

# ECOO GUEST ARTICLE



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## **THE PROCESS OF ACCREDITATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF METROPOLIA UNIVERSITY**

Metropolia University of Applied Sciences' optometry degree programme in Helsinki, Finland is the sixth optometry programme in Europe to have received full accreditation by ECOO. The final decision was announced in Helsinki by ECOO's European Qualifications Board in May 2024, at the same time as the ECOO General Assembly and the EAOO (European Academy of Optometry and Optics) conference were held in Helsinki.

Achieving full accreditation of the optometry degree resulted from a ten-year process, during which there were changes in the curriculum, teaching facilities and the competence of the staff. In addition, the field of optometry in Finland was

changing. The Act on the use of diagnostic drugs came in effect in 2011 and made it possible to use diagnostic drugs to examine the eyes more effectively. This change also had to be considered in the curriculum of future optometrists, and this prompted the idea of seeking accreditation.

The accreditation process started in 2014 with the curriculum change of Metropolia University of Applied Sciences' optometry degree programme, and after the first group studying with this curriculum graduated, when an extensive evaluation was conducted by ECOO. It resulted in a partially accredited degree (Parts A and B) in 2017. To obtain full accreditation, additional needs were recognised in theoretical components of general and eye pathology, as well as the extent of pharmacological knowledge. In addition, practical experience in various customer contacts was

limited, especially regarding eye diseases. Throughout the evaluation process, we received very good guidelines on how to improve the scope of the teaching and information on the requirements regarding the recording student evaluation.

The process continued with the revised curriculum. At the beginning of 2020, we moved to a new campus in Myllypuro and got larger facilities for teaching optometry, which again enabled more efficient clinic operations. We also opened the "VillageOPTICIAN" store at the Myllypuro campus, which significantly increased the number of patients. Optometry lecturers were trained in the field of clinical competence, and updating and adding more refined equipment also expanded the scope of teaching.

In November 2022 the accreditation panel made a two-day evaluation visit to the Myllypuro campus. During the visit, the panel conducted a considerable number of interviews, at which both staff (from lecturers to Metropolia's management) and students from all student groups were included. Also working life training instructors were included in the discussions. The accreditation panel got information on our processes, were shown our facilities and equipment and observed practical teaching and lectures.

Following the visit, we received some additional good ideas and proposals, which were included in our syllabus development plans. A new post-graduation study course was created

to be completed as open university studies. On this course, the graduated optometrists perform and report examinations while working as optometrists until they have achieved the 130 examinations that fulfill specifically stated requirements. Once the implementation of this plan was confirmed, the degree received full accreditation and the right to award the European Diploma of Optometry (EDO) to those who complete the required examinations. The Diploma makes it easier to recognise our degree abroad, but it is also a valuable proof of the quality of teaching and continuing development of the degree in Finland.

There are two educational institutions in Finland where optometry is taught, one in Helsinki and another one in Oulu. These departments have cooperated to eventually unify their degrees, aiming for full accreditation of both. Helsinki Metropolia has now received full accreditation and the work to achieve accreditation for Oulu continues.

Accreditation is proof of the high European level of the degree offered to the students, and the competence of the graduates. It also enables changes in the division of labour regarding eye health and more efficient treatment of the ageing population. The Finnish government has just decided on regulation changes whereby it will remove restrictions on opticians prescribing glasses for under eight-year-olds and those who have undergone

ocular/eye surgery.

ECCO accreditation proves the high quality of the Metropolia University of Applied Sciences Optometry degree. The accreditation process has inspired us to develop in the future a higher degree in clinical competence in optometry in

Metropolia. The joint effort to continue improving the knowledge and skills in the field has also supported the general development of the whole optometric profession and thereby eye care in Finland.



*ECCO accreditation panel, front row from left: Dr Sonja Zinken Utrecht University of Applied Sciences (Netherlands); Dr José Manuel González Meijome, University of Minho (Portugal); Dr Julie-Ann Little, Ulster University (Northern Ireland); Dr Brendan Barrett, University of Bradford (England).*

*Metropolia optometry staff back row from left: Mira Järvinen, Päivi Nokipii, Saija Flinkkilä, Johanna Valtanen, Pia Mäkelä, Satu Autio, Kajsa Sten, Tanja Lehti.*