 years full-time, referred to as PMSP+), instead of the 2-year full-time duration for the PMSP alone. However, the OptoBasic course has not yet started (the first intake is expected in September, 2024) and the Panel were clear with the course team from the outset that this particular accreditation visit was to evaluate the existing combination of BSP and PMSP against the requirements of the EDO. In the future, when there are students on the OptoBasic programme the University of Latvia can request that the PMSP+ route (i.e. the combination of the OptoBasic and PMSP) be evaluated for EDO accreditation.

The University of Latvia's Medical School has recently (2021) begun running a course for optometrist's assistants. Graduates of this two-year course can seek employment. Should they choose to continue their studies, they are exempted from the subjects that are similar in both programmes (e.g. Visual Optics, Geometrical Optics, Human Anatomy and Physiology). As with the OptoBasic course, this accreditation visit did not consider this course, and, as indicated, focused instead only on the University of Latvia's BSP and PMSP courses.

All forms of study (full-time, part-time, intra- and extra-mural) for both programmes (BSP and PMSP) in both languages (English and Latvian) have recently undergone a successful accreditation within the University, and are thus accredited for the maximum 6 year period from 1/2/23.

The Visitor Panel consisted of:

Brendan Barrett (Chair of Panel)
Ms Nikki Keller (Student representative)
Michelle Hennelly

2. Overarching analysis of the programme

Prior to the visit, the Visitor Panel were supplied with comprehensive documentation by Optometry leadership and the quality of the documentation was found to be consistently excellent. Two zoom calls took place in advance of the visit and during the visit, the Panel had extensive opportunities to talk with the key members of the course team and with the wider staff. Through these efforts, the Panel members were able to view in detail the content and assessment for the various modules in the BSP and PMSP and to gain a good understanding of how the programmes are delivered. During the visit, the Panel were shown the virtual learning platform (Moodle) and were impressed by the volume and quality of material from the courses that were sampled online.

The two study programmes (BSP and PMSP) are delivered by 43 academic staff, consisting of University professors, lecturers and assistants from different faculties. Around 50% of the academic staff teaching on the BSP are from other faculties. The PMSP is delivered by academic staff within the Department of Optometry and Vision Science with the Faculty of Physics, Mathematics and Optometry. From the staff list provided for the Department of Optometry and Vision Science, there are 12 staff with an optometric qualification and one member of staff is a qualified ophthalmologist. The Department has five laboratories which are as follows: (1) Student clinic, which receives members of the public for eye examination; (2) Refraction laboratory; (3) Eye movement laboratory; (4) Perception laboratory and (5) Modelling laboratory. When the student clinic is running, up to 6 patients can be examined at one time. Students work in pairs with one student conducting the examination and their colleague also recording the results of the examination. The team at the University refer to this as 'assisting'. Students do not always work in the same pairs and those who do not speak Latvian only examine or assist when the patient speaks English.

The clinical equipment contained in the laboratories is of a modern and good standard. The equipment list includes 6 refraction stations (with phoropters and trial cases, and projector units for displaying the test charts), three auto-refractors (two of which also perform keratometry), 5 manual keratometers, 5 slit lamps, one automated perimeter, a corneal topographer, one optical coherence tomographer, one Goldmann applanation tonometer and a Pulsair, non-contact tonometer. For glazing and dispensing, there are 6 focimeters, two pupilometers, a frame heater and a lens edger. The facilities also include an impressive volume of equipment for low vision assessment and a wide range of low vision aids. There is an array of equipment for the assessment of vision in children. In addition, there is a PlusOptix binocular photorefraction unit, a straylight meter, a macular pigment screener (MPS) unit, an anomaloscope, an Oculus Myopia Master, an EyeLink eye tracker plus other eye tracking equipment, as well as other equipment for specialised clinical investigation and research projects.

In Latvia, 1 credit point is equivalent to 1.5 ECTS and each Latvian credit point corresponds to 40 hours of effort, with no less than 16 of these hours as contact hours. The BSP consists of 120 Latvian credit points (180 ECTS) which are taken over 6 semesters (full-time, over 3 years) or 8 semesters (part-time, over four years). The BSP in Optometry first ran in 1993 and currently consists of mandatory courses of 68 credit points (102 ECTS), optional courses 48 credit points (72 ECTS), free-choice courses 4 credit points (6 ECTS) and a Bachelors thesis which carries a weighting of 10 credit points (15 ECTS). The Latvian Ministry of Education mandates that certain courses are part of the programme (e.g. Civil Protection, Environmental Protection, both 1 credit point [1.5 ECTS]) and that there is optionality in the programme. The Optometry team at the University provided the Panel with assurance that despite the requirement for optionality in both the BSP and the PMSP, graduates of these programmes, regardless of which courses they have taken, will all have met the learning

outcomes of the EDO. Completion of the BSP does not confer any professional qualification or give any recognised professional status, although graduates of the programme will certainly be useful in the workplace, acting in the capacity as an optical assistant.

For the PMSP, the number of Latvian credit points is 80 (120 ECTS), and this course is taken over 2 years on a full-time basis (see schematic), or 2.5 years on a part-time basis. The content and scope of the courses that form the PMSP, as well as the details of the practice elements of the course, are dictated by the 'Professional Standard for Optometrists', an official document which was last updated in 2019.

Taking the BSP and PMSP together, the total amount of training devoted to practice is 30 credit points (i.e. 45 ECTS). However, the main bulk of this practice takes place within the PMSP (26 credit points, equivalent to 39 ECTS) rather than in the BSP (4 credit points, i.e. 6 ECTS). In the PMSP, this practice takes in the modules Clinical Practice in Optometry I, II, III & IV.

Admission to the BSP takes place once a year (in September) and the typical intake is 35-40 students, depending on state funding. Currently there is state funding for 68 full-time Bachelors students across all three years of the programme. The Department of Optometry and Vision Science is currently funding additional 12 students across the BSP programme. Other students pay the tuition fees themselves. Typically, there is a total of 85-95 BSP students at any one time, taking all groups into account (Latvian- and English-speaking groups, full- and part-time groups). Around two-thirds of students who start the BSP complete their course, with the biggest drop in student numbers taking place between first and second year of the programme.

Entry requirements for the BSP at the University of Latvia include the possession of a General secondary high-school diploma, a specified English language proficiency (Language proficiency (lu.lv)), grades in Mathematics or Physics or in Chemistry or Biology at 6 or above in the 10 point grading system. For those applicants who have not achieved the required grade in mathematics or physics, or in chemistry or biology, an entrance exam in mathematics or physics can be taken. This examination is organized by the Faculty of Physics, Mathematics and Optometry at the University of Latvia. The typical age of students joining the BSP is 18/19 years. Overall, ~83% of students are female.

Admission to the PMSP also takes place once per year. On average there are 16-18 students admitted to the PMSP and most of these have come directly from the University's BSP in Optometry. Currently the State funds a total of 12 full-time PMSP students across the two years of the programme. The Department of Optometry and Vision Science currently funds additional 4 places on the PMSP and the remaining students pay tuition themselves (or their tuition fees are covered by the employers). In total there are typically 40-50 students on the PMSP, taking all groups into account (Latvian- and English-speaking groups, full- and part-time groups). All students on the PMSP are required to complete a Master's Thesis which carries a weighting of 20 credit points (30 ECTS). 95% of students entering the PMSP successfully complete the course.

The Government-funded places are for Latvian citizens only and the students who accept these places study full-time students and are taught in Latvian. Students on the BSP or PMSP who start the course on a Government-funded place can lose their funding if they do not perform to the required level in their examinations and the reverse can also happen, where students on the course can be in receipt of Government funding part way through their course. This is called a 'rotation process'.

In common with other schools of optometry, the COVID-19 pandemic affected the programme in terms of delivery of practical experience and in relation to retention rates. During the pandemic, it was necessary to switch to online delivery. Now, however, all content has moved back to face-to-face delivery aside from part-time (only English groups) student who take the programmes extra-murally where they have an opportunity

to participate in a hybrid version of the lectures, but have face-to-face practice during their university visit. Attendance is closely monitored in lectures and clinical/practical settings, though different tutors appear to take different approaches as to whether attendance at lectures is mandatory.

The structure of the BSP and PMSP are shown below in schematics supplied by the course team.

Academic Year 202_/202_

BACHELOR STUDY PROGRAMME "OPTOMETRY"

Full-Time Study (Six Semesters)

Course Title	1st year		2nd year		3rd year		CP	Evaluation Form
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th		
Mandatory Courses (A Part)								
Introduction to Optometry	4						4	Exam
Mathematics for Optometry	4						4	Exam
Chemistry for Optometrists	4						4	Exam
Cell Pathology		2					2	Exam
Physics for Optometrists		4					4	Exam
Anatomy and Physiology of the Eye		4					4	Exam
Healthcare Business Management		4					4	Exam
Biochemistry of the Eye			2				2	Exam
Civil Protection			1				1	Exam
Environment Protection			1				1	Exam
Optometric Instruments				4			4	Exam
Pharmacology for Optometrists				4			4	Exam
Statistics and Epidemiology					4		4	Exam
Communication and Medical Ethics					4		4	Exam
Research Methods in Vision Science					2		2	Exam
Vision and Ageing					4		4	Exam
Practice						4	4	Exam
Bachelor Exam						2	2	Exam
Bachelor's Thesis						10	10	Defence
Optional Courses (B Part)								
Optics Module (16 CP)								
Geometrical Optics	4						4	Exam
Occupational and Physical Optics		4					4	Exam
Visual Optics			4				4	Exam
Optical Appliances				4			4	Exam
Visual Ergonomics		4					4	Exam
Ophthalmic Optics			4				4	Exam
Optometry Module (16 CP)								
Physiology of Vision			4				4	Exam
Binocular Vision				4			4	Exam
Refractive Anomalies of the Eye					4		4	Exam
Contact Lenses						4	4	Exam
Sensation and Perception			4				4	Exam
Evaluation of Visual Functions					4		4	Exam
Medicine Module (16 CP)								
Human Anatomy and Physiology	4						4	Exam
Neurophysiology		2					2	Exam
Microbiology			4				4	Exam
General Pathology				4			4	Exam
Introduction to Eye Diseases					2		2	Exam
Latvian for Beginners		2					2	Exam
Clinical Medicine in Optometric Practice				4			4	Exam
Eye Diseases and Pathologies					2		2	Exam
Courses of Free Choice (C Part)								
Free Choice Courses			4				4	Exam
SUMMARY								
Mandatory Part (A Part)	12	14	4	8	14	16	68	
Optional Part (B Part)	8	6	12	12	6	4	48	
Free Choice Part (C Part)	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	
Total in Programme	20	20	20	20	20	20	120	

Structure of the BSP (including credit points per course) for the full-time version of the course.

Academic Year 202_/202_

PROFESSIONAL MASTER STUDY PROGRAMME "CLINICAL OPTOMETRY"

Full-Time Study (Four Semesters)

Course Title	1st year		2nd year		CP	Evaluation Form
	1st	2nd	3rd	4th		
Mandatory Courses (A Part)						
General Optometry Module						
Visual Perception	2				2	Exam
Contact Lens Correction	4				4	Exam
Low Vision		2			2	Exam
Current Problems in Vision Science		2			2	Exam
Eye Diseases and Pharmacotherapy		4			4	Exam
Clinical Diagnostic Methods in Optometry		2			2	Exam
Disorders of Binocular Vision		2			2	Exam
Emergency Medicine			2		2	Exam
Clinical Practice Module						
Clinical Practice in Optometry I	8				8	Exam
Clinical Practice in Optometry II		8			8	Exam
Clinical Practice in Optometry III			6		6	Exam
Clinical Practice in Optometry IV				4	4	Exam
Final Module						
Introduction to Master's Thesis			6		6	Defence
Master's Thesis				14	14	Defence
Qualitication Examination in Optometry				2	2	Exam
Optional Courses (B Part)						
Mandatory Professional Module						
Paediatric Optometry	2				2	Exam
Individual Vision Correction Techniques			2		2	Exam
Optional Professional Module						
Vision Training	2				2	Exam
General Medicine for Optometrists	2				2	Exam
Eye Health and Nutrition	2				2	Exam
Clinical Ethics for Optometrists			2		2	Exam
Business Aspecs in Optometry			2		2	Exam
Optional Academic Module						
Modelling in Vision Science	2				2	Exam
Stereovision	2				2	Exam
Eye Movements			2		2	Exam
Visual Neuroscience			2		2	Exam
Psychophysics			2		2	Exam
Language Module						
Latvian for Beginners	2				2	Exam
Additional Courses						
Civil Protection			1		1	Exam
Environmental Protection			1		1	Exam
SUMMARY						
Mandatory Part (A Part)	14	20	14	20	68	
Optional Part (B Part)	6	0	6	0	12	
Total in Programme	**20**	**20**	**20**	**20**	**80**	

Structure of the PMSP (including credit points per course) for the full-time version of the course.

The University has two impressive new buildings called the House of Nature and the House of Science which are situated next to one another. Optometry-specific facilities are currently located in the House of Nature. The University has ambitious plans to build several new buildings on the same site, moving from it's current, more spread-out facilities across the city. One of the proposed new buildings (House of Health) is due to be built by 2027 and it is in this building where the Optometry Student Clinic is expected to be located. It is when this move takes place that the Optometry team anticipate that they will have a new Eye Clinic, open to the public year-round, with a dispensing facility and offering a wide range of optometric services, consistent with the scope of a modern optometric practice. In the new facility, because it will be a designated medical facility, it will be possible to charge fees and the intention is to do this.

The Eye Clinic at the University of Latvia is referred to as the "Student Clinic". It is open to the public during the Autumn semester only, for two days a week. Over the course of the semester, the Student Clinic typically receives around 400 patients. There are two, well-equipped cubicles in one clinical room that is used for refraction, binocular vision, contact lenses, low vision and for supplementary testing. In an adjacent room there is equipment for assessing visual fields. Nearby, the 'lab' clinical cubicles (with 4 test lanes) can be found.

The eye examinations conducted in the Student Clinic are free of charge (as the University is currently not permitted to charge for them), however a donation can be made if the patient chooses to make one. There is no dispensing clinic at the University, meaning that all cases of actual dispensing experience are received at external optical outlets, however some practical experience in dispensing is gained at the University. At the Student Clinic, students see patients with a range of ocular pathologies, including cataract, glaucoma, and macular degeneration. Patients with interesting conditions can be asked to return and case records are kept for the patients seen. For more rare cases of pathology not seen in the clinics, the ophthalmologists teaching on the program demonstrate real cases.

During the visit, the Panel met with a number of optometry staff who teach on both programmes, including visiting optometric staff who work on a part-time basis at the University. All of the staff who met the Panel were extremely engaged and knowledgeable about the EDO. One of the staff who met the Panel had been to visit the School of Optometry in Olten and had become familiar with the EDO as a result.

Students are offered the opportunity to experience pupil dilation in the Clinical Practice in Optometry I module but they can opt out of having their pupils dilated. Students see Goldman tonometry being performed but they do not do this themselves.

During the visit, the Panel had the opportunity to meet with students across all years of both programmes, including part-time students on the BSP and PMSP. Students on the BSP indicated that they intended to continue without delay to commence the PMSP, with the aim of becoming professionally qualified as an Optometrist. Most of the PMSP students had undertaken the BSP at the University of Latvia and they too indicated that this had been the intention when they started the BSP. Students from both programmes were extremely complimentary about the staff and facilities, and the overall level of training received as part of their studies. The only points which they felt could be improved related to a desire to have more textbooks in Latvian and greater access to the facilities to be able to practice their clinical skills. The part-time PMSP students were similarly positive and hugely complimentary about the training they were receiving. Some of the students had taken part in Erasmus exchanges during their studies. There was good familiarity with the EDO and students seemed to understand clearly the purpose and significance of the accreditation visit.

The Panel met with representatives of the Association of Latvian Optometrists and Opticians. The Association is responsible for administering and running the CPD scheme and for running the certification exams for

prospective new registrants, and for individuals whose certificate has lapsed. It is clear that the Association has a close working relationship with the University.

In the later Clinical Practice in Optometry modules, PMSP students go on external placements to Eye Clinics and Optical Outlets in the city in order to gain experience. In Clinical Optometry in Practice IV, the students gain experience of examining sizeable numbers of patients, under the supervision of a placement supervisor. This is for a period of six weeks and is worth 4 credits (6 ECTS). Placements are covered by an agreement between the University and the external body offering the placement and for the PMSP there is a "CLINICAL OPTOMETRY PRACTICE REGULATION" document. The Panel visited one of the external Eye Clinics, a private ophthalmology clinic which employs optometrists, and which also offers experience to the University of Latvia PMSP students. The Panel had the opportunity to meet one of the Ophthalmologists in the Eye Clinic who indicated their satisfaction with the quality of the graduates from the PMSP at the University of Latvia. Other employers of recent graduates (many of whom who themselves had trained at the University) also indicated their satisfaction with the quality of the training being offered by the University. The Panel also had the opportunity to visit a high-street optometric practice where students are placed in order to gain experience as part of one PMSP modules (Clinical Practice in Optometry IV). The practice was well equipped, and the supervisor met by the Panel was very positive about her experience of supervising and mentoring University of Latvia students. Practice supervisors need to be recertificated (with at least five years of optometric practice experience) before they are allowed to supervise students from the University.

During the visit, the Panel also met with senior representatives of the University who included the Vice-Rector for Natural Sciences, Technology and Medicine and the Dean of the Faculty of Physics, Mathematics, and Optometry in which Optometry is placed. The Panel heard about the plans for changes to faculty structures within the University and about the plans for the new facilities which will be to the benefit of optometry, especially in relation to the student clinic.

3. Summary Analysis of the Self-Assessment Document

The following represents the evaluation of the Panel about the extent to which students who have completed both the BSP and PMSP at the University of Latvia have met the requirements for the EDO for Parts A-D of the EDO, and for the portfolio element of the EDO. Provided the University of Latvia students have completed the same modules/courses in the BSP and PMSP, the decision of the Panel is the same regardless of whether the students have taken the programmes on a full-time or part-time basis, and whether the studies were undertaken in English or Latvian.

Part A

A number of modules, chiefly in the BSP programme, support the knowledge base for Part A with sufficient depth. For the Part A clinical/practical competencies, these are covered mainly in the PMSP.

Decision: met subject to fulfilment of Condition 1 (see below).

Part B

A broad range of modules, in both the BSP and PMSP, underpin the knowledge base for Part B. The BSP modules contributing include Binocular Vision, Contact Lenses, Refractive Anomalies of the Eye, Evaluation of Visual Function. A number of PMSP also contribute to the Part B knowledge base. The clinical/practical competencies for Part B are principally covered in the Clinical Practice in Optometry I-IV modules in the PMSP, with additional contribution from modules including 'paediatric optometry' and 'individual vision correction techniques'.

Provided that each student gains experience of using diagnostic drugs and that students examine at least one patient with a real (rather than a simulated) case of low-vision, the Panel finds that the requirements for Part B are met.

Decision: met subject to fulfilling Conditions 2 & 3.

Part C

A range of modules, in both the BSP and PMSP support the subject areas and learning outcomes for Part C. These include the BSP modules human anatomy and physiology, neurophysiology, biochemistry of the eye, microbiology, cell pathology, general pathology, clinical medicine in optometric practice, pharmacology for optometry and statistics and epidemiology. The PMSP modules contributing to Part C include eye diseases and pharmacotherapy, individual vision correction techniques, current problems in vision science and the Clinical Practice in Optometry (I-IV) modules.

As with Part B, provided that each student gains experience of using diagnostic drugs, the Panel finds that the requirements for Part C are met.

Decision: met subject to fulfilling Condition 2.

Part D

Learning outcomes for professional conduct and communication are delivered to a sufficient level. The modules which cover these learning outcome include Communication and Medical Ethics (BSP), Clinical Ethics for Optometrists (PMSP) as well as the PMSP modules in Clinical Practice in Optometry I-IV.

Decision: met.

4. Analysis of the Clinical Portfolio

During the visit the Panel had access to some portfolios from current and former PMSP students. Mostly these contained evidence of the completed protocols from the Clinical Practice in Optometry I-IV modules and they were in Latvian. Some of the Portfolios viewed by the Panel contained examples of the detailed cases, and the Panel have not as yet asked for these to be translated, though this will be needed in due course. The course team indicated that their students are trained in the preparation of case reports required for the EDO portfolio, in particular for the twenty detailed cases.

At present, students enter the results from their general and specialist clinic patient experiences on Moodle. The course team track patient numbers so that they can become aware when minimum patient numbers are off-target for any student

During the Panel visit, there was discussion about which patient encounters are eligible to be counted. For example, the course team had initially suggested that 16 patients examined as part of the Clinic Practice in Optometry I module would count. However, the Panel pointed out that this was too early in their clinical learning to be able to indicate evidence of practising at or near the level required for EDO portfolio cases (WCO level IIIb). There was further discussion about the patients examined in pairs by students in the Student Clinical (Clinical Practice in Optometry III). While it is valuable for students to observe each other performing eye examinations and to make a separate record from the student who is actually examining the patient, the Panel indicated that the Portfolio cases needed to reflect the student's own clinical /practical experience.

Based on these discussions, the course team recognised that at the present time, the current 2nd year students in the PMSP will not achieve 150 patient episodes consisting of primary healthcare eye examinations demonstrating their optometric knowledge and skills during the PMSP in Clinical Optometry. During the visit, the Panel indicated that they could advise the course team on any proposals that the team come up with in order to reach the goal of achieving the 150 portfolio cases, and the 20 detailed cases within the PMSP. Any such changes could be implemented for future cohorts with the aim of achieving the EDO Portfolio standard. The Panel pointed out that an alternative approach to having a total number of cases gained during the PMSP which is below 150 would be to allow graduates of the PMSP a period of time post-graduation in which to submit their completed portfolio for EDO. ECOO allows up to two years post-gradation during which the portfolio can be submitted.

At the time of the visit, the course team did not demonstrate the mechanism and approach to be used for overarching assessment of the Portfolios, for example, in terms of the establishment of pass and fail criteria, and about how the veracity of the other 130 non-detailed cases could, if needed, be established. The Panel would be pleased to comment on proposals for the assessment of the portfolios, and indeed on any aspect of the process by which some, or all, of the PMSP graduates will submit their portfolio as they seek to gain the EDO. In revising the arrangements for portfolio completion by students and their evaluation by the course team, the course team is strongly encouraged to continue to pay close attention to the ECOO Guidelines Part III: Portfolio Guidance.

Decision: Decision deferred until the Panel is provided with (i) a representative (and translated) sample of portfolios submitted containing eligible cases, and (ii) the detailed plans of the course team for portfolio assessment.

5. Conclusions

The EDO standard for Parts A, B, C & D are met subject to fulfilment of Conditions 1-3 [see below]. In relation to the Portfolios (Condition 4), our decision is deferred until we see a translated sample of completed portfolios containing only eligible cases, and the detailed plans of the course team for Portfolio assessment.

The Visitors would like to thank Prof. Gunta Krūmiņa, Assoc.Prof. Aiga Švede, Dace Rutkovska and the entire staff of the Department of Optometry and Vision Science for their organisation of and co-operation during the Accreditation visit. We recognise the dedicated efforts required to prepare for and undertake accreditation for the EDO. We wish to especially commend the detail provided in the documentation supplied in advance of, and during the visit.

During the visit, we were pleased to hear about the plans for new clinic facilities and to hear very good feedback from employers on the quality of graduates. We were also very pleased to note the positive comments from students and graduates of the programme. We especially note the dedication of staff creating a supportive environment for students.

Based upon our observations, below we list four conditions that would need to be met in order for Full Accreditation to be achieved. The course team should also pay careful attention to the recommendations and other areas for improvement noted in the narrative above.

Should these conditions be met, Full Accreditation can be granted. As the next step, the Panel suggests that the Course team develop a plan (including timelines) for how the team propose to meet the conditions that are set out below. The timing of awarding accreditation will depend on when the University can fulfil the conditions.

CONDITIONS

Condition 1: Record of Dispensing Experience for BSP Students
The logbook record of optical dispensing practice for the BSP students is only starting to be used. When operational, it needs to explicitly capture information that each of the EDO practical competencies are met for subjects 5 & 6.

Condition 2: Experience of using diagnostic drugs for eye examination.
There is a need to ensure that all students gain experience of using diagnostic drugs to aid refraction and to conduct various eye examination procedures (including applanation tonometry)

Condition 3: Low-Vision patient Experience
To ensure the clinical competencies in EDO subject #9 (Low Vision), there is a need to ensure that all students gain experience of examining at least one real patient with low vision.

Condition 4: European Diploma in Optometry Portfolio of Clinical Experience.
While portfolios exist, we did not see any completed portfolios that were at the level required to meet the standard of the EDO. The Panel had concerns about the approach used for counting patient episodes that would make up the 150 cases. We did not see translated examples of the 20 detailed cases, nor did we see the system that the course team is using (or plans to use) for the assessment of the portfolios. The conditions relating to the EDO Portfolio are that:

(a) The standard and level of portfolios needs to be more detailed and include supplementary material (fundus images, referral letters, visual fields, embedded relevant literature) consistently to support the comprehensive presentation of interesting cases, together with detailed reflection on the part of the student.
(b) The course team need to ensure that students gain enough patient experience to achieve the further 130 primary healthcare eye examinations required for the EDO using the possible methods discussed during the visit, or via other opportunities.
(c) The course team need to establish a system for holistic assessment of portfolio against the requirements of the EDO portfolio of clinical experience, ensuring a mechanism is in place for establishing the veracity and quality of the other 130 examinations.

RECOMMENDATIONS
We recommend that the course team should:
1. Embed visual fields examination to a greater extent in the UL clinics as perimetry appears not to take place as frequently as would be expected.
2. Reflect contemporary optometric practice, by encouraging the routine use of slit-lamp biomicroscopy + volk lens as the primary means for posterior segment examination, with direct ophthalmoscopy used as a secondary technique.
3. (related to 2.), encourage every student purchase a Volk lens or that the Course Team provide more.

COMMENDATIONS
We commend the Course team on:
1. Positivity and dedication of staff and students in the two programs at the UL.
2. The quality of the documentation supplied in advance of, and during, the accreditation visit.