



Summary of results from 2022 ECOO survey on the appropriateness of the syllabus of ECOO qualifications

Introduction

In the period from 15 May 2022 until 31 July 2022, ECOO encouraged academic teachers of optometry & optics, and optical professionals across Europe to complete one of two surveys, one targeted at each of the group. The purpose of the surveys was to investigate if the syllabus of ECOO qualifications reflects the current scope of practice across Europe and possible future developments in the scope of practice.

Summary of respondent characteristics

In total, 287 persons spread over 22 countries completed the survey with 55 respondents from academia and the remainder (232) were professionals. Around 73% of the academics who responded from countries where the level of optometry practiced is WCO level 3a or 3b, whereas this was the case for 93% of the professionals who responded.

View of Academics on the appropriateness of ECTS weightings in the European Diploma Syllabus

The survey distributed to academic staff asked about the weighting given to each subject in the European Diploma in Optometry syllabus. Specifically, respondents were given the European Credit Points (ECTS) per subject in the EDO and then asked for the number of ECTS they believed should be attached to each subject. For the vast majority of subjects, the number of ECTS suggested per subject by the academic respondents closely matched the existing ECTS number per subject, thus indicating that academics have confidence in the current weightings given in the EDO syllabus content. However, significant discrepancies were observed for three subjects; for subject 5 (Part A, optical appliances) the median suggested ECTS was 8 compared to the existing 12 ECTS. For Visual Optics (Part A, subject 3), respondents suggested doubling the ECTS weighting from 2 to 4 ECTS. Similarly, for Low Vision (Part B Subject 9), the respondents suggested dramatically increasing the weighting from 3 to 12 ECTS. Overall, the results from the academic respondents suggest that ECOO should consider increasing the weighting in Part B of the syllabus. This should be discussed within ECOO. Parts C & D were considered to have appropriate ECTS weightings.

View of Academics on the relevance of subjects/topics that make up the EDO syllabus

This part of the survey asked academic respondents to give a rating for the relevance of each subject, using a scale that ranged from 4 ('highly relevant') to 0 ('not at all relevant'). In addition, respondents were given the opportunity to indicate whether there are subjects/topics which could be removed or de-emphasized, and where there are subjects/topics that are not currently included which belong in the EDO syllabus. In parts A & B, the median rating for all subjects was 3 ('relevant') or 4 ('highly relevant'). The survey results did not depend on whether respondents came from countries where the level of optometry practiced is at WCO levels 1-3a or above (i.e. WCO level 3b & 4). In Parts C & D, again all subjects were deemed to 'relevant' or 'highly relevant'. In Part C, a number of subjects were rated as 'highly relevant' (subjects 16-21, & subject 23) by respondents from areas practicing optometry at WCO levels 3b&4 whereas these subjects were rated only as 'relevant' by respondents from areas practicing optometry at WCO levels 1-3a. Similarly, in Part D, all four subjects were rated 'relevant' by respondents from areas practicing optometry at WCO levels 1-3a but as 'highly relevant' by respondents from areas practicing optometry at WCO levels 3b&4.

Many comments were made, including a suggestion not to have subjects 12 & 14 (investigative techniques & refractive surgery, respectively) appear in both Parts B & C. All of the comments made deserve careful consideration.

View of Professionals on the relevance of subjects/topics that make up the EDO syllabus

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The survey for professionals took a similar approach to that used above for the academics. In addition, the professional respondents were asked, having rated the relevance of each subject, to indicate the topics that will have the most and the least relevance in the next 10 years.

The theoretical knowledge of all subjects of the European Diploma (Parts A-D) were rated as 'relevant' or 'highly relevant'. The same is the case for the majority of the optometric practice / main competencies. Two optometric practice / main competencies of Part A were evaluated as only 'somewhat relevant', namely 'Repair of Optical Appliances' and 'Glazing of Spectacle Lenses', and three of Part C, namely 'Use of Therapeutic Drugs' and 'Performing Contact Tonometry', and 'Performing Gonioscopy'.

There were slight differences in the ratings given by respondents from WCO-categories 1,2, & 3a compared to WCO-categories 3b & 4 in respect of the optometric practice / main competencies of Part A and Part C. In general, respondents from WCO-categories 1,2, & 3a rated those competencies more relevant than was the case for WCO-categories 3b & 4. The opposite was the case for Part C competencies which were rated slightly higher by respondents in WCO-categories 3b & 4 as compared to respondents in WCO-categories 1,2, & 3a.

Opinions vary greatly about how optometry is expected to develop over the next 10 years. About 15- 20% of respondents believe that some of Part A optometric practice/ main competencies will be taken over by online services or other professionals, all related to dispensing, repair and selling of optical appliances. Many respondents consider Part B knowledge and optometric practice/main competencies like refraction and contact lens fitting the core business of optometry. Myopia management is considered to be amongst the most important topics for the future.

Summary

Academic respondents clearly indicated that, with only a few exceptions, the current ECTS subject- weightings in the EDO syllabus are appropriate. Furthermore, both academics and professionals gave assurance that the subjects/topics that make up the syllabus continue to be relevant to modern optometric practice, despite the diversity of practice across the countries of Europe. Overall, the results of the surveys indicate that the content and weightings of the EDO syllabus are less in need of change than might have been imagined at the outset of this project.

Next steps

Whilst many free-text comments were made, a great range of opinions were expressed. Careful consideration of these comments is underway in order to identify themes. Careful consideration is also required concerning the views made about the relevance, ECTS-weightings and location within the Part A-D structure of a small number of ECTS subjects/topics, and of the suggestions for new topics/subjects in the EDO syllabus. It is proposed that the working group who led the development of the surveys and the analysis of the results should now complete these tasks. This may, in turn, lead to concrete suggestions for change which will then be put to currently accredited institutions for their comments.