The European Council of Optometry and Optics

Accreditation of the

Bachelor in Optometry programme at the Department of Ophthalmology & Optometry, Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy (USMF), Chisinau, Moldova

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

30 March–1 April 2026

1. Background

The Bachelor of Optometry programme in the Republic of Moldova was officially launched on 1 September 2017. The Programme is run by the Department of Ophthalmology & Optometry at Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy (USMF), which is a public, state-supported institution. Its core operations, including the Optometry Programme, are funded by the Government of the Republic of Moldova. This date marked the beginning of structured optometric education in the country. Its creation was closely linked to the Moldovan–Norwegian partnership project which was implemented between 2015–2022, and which had the goal of strengthening primary eye care services in Moldova. The programme was developed with academic support from the Brien Holden Vision Institute (Australia) and the Department of Optometry and Visual Sciences at the University of South-Eastern Norway. The development of the optometry programme benefitted financially from the Brien Holden Vision Institute, the Moldovan–Norwegian collaboration project and from contributions from universities in Norway.

The commencement of the optometry training programme in 2017 represented a crucial step in eye-care service provision in Moldova, because it marked the beginning of a transition from a purely ophthalmology-based model to a model creating primary eye care for the country, in which optometrists play a key role in refractive care, early detection of ocular disease, and preventative eye health. The first curriculum for the programme was adapted from the Norwegian model and was accredited by the Moldovan National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC), a legal public body which is responsible for quality assurance in the field of education and research. When the course started, international mobility opportunities and internships in Norway were available as part of the Moldovan–Norwegian project. This helped to support the training of the first cohorts of optometrists. However, these internships are no longer active. The Bachelor of Optometry programme at USMF remains the only optometry programme in the country.

The establishment of the Bachelor programme, and later the Master programme, laid the foundation for the official recognition of optometry as an independent health profession in Moldova. Graduates from the Master's programme now have the right to use diagnostic drugs in Moldova. Clearly, a lot has been achieved in a relatively short period.

Since starting in 2017, the USMF programme has undergone a significant change in that the Bachelor programme duration is now 3 years of full-time education (180 ECTS), having originally started as a course with a four-year duration (240 ECTS). This change is not specific to optometry but also applies to other courses at USMF. The change has arisen from a decision made by the Moldovan Ministry of Education and it was made following consultation with the labour market.

The University received World Bank funding to support this accreditation exercise which the leadership team reported was undertaken to augment quality, to gain external review and to maintain standards for quality of education. The timing of this visit by the Panel to Moldova was influenced by the source of funding because the University needed the visit to take place in early 2026 in order to access the funding by the World Bank's deadline.

To date, there have been 40 graduates from the Bachelor programme, and these individuals are the first generation of optometrists trained in the Republic of Moldova. So far, the Master's in Clinical Optometry programme (which has a 2 year duration), that launched in 2022, has completed two cohorts. So far there have been 9 graduates. The course leadership team indicated that ~15% of graduates from the Bachelor in Optometry programme are yet to find employment, though this is primarily due to personal/family circumstances of the individuals concerned, rather than to a lack of employment opportunities related to their qualification. The large majority of Bachelors graduates who are in employment work in optics, optometry or ophthalmology-related clinical settings.

Currently, there are 67 Bachelor students and 9 Master students at various stages of their training. The new, 3 year programme commenced in September 2024, hence during the Panel Visit, there were only first- and second- year students on the new, shorter-duration programme which the Panel was in Moldova to accredit. The Panel did meet third- and fourth- year students and while these meetings were useful, these students are following the older, longer-duration (4 year) course which was not being accredited by the ECOO Panel. Ideally, the Panel Visit would have taken place a little later, when at least one cohort of students had graduated from the 3-year programme. However, the Panel recognises that, for reasons to do with funding (and mentioned above), the visit needed to take place when it did.

The programme leadership team consists of associate professor Dr Lilia Dumbraveanu who is the Head of the Department of Ophthalmology and Optometry and Dr Rodica Bilba, who is the Head of Medical Studies within the Department. Professor Valeriu Cusnir heads the Ophthalmology Clinic at the hospital where the optometrists are mainly based for their training. All three are ophthalmologists.

The team at USMF have offered their 3-year Bachelor programme alone as meeting the requirements of the European Diploma in Optometry and for this reason it was this programme which was the focus of the Panel's accreditation visit.

The Visitor Panel* consisted of:

Prof Brendan Barrett (Chair)
Prof Julie-Anne Little
Dr Michelle Hennelly
Dr Pedro Monteiro

**Note that we did invite a student to be part of the Visitor Panel but unfortunately due to personal reasons, and at short notice, the student was not able to attend the visit in person, or to remotely participate in the visit.*

2. Optometry in Moldova

Optometry training only commenced in the Republic of Moldova in 2017. The need for optometric training was identified at the national level by a 'Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness and Diabetic Retinopathy' study in the Republic of Moldova which was conducted in 2012. The 'Study Plan for Optometry' document states that this survey revealed a prevalence of blindness of 1.5% in the Republic of Moldova. It is estimated that around 150,000 (5-6%) of the country's population has some degree of visual impairment, of which around half (51.5%) is due to uncorrected refractive errors.

Despite being in existence for less than 10 years and the small number of optometry graduates to date (40), considerable progress has been made in establishing the new profession of Optometry.

The Bachelor of Optometry programme is recognised with national legislation through the National Qualifications Framework, approved by the Ministry of Education and Research, and supported by the Ministry of Health which has formally recognised Optometry as a healthcare profession.

Optometrists in Moldova do not prescribe medications or perform therapeutic procedures which are only conducted by ophthalmologists. The Republic of Moldova currently has around 250 ophthalmologists.

As well as the Bachelor programme which has been developed with strong international support and guidance, the establishment of the Master's programme is a real strength for the new profession in the country because it facilitates the acquisition of advanced clinical skills that are required to grow and develop the profession. The fact that ophthalmic diagnostic drug rights have already been secured for graduates of the Master's programme is testimony to the very rapid progress made by the leadership team in a remarkably short period of time.

At present there is no dedicated, autonomous regulatory body for optometrists in the Republic of Moldova. Graduates work under the general healthcare regulatory framework of the Ministry of Health and under institutional employment regulations.

The introduction of the Master's programme is also important because it is intended to align with the World Health Organisation (WHO) *Eye Care Competency Framework* (2022) document, where the role of eyecare and vision in public health was recognised by the WHO in their first policy document focussing on eye care. Going forward, the Master's programme will provide a pipeline of suitably skilled optometrists with higher qualifications to deliver high-quality eyecare provision to the public. It will be important for some graduates from the Master's programme to become the optometric educators of the future. While the development of optometry in Moldova has stemmed from the considerable efforts of key ophthalmology personnel, it will be important for the future development of optometry training in the country to have greater input in the study programmes from optometrically trained staff. In this regard, the Panel was pleased to see that a number of graduates from the Master's programme are already contributing to the teaching on the Bachelor

programme and the Panel heard that PhD training may soon be undertaken by a Master graduate.

In addition to rapid progress relating to training of optometrists since the commencement of the first cohort of optometry students in 2017, there have been a number of other very positive developments which suggest a bright future for further development of the new profession. Continuing professional development is compulsory for optometrists in Moldova, and this runs on a 5 year cycle.

A number of national and international conferences have been arranged in Chisinau in the recent past. These include the 'Myopia Study Day' event which ran in October 2025 and which was arranged by the Moldovan Association of Orthokeratology and Myopia Management and attended by many international speakers. This is now a biannual event. The optometry leadership team have a very outward-facing approach in relation to international collaboration and this is already of benefit to the development of the optometry profession. The Panel was impressed to see details of abstracts and presentations which have been made at such conferences by Master's graduates. The Moldovan Association of Orthokeratology and Myopia Management is currently the only national optics group in the country and members of the group have expressed an interest to the Panel in becoming an ECOO member. Members of the teaching staff have attended and presented research findings at meetings of the European Academy of Orthokeratology and Myopia Control and of the International Academy of Orthokeratology and Myopia Control.

3. Introduction to the Institution and Overview of the Optometry Programmes of Study Offered

Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy (USMF) consists of four Faculties and one Department of Continuing Medical Education. The Faculties are as follows: Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Stomatology, Faculty of Pharmacy and Faculty of Residency. Optometry resides within the Faculty of Medicine which also contains study programmes in the following clinical areas: Medicine, Public Health, Nursing Radiological Technology & Nursing. USMF has ~14,000 students, 30% of whom are international students. The university has ~1200 staff.

Because USMF is state-funded, graduates from the university's various programmes, including Optometry, need to work for state institutions for a period of time before being able to work in the private sector. This may be for a period of up to 5 years.

The Bachelor of Optometry programme at Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy started on the 1st of September 2017. The programme was initiated through the Moldovan–Norwegian partnership (Project CPEA-2015/10066) and its primary objective was to 'strengthen primary eye care in Moldova (2015–2022)'. Training and certification of teaching staff for optometric education at USMF was supported by Brien Holden Vision Institute (Australia) and by the Department of Optometry and Visual Sciences at Southeastern University (USN), Kongsberg, Norway. The staff in the Department of Optometry & Ophthalmology at USMF prominently acknowledge the help and support they

have received and in particular, they refer to the contribution of Hans Bjorn Bakketeig, a Norwegian Optometrist to the development of optometry in Moldova.

The curriculum was developed based on the Norwegian model of optometry training. The Bachelor programme was accredited by the Moldovan National Agency for Quality Assurance in Education and Research (ANACEC), a legal public body which is responsible for quality assurance in the field of education and research in 2017 (and re-accredited in 2022). The stated mission for the study programme is as follows: “Training eye care professionals to manage refractive errors, screen for eye diseases, and support prevention”. The Bachelor programme started as a 4-year course but since 2024, it has been offered instead as a 3-year course.

Internal assessment of the Optometry Programmes at USMF follows the University’s quality assurance system, which includes:

- Curriculum development and periodic revision, based on the accredited Norwegian-adapted model and aligned with ANACEC standards.
- Accreditation and re-accreditation procedures, ensuring compliance with national educational requirements
- Evaluation of practical skills, conducted through structured training at the University Centre for Medical Simulation, where standardised patient methods and scenario-based simulations are used.
- Monitoring of teaching quality, facilitated through departmental oversight, student feedback, and academic performance indicators.
- Assessment of clinical training, supported by partnerships with national clinics, medical centres, and industry collaborators.

The Bachelor of Optometry programme is fully competency-based and is intended to align with the recent (2025) publication of *National Qualification and Competence Standards for the Optometrist*, a document produced by the Ministry of Education and Research in the Republic of Moldova. During the visit, the Panel was provided with a copy of this document which included amongst its authors the Head of Optometry and other staff in Optometry at USMF. The document lists transversal, general, and professional competences (see below), each with detailed measurable learning outcomes. For each professional competence, the skills and knowledge needed for this competence are listed, along with learning outcomes and the ‘minimum level of competence to be achieved/ demonstrated’ is also stated.

COMPETENCES RELEVANT TO THE QUALIFICATION

TRANSVERSAL COMPETENCES (TC)	**TC1.** Working in a team and collaborating with team members **TC2.** Using effective communication and possessing digital skills **TC3.** Problem-solving and critical thinking **TC4.** Applying lifelong learning and adaptability **TC5.** Observing professional ethics and responsibility **TC6.** Time and resource management
GENERAL COMPETENCES (sectoral/ cross-sectoral) (GC)	**GC1.** Performing problem solving activities and applying critical thinking **GC2.** Planning and organizing work in multidisciplinary team **GC3.** Promoting and ensuring the prestige of the profession of optometry at national level
PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCES (PC)	**PC1.** Organizing and directing the work of optical units, improving decision-making autonomy **PC2. Assessment of refractive status and prescription of glasses** **PC3.** Contact lenses fitting **PC4.** Assessment of oculomotor and binocular function. **PC5.** Prescribing low vision devices **PC6.** Management of patients requiring vision therapy **PC7.** Provide advice on vision health, eye safety and eye protection in occupational and recreational contexts. **PC8.** Assessment of ocular adnexa and the eye. **PC9.** Assess central and peripheral visual sensory function and visual pathway integrity. **PC10.** Evaluation of signs and symptoms identified during the ocular examination that have significance to the systemic health of the patient.

Extract from 2025 National Qualification Standard for ‘Bachelor of Optometry’.

The Bachelor in Optometry qualification is at level 6 in the National Qualification Framework (NQF, equivalent to EQF Level 6 and to Level 1 QF-EHEA).

In the *National Qualification and Competence Standards for the Optometrist* document, the qualification description is as follows:

The Optometrist is a specialist with a bachelor's degree who holds professional competencies in the field of optometry. They are responsible for identifying the early signs of visual impairments, assessing and correcting them, and acting as an interface with the *ophthalmologist. Optometrists may work independently in optometry clinics and laboratories or within ophthalmology or multidisciplinary clinics. In their professional activity, they can also offer advice to help prevent visual disorders and promote methods for maintaining good vision.*

4. Overarching description of the Bachelor of Optometry programme

The 3-year, full-time (180 ECTS) Bachelor of Optometry programme consists of 5400 study hours of theory and practice and is offered by USMF in a field of professional training under the heading of “Medical Diagnostics and Treatment Technologies”. The programme includes 30 credits (900 hours, 16.6%) of practical training which takes place across three specialty internships (see graphic below).

The ‘Study Plan’ for the Bachelor of Optometry lists the following as the ‘Professional Competencies’ which the student will have achieved on completion of the 3 year programme:

Planul de învățământ pentru studii superioare de licență, programul de studii 0914.3. OPTOMETRIE
Study Plan for bachelor higher education, study program 0914.3. OPTOMETRY

CP 1. Organization and management of optical units, enhancing autonomous decision-making capacity. Effectively manages and coordinates the activity of optical units; demonstrates decision-making autonomy and responsibility in professional contexts; ensures the implementation of good management practices and promotes the continuous improvement of services provided.

CP 2. Refractive status evaluation and eyeglass prescription. Performs accurate refractive examinations using both objective and subjective methods to identify refractive errors; interprets refractive test results and determines the appropriate type and power of optical correction; prescribes suitable eyeglasses based on the patient’s visual needs, adhering to ergonomic and personalized correction principles.

CP 3. Contact lens fitting. Assesses clinical indicators necessary for contact lens fitting, taking into account ocular condition, refraction, and the patient's lifestyle; selects and fits contact lenses correctly, choosing the appropriate type, material, and parameters for each individual case; instructs the patient on the safe application, removal, maintenance, and wear of contact lenses.

CP 4. Evaluation of oculomotor and binocular function. Assesses eye movements and coordination using specific clinical tests to identify oculomotor dysfunctions; tests and interprets binocular function (e.g., convergence, fusion, stereopsis) using appropriate instruments and procedures; identifies binocular and oculomotor anomalies and determines the need for optometric interventions or referral to specialists.

CP 5. Prescription of low vision aids. Evaluates the degree of visual impairment and its impact on daily activities; selects and prescribes appropriate optical and electronic devices for low vision compensation (e.g., magnifiers, telescopes, video magnifiers); instructs the patient on the use of low vision devices and offers guidance for adapting to these aids in daily life.

CP 6. Management of patients requiring visual therapy. Identifies visual dysfunctions that may be corrected or improved through visual therapy based on functional assessments; develops and implements a personalized visual therapy plan tailored to the patient’s specific needs; monitors patient progress and adjusts the therapy program based on individual evolution and response.

CP 7. Providing recommendations on visual health, ocular safety, and eye protection in professional and recreational settings. Identifies ocular risk factors associated with work and leisure environments; offers personalized recommendations for eye protection, including the use of protective equipment and UV filters; educates patients on visual hygiene, prevention of eye strain, and long-term visual health maintenance.

CP 8. Evaluation of ocular adnexa and the eye. Examines the ocular adnexa (eyelids, conjunctiva, lacrimal system) to identify signs of inflammation, infection, or other anomalies; evaluates ocular structures (cornea, lens, anterior chamber, retina) using appropriate optometric instruments; recognizes pathological changes and determines the need for monitoring, treatment, or referral to a specialist.

CP 9. Evaluation of central and peripheral visual sensory function and the integrity of visual pathways. Assesses central visual acuity and peripheral visual field using standardized tests (e.g., optometric charts, perimetry); identifies deficits in visual sensory function and correlates findings with potential visual pathway damage; recognizes clinical signs indicating central nervous system involvement and refers the patient for further investigation or interdisciplinary consultation.

CP 10. Evaluation of ocular signs and symptoms relevant to systemic health. Identifies ocular signs with systemic significance (e.g., retinal changes, papilledema) associated with conditions such as diabetes, hypertension, or neurological diseases; correlates ocular symptoms with potential systemic pathologies and determines the need for further investigations; recommends interdisciplinary consultation when ocular signs suggest involvement of other organs or systems.

Students entering the Bachelor programme are typically recruited immediately after high school graduation (i.e. at 18–19 years old). No prior university education is required. According to the qualification standard “Bachelor in Optometry” (NQF level 6), admission may be based on:

- High school diploma (Baccalaureate);
- Diploma of professional studies (usually medical college);
- Diploma of higher education (e.g., Bachelor’s degree in General Medicine).

Candidates who are from non-medical institutions are required to complete a minimum curricular requirement of 30 credits, which is stipulated in the study programme.

Student numbers relevant to academic year 2025/2026: Currently there are 27 students in the first year of the new, 3-year Optometry Bachelor's degree programme and 21 students in the second year of the programme. This programme commenced in 2024. The current optometry students in years 3 (n=17) and 4 (n=12) are pursuing a different optometry programme in that their programme has a 4-year duration. The longer programme will therefore come to an end when the students that are currently in 3rd year reach the end of their programme. There is one entry per year, in September.

A total of 40 students have graduated with a Bachelor degree since the Optometry study programme started in September 2017. Progression during the degree is good, with around 80-85% of students successfully advancing to the next year of study.

The Department of Optometry and Ophthalmology also runs a Master's in Optometry programme, which has a duration of 2 years. Currently, there are three students in the first year of the Master's programme, and six students in the second year. The Master's programme started in 2022 and, at the time of this report, there have been nine graduates from this programme. To date, all of the students on, and graduates from, the Master's programme are graduates from USMF's Bachelor's programme. Successful completion of the Master's programme enables ophthalmic diagnostic drugs to be used.

In relation to staffing, there are 13 teachers employed by the Department of Ophthalmology and Optometry. Three are full-time members of staff, and ten are part-time lecturers, three of whom are optometrists who graduated from the USMF Bachelor of Optometry and Master of Optometry programmes. In addition there are two laboratory assistants. A number of the part-time staff are graduates of the Bachelor's and Master's programmes at USMF.

USMF Bachelor students have the opportunity to present to their peers in an annual event called 'Optometry Day' which is organised by final-year students and which features peer-to-peer learning scientific presentations and clinical workshops. The Panel witnessed some student presentations during our tour of the teaching facilities and got the sense that peer-to-peer teaching and learning is well embedded in the programme. The biannual Myopia day also has considerable student involvement, e.g. a best poster competition. The stated aims of the course leadership team include the development of doctoral and continuing medical education programs in Optometry, greater internationalisation of the Optometry study program and to promote the conditions which will facilitate greater academic mobility. Optometric education and innovation activities are supported through collaboration with a range of industry partners.

During the visit the Panel had the opportunity to tour the facilities where clinical training takes place. The Panel visited the SfântaTreime Municipal Hospital where lectures are delivered and the practical training that is not part of the internships takes place. The facilities at the hospital consist of two lecture rooms and two laboratories, one of which is set up for training students in dispensing. This laboratory contains focimeters and equipment for glazing and for spectacle adjustment and repair. The hospital facility also contains four pre-clinical examination rooms. The Panel had the opportunity to attend some of the teaching sessions that were running during the visit to the hospital. One consisted of a lecture on OCT and a second session involved students making short presentations to one another. The presentations featured short video clips that the students had made on the topic of

contact lenses (e.g. their safety, how to insert & remove them). Another teaching session featured case presentations by one of the optometrically trained staff members again on the contact topic. The session leader made good use of technology to present multiple choice questions which the students answered using a QR code via their phones. The students seemed engaged in all of the teaching and practical sessions which the Panel attended. One of the lecture theatres contains excellent audio-visual facilities allowing for the possibility of viewing eye surgery in real time. The Panel are very grateful to the Chief of Sfânta Treime Municipal Hospital, Mr. Crudu, for the time he spent with us and for the tour of the hospital's very impressive general medical facilities.

The hospital has a busy eye clinic attended by patients. The fact that the optometry students are located adjacent to the location where eye clinic patients are attending for investigation and treatment means that the optometry students have a great opportunity to see a wide range and a large volume of eye disease. This is a great strength of the USMF optometry programme because many optometry programmes need to direct their students to hospital settings (usually for very short periods) located away from normal place of training in order to get enough exposure to eye disease. The fact that ophthalmologists are on hand to teach students about eye disease in real patients and in real time is again extremely useful in the training of the USMF optometry students. The eye clinic appeared to be well equipped for ocular disease consultations.

While the Panel was impressed by the opportunities for training in relation to eye disease investigation and treatment at the hospital, it was much less clear where the students learn the basics of optometric eye examination (e.g. refraction, binocular vision investigation, prescribing of optical appliances). For example, the room where refraction training takes place seemed small for the increased number of students on the new 3-year programme and it was not clear to the Panel that it contained the equipment required for learning how to perform the component parts of an optometric eye examination. There were two lanes within this room where refraction might take place, but it was unclear how much this was utilized, and the students did not appear to access this for self-practise. The Panel were provided with an equipment list which indicates that the Department is in possession of a corneal topographer, two autorefractors and a number of tonometers, retinoscopes and slit lamps for teaching purposes.

The practical component of ophthalmic dispensing is taught within the Department of Ophthalmology and Optometry by Assistant Professor, Codrean Rața, a graduate of the Bachelor in Optometry programme. Students use the on-site dispensing facilities and optics laboratory for practical activities relating to dispensing, e.g. adjustment, verification, and prescription of optical appliances.

The Panel also visited two locations where students attend for internships. These were referred to in the documentation as "Partner Clinics". One is the Oculus Prim Medical Center which is a private clinic attended by USMF Optometry students during their training. The clinic currently employs one of USMF's Master's graduates and a current part-time lecturer and a graduate of the Bachelor programme. As well as being a member of teaching staff in USMF's Department of Optometry and Ophthalmology, Dr Bilba is an owner of the Oculus Prim Medical Center.

Whilst the Panel visited Oculus Prim, there were fourth-year students (from the 4-year Bachelor's programme) in attendance and they were engaged in a range of activities, that included observing clinical activities that were taking place with real patients (e.g. amblyopia training with simultaneous electrophysiological measurement and recording) and working in pairs on each other. This clinical facility has a number of well-proportioned and well-equipped rooms and it seems that it is busy with patients presenting with a broad range of clinical needs. The Center contains a wide variety of modern digital equipment for ocular health and visual function assessment including medmont, also a retinomax (CSO) and visual electrophysiology equipment, as well as a pentacam, OCT and fundus photography. However, once again, there was some uncertainty amongst the Panel as to the extent to which USMF students, whilst at the Oculus Prim Medical Center, have the opportunity to conduct full optometric examinations upon patients attending the facility. The Panel was satisfied that experience obtained by the students whilst at this clinic would be very valuable but it seemed that students were being presented with considerable opportunities to see unusual cases but fewer opportunities to put their knowledge of the basics of optometric eye examination into practice.

The Panel was also pleased to be able to visit the staff and facilities at a low vision clinic that is under the direction of Dr. Tatiana Ghidirimsch, ophthalmologist. Helpfully, Dr. Ghidirimsch is also a part-time staff member in Optometry at USMF. One of the optometry graduates of USMF is also a member of staff there, working as a low vision optometrist. As well as attending a practical training session, the Panel saw patient consultations taking place. USMF students attend this clinic, and this is useful because it is a principal facility in the country for receiving low vision patient referrals. It was clear to the Panel that students attending this facility as part of their internship gain very valuable experience in this important area. As with all of the staff we met during the visit to the internship locations, the dedication and enthusiasm of the clinic staff towards both the patients attending the clinic, and the visiting USMF students was obvious. The Panel are grateful to the Course Team for arranging visits to the external clinics which are so important to the scope and volume of practical experience and exposure which USMF students receive.

At the outset of the accreditation visit, the Panel was grateful to have the opportunity to meet with the Senior Management Team, including the Rector, the Dean of Faculty, and with the Course Leadership Team. This meeting provided a useful introduction to the educational framework of the Republic of Moldova and an outline of the structure and educational provision offered by the Nicolae Testemițanu State University of Medicine and Pharmacy. The Panel learned about plans for the growing international student numbers and about improving the training facilities, and heard brief details about the proposed new eye clinic/optometry training space.

As part of the visit, the Panel also held meetings with a range of key personnel who are responsible for critical components of the programme and its delivery. The groups with whom the Panel met were as follows: (i) The Programme Leadership, including the Head of the Ophthalmology and Optometry Department and senior optometry staff; (ii) Academic staff teaching on the Optometry Programme; (iii) Internship Coordinators & Logbook Assessors; (iv) A sample of recent graduates, the majority of whom are now contributing to the teaching on the Programme, which is in itself a very positive sign for the development of the Optometry profession in Moldova; (v) a sample of Employers. Interestingly, there was a

diversity of opinion amongst the employers about the direction that the profession might take in the future. The debate which the Panel witnessed about the future direction for optometry which the Panel heard is not unique to Moldova. The Panel are grateful to Programme Leadership for co-ordinating this extremely useful series of meetings.

The Panel met with all (or virtually all) students in the 1st and 2nd years of the new, 3-year Bachelor's programme, and with students on the 3rd on the soon-to-finish, 4-year Bachelor's programme. Only one of the first-year students works as an optical assistant. Around one quarter of the second-year students work in practice as optical assistants, whereas virtually all of the third-year students work part-time in the optical sector. The Panel encountered a group of the fourth-year students during the visit to Oculus Prim, and during the visit to the low vision clinic (see above). The overwhelming majority of the students were female, reflecting a strong and growing trend which ECOO has recently observed in many other optometry study programmes. It was notable that a large majority of students in all years of the Bachelors indicated that they were strongly considering going straight into the Master's programme when they complete their undergraduate course. The students indicated that they are very happy with the education they are receiving and they were very complimentary about the staff who teach them in relation to both the teaching and the support offered.

The Panel did not meet current students on the Master's programme, however there in meetings with recent graduates and teaching staff, the Panel did meet with some Masters graduates.

A meeting also took place with graduates from the programmes. A number had graduated from the four-year Bachelor's programme and were currently taking the Master's programme on a part-time basis. Another had graduated from the Master's programme. Some have their own practices (shops) with good connections with ophthalmological colleagues, and others are working in clinics alongside ophthalmologists. In such clinical settings, perimetry is available and the back of the eye is checked in every patient. However, the graduates indicated that this would not be the case in optical shops.

The Panel noted that rather than being delivered in a semester-long or even an academic-year-long format (e.g. with a small, fixed number of hours per week), teaching at USMF appears to be arranged in short blocks where the students receive intensive training and tuition in a particular topic. The examination in that topic then follows very shortly afterwards. This teaching and delivery format appears to suit the staffing profile at USMF and it is not unpopular with students. Attendance at all classes (laboratories, practicals and lectures) is mandatory and students who miss classes are followed up by staff to ensure they catch up on the missed material. Teaching typically takes place between 8am and 2pm, after which students are free to work or study independently. All examinations have to be passed and there are multiple opportunities to retake exams if they have been failed.

For contact lens teaching, the programme uses the online educational resources of the International Association of Contact Lens Educators (IACLE). For other subjects, teaching materials are organised and made available to students using a department-managed, shared Google Drive space where students have access to course notes, presentations, manuals, practical guides, and other recommended material before, during and after teaching sessions.

The curriculum structure is shown in the graphics below, which lists subject details covered in each of the six semesters of the programme. Compulsory modules make up around three quarters of the subjects offered (76%, 38 modules) with the remainder (24%, 12 modules) described as optional.

CONȚINUTUL PLANULUI DE ÎNVĂȚĂMÂNT PE ANI DE STUDII/ *THE CONTENT OF THE CURRICULUM BY THE YEARS OF STUDY*

Cod/ *Code*	Denumirea unității de curs/ modul *Course unit/ module name*	Total ore/ *Total hours*			Nr. ore pe tipuri de activități *No. of hourss by the type of activities*				Forma de evaluare *Form of assessment*	Nr. Credite *No. ECTS credits*
		Total/ *Total*	Contact direct/ *Direct contact*	Studiu individual/ *Individual trainig*	Curs/ *Course*	Lucrări practice/ *Practice, laboratory work*	Seminar/ *Seminar*	Stagiu practic/ *Practical trainig*		
ANUL I, SEMESTRUL I (15 SĂPTĂMÂNI)/ IST YEAR, 1ST SEMESTER (15 WEEKS)										
Discipline obligatorii (O))/ Compulsory disciplines										
F.01.O.001	Anatomia/ *Anatomy* Histologia/ *Histology*	90	60	30	15 15	8 8	7 7		**E**	3
F.01.O.002	Biochimia/ *Biochemistry* Fiziologie generală/ *General Physiology*	90	60	30	15 15	8 8	7 7		**E**	3
G.01.O.003	Limba engleză/ franceză/ *English/ French*	60	30	30	-	30			**E***	2
F.01.O.004	Optica fizică/ Physical Optics	120	60	60	20	20	20		**E**	4
F.01.O.005	Optica geometrică/ *Geometrical optics*	150	75	75	30	20	25			5
F.01.O.006	Aparate optice/ *Optical Devices*	180	90	90	30	30	30		**E**	6
G.01.O.007	Tehnologii informaționale în optometrie/*Informational technology in optometry*	60	30	30	15	8	7		E*	2
F.01.O.008	Microbiologia/ *Microbiology* Imunologia/ *Immunology*	90	60	30	15 15	8 8	7 7		E	3
G.01.O.009	Științele comportamentului. Psihologie și sociologie în medicină / *Behavioral sciences. Medical psychology. and sociology*	60	30	30	15		15		**E***	2
Total semestrul I curricular/ *Total curricular semester I*		**900**	**495**	**405**	**200**	**156**	**139**		**8E**	**30**
Discipline obligatorii extracurriculare (OE)/ Compulsory extracurricular disciplines										
G.01.O.010	Educația fizică/ *Physical education*	30	30	-	-	30	-		C	-
ANUL I, SEMESTRUL II (15 SĂPTĂMÂNI)/ YEAR I, SEMESTER II (15 WEEKS)										
Discipline obligatorii (O)/ Compulsory disciplines										
F.02.O.011	Anatomia ochiului/ *Ocular Anatomy* Fiziologia ochiului/ *Ocular Physiology* Neuroștiințe/ *Neuroscience*	180	120	60	15 15 15	8 15 15	7 15 15		**E**	6
F.02.O.012	Optica vizuală/ *Visual optics*	60	30	30	10	10	10		**E**	2
S.02.O.013	Optica profesională/ *Professional optics*	60	30	30	10	10	10			2
G.02.O.014	Bioetică și deontologie profesională/ *Bioethics and professional ethics*	60	30	30	10	20			E*	2
F.02.O.015	Tehnici de investigare de bază în optometrie/ *Basic investigation techniques in optometry*	180	90	90	30	30	30		**E**	6
S.02.O.016	Urgențe medicale primare/ *Primary Medical Emergencies*	60	30	30	15	15			E*	2
G.02.O.017	Limba engleză/ franceză/ *English/ French*	60	30	30	-	30			**E***	2
SP.02.O.018	Stagiul practic*. Practica în produsele optometrice fundamental / *Internship. Internship in fundamental optometric products*	150	120	30	-	-	-	120	**E**	5
Total discipline obligatorii/ *Total compulsory disciplines*		**810**	**480**	**330**	**120**	**153**	**87**	**120**	**7E**	**27**
Discipline opționale (A), Pachetul II/ Optional disciplines, Set II										

Cod/ *Code*	Denumirea unității de curs/ modul *Course unit/ module name*	Total ore/ *Total hours*			Nr. ore pe tipuri de activități *No. of hourss by the type of activities*				Forma de evaluare *Form of assessment*	Nr. Credite *No. ECTS credits*
		Total/ *Total*	Contact direct/ *Direct contact*	Studiu individual/ *Individual trainig*	Curs/ *Course*	Lucrări practice/ *Practice, laboratory work*	Seminar/ *Seminar*	Stagiu practic/ *Practical trainig*		
U.02.A.019.1	*Relaționarea în mediu social/ Relationship in a social environment*	90	30	60	15	-	15		E*	3
U.02.A.019.2	*Drepturile omului în sănătate/ Human rights in health*									
U.02.A.019.3	*Sănătatea mintală la locul de muncă/ Mental health at work*									
Total semestrul II curricular/ *Total curricular semester II*		**900**	**510**	**390**	**135**	**153**	**102**	**120**	**8E**	**30**
Total anul I curricular/ *Total curricular year I*		**1800**	**945**	**795**	**335**	**309**	**241**	**120**	**15E**	**60**
Discipline obligatorii extracurriculare (OE)/ *Compulsory extracurricular disciplines*										
G.02.O.020	Educația fizică/ *Physical education*	30	30	-	-	30	-		C	-
Total extracurricular/ *Total extracurricular*		**60**	**60**			**60**			**2C**	
ANUL II, SEMESTRUL III (15 SĂPTĂMÂNI)/ YEAR II, SEMESTER III (15 WEEKS)										
Discipline obligatorii (O)/ *Compulsory disciplines*										
S.03.O.021	Refracția/ *Refraction*	150	90	60	30	30	30		E	5
F.03.O.022	Farmacologia generală/ *General pharmacology*	120	60	60	30	15	15		E	4
S.03.O.023	Motilitatea oculară și vederea binoculară/ *Ocular motility and binocular vision*	150	60	90	20	20	20		E	5
F.03.O.024	Biostatistica și metodologia cercetării științifice/ *Biostatistics and scientific research methodology*	60	30	30	10	10	10		E	2
F.03.O.025	Promovarea sănătății/ *Health promotion*	60	30	30	10	10	10		E	2
S.03.O.026	Medicina calamităților/ *Disaster medicine*	60	30	30	10	10	10		E	2
S.03.O.027	Percepția vizuală/ *Visual perception*	120	60	60	20	20	20		E	4
S.03.O.028	Metode de investigații în optometrie/Diagnostical methods in optometry	90	60	30	20	20	20		E	3
Total discipline obligatorii/ *Total compulsory disciplines*		**810**	**420**	**390**	**150**	**135**	**135**		**8E**	**27**
Discipline opționale (A), Pachetul III/ *Optional disciplines, Set III*										
U.03.A.029.1	*Primul ajutor psihologic/First psychological aid*	90	30	60	10	10	10		E	3
U.03.A.029.2	*Sănătatea persoanelor în etate/ Health of older people*									
U.03.A.029.3	*Sănătatea și schimbările climatice/ Health and climate change*									
Total semestrul III curricular/ *Total curricular semester III*		**900**	**450**	**450**	**160**	**145**	**145**		**9E**	**30**
ANUL II, SEMESTRUL IV (15 SĂPTĂMÂNI)/ YEAR II, SEMESTER IV (15 WEEKS)										
Discipline obligatorii (O)/ *Compulsory disciplines*										
S.04.O.030	Dezvoltarea vederii și îmbătrânirea/ *Vision development and ageing*	210	120	90	40	40	40		E	7
F.04.O.031	Farmacologia oculară/ *Ocular pharmacology+generala un modul*	120	90	30	30	30	30		E	4
S.04.O.032	Vederea slabă/ Low *vision*	210	120	90	40	40	40		E	7
S.03.O.033	Epidemiologia și prevenirea infecțiilor asociate asistenței medicale/ *Igiena/ Epidemiology and prevention of healthcare associated infections/ Hygiene*	120	90	30	20 10	20 10	20 10		E	4

Cod/ *Code*	Denumirea unității de curs/ modul *Course unit/ module name*	Total ore/ *Total hours*			Nr. ore pe tipuri de activități *No. of hourss by the type of activities*				Forma de evaluare *Form of assessment*	Nr. Credite *No. ECTS credits*
		Total/ *Total*	Contact direct/ *Direct contact*	Studiu individual/ *Individual trainig*	Curs/ *Course*	Lucrări practice/ *Practice, laboratory work*	Seminar/ *Seminar*	Stagiu practic/ *Practical trainig*		
SP.04.O.034	Stagiul practic. Tehnici investigative în examinarea vederii și prescrierea corecției optice/ *Internship* Investigative techniques in vision examination and prescription of optical correction*	150	120	30	-	-	-	120	E	5
Total discipline obligatorii/ *Total compulsory disciplines*		**810**	**540**	**270**	**140**	**140**	**140**	**120**	**5E**	**27**
Discipline opționale (A), Pachetul IV/ *Optional disciplines, Set IV*										
U.04.A.035.1	*Metodologia cercetării în realizarea tezei de licență/ Research methodology for the bachelor thesis*	90	30	60	10	10	10		E	3
U.04.A.035.2	*Malpraxis și decizie morală în medicina clinică/ Malpractice and moral decision-making in clinical medicine*									
U.04.A.035.3	*Monitoring și evaluare în sănătate/ Health monitoring and evaluation*									
Total semestrul IV curricular/ *Total curricular semester IV*		**900**	**570**	**330**	**150**	**150**	**150**	**120**	**6E**	**30**
Total anul II curricular/ *Total curricular year II*		**1800**	**1020**	**780**	**310**	**295**	**295**	**120**	**15E**	**60**
ANUL III, SEMESTRUL V (15 SĂPTĂMÂNI)/ YEAR III, SEMESTER V (15 WEEKS)										
Discipline obligatorii (O)/ *Compulsory disciplines*										
S.05.O.036	Patologie și tulburări metabolice generale/ *Pathology and general metabolic disorders*	120	60	60	20	20	20		E	4
S.05.O.037	Lentile de contact/ *Contact lenses*	240	120	120	40	40	40		E	8
S.05.O.038	Afecțiuni oculare anormale/ *Abnormal eye diseases*	240	120	120	40	40	40		E	8
S.05.O.039	Optometria pediatrică/ *Pediatric Optometry*	120	60	60	20	20	20		E	4
S.05.O.040	Chirurgie refractivă/ *Refractive surgery*	90	60	30	20	20	20		E	3
Total discipline obligatorii/ *Total compulsory disciplines*		**810**	**420**	**390**	**140**	**140**	**140**		**5E**	**27**
Discipline opționale (A), Pachetul V/ *Optional disciplines, Set V*										
S.05.A.041.1	*Boli ale suprafeței oculare/ Diseases of the ocular surface*	90	30	60	10	10	10		E	3
S.05.A.041.2	*Reabilitarea dizabilităților oculare/ Rehabilitation of ocular disabilities*									
S.05.A.041.3	*Glaucomul în practica optometristului/ Glaucoma in the optometrist's practice*									
Total semestrul V curricular/ *Total curricular semester V*		**900**	**450**	**450**	**150**	**150**	**150**		**6E**	**30**
ANUL III, SEMESTRUL VI (12 SĂPTĂMÂNI)/ YEAR III, SEMESTER VI (12 WEEKS)										
SP. 06.O.042	Stagiul practic de specialitate. Investigații optometrice și contactologie / *Specialty internship* Optometric investigations and contactology*	600	480	120				480	E	20
Evaluarea finală (Examen de licenta și tezei de licență)/ Graduation exam (*bachelor (graduation) thesis*)		300	60	240	-	-	60	-	E	10
Total semestrul VI curricular/ *Total curricular semester VI*		**900**	**540**	**360**	-	-	**60**	**480**	**2E**	**30**
Total anul III curricular/ *Total curricular year III*		**1800**	**990**	**810**	**150**	**150**	**210**	**480**	**8E**	**60**
Total pe anii de studii/ *Total years of study*		**5400**	**3015**	**2385**	**795**	**754**	**746**	**720**	**38E/ 2C**	**180**

Details of the three Internships are as follows:

STAGIILE DE PRACTICĂ/ *SPECIALITY INTERNSHIPS*

Stagiile de practică/ *Specialty INTERNSHIPS*	**Semestru/ *Semester***	**Durata-nr. săptămâni/ ore/ *Duration- weeks/ hours***	**Perioada/ *Period***	**Număr de credite *No. f credits***
1. Practica de specialitate/ Specialty internship: Practica în produsele optometrice fundamentale/ Internship in fundamental optometric products	II	5 săptămâni/*weeks* / 150 ore/*hours*	Iunie-iulie	5
2. Practica de specialitate/ Specialty internship: Tehnici investigative în examinarea vederii și prescrierea corecției optice/ Investigative techniques in vision examination and prescription of optical correction	IV	5 săptămâni/*weeks* / 150 ore/*hours*	Iunie-iulie	5
3. Practica de cercetare/ creație de licență - Investigații optometrice și contactologie/ Graduation research/ creation internship - Optometric investigations and contactology	VII	12 săptămâni/ 600 ore/ 12 weeks/ 600 hours	Februarie -aprilie	20

Examenul de licență/ *Graduation examination*

Nr. crt.	**Denumirea activității/ *Name of activity***	**Perioada/ *Period***
1.	Susținerea tezei de licență/ *Bachelor thesis defense*	Mai/ *May*
2.	Testarea asistată la calculator/ *Computer Assisted Testing*	Mai/ Iunie/ *May/ June*

**Note that the 3rd internship runs in semester VI not semester VII as indicated in the table above.*

As indicated in the curriculum information above, the first year (semester I & II) contains mostly theoretical, underpinning science with more optometry-specific material accounting for a higher proportion of the overall material delivered in the 2nd and especially in the 3rd year. The optics aspects of the programme are taught by academics in other departments of USMF and, while they appear to cover the theory required, it was not clear to the Panel who teaches the practical aspects of ophthalmic dispensing or the extent to which the students use the optical dispensing facility at the hospital.

The Bachelor programme includes 900 hours of supervised clinical practice, across the three specialty internships. The first internship (5 weeks, 150 hours) provides practice and clinical experience in fundamental optometric products, including lenses and dispensing practice and runs in Semester II. This internship is conducted at the end of the first year of study, during the month of July. The second internship (also 150 hours, 5 weeks) provides practice and clinical experience in investigative techniques in vision examination and optical prescription and it runs in Semester IV. This internship is also focussed on ocular pathology. The final specialty internship runs for 12 weeks (600 hours) and is titled 'optometric investigations and contactology' (Semester VI).

Each internship is mandatory and assessed. The specialty internship is coordinated by the Head of the Specialty Internship within the Department of Ophthalmology and Optometry, together with internship coordinators (mentors), who are experienced medical specialists appointed by order of the Rector of Nicolae Testemițanu USMF. During the internships, students are required to document in detail their clinical cases, the investigations they performed, the results that were obtained and to record any optical or clinical management applied. The competencies and learning objectives to be achieved are specified in the internship logbooks, which are checked and validated by supervising academic staff.

As indicated, the 3rd year contains the final, 12-week internship which is titled “Optometric investigations and Contactology” and this accounts for 600 of the 1800 hours assigned in the 3rd year. The preface in the Portfolio document in which students record their clinical activities states that the purpose of the final internship is as follows:

This internship aims to enable the student to:

- *apply optometric investigation techniques in real clinical settings;*
- *participate in the assessment, fitting, and monitoring of contact lenses under supervision;*
- *collect, analyse, and interpret clinical data relevant to optometric practice;*
- *develop critical thinking and evidence-based decision-making skills;*
- *integrate clinical findings into the preparation of the Bachelor’s thesis;*
- *demonstrate professional responsibility, ethical conduct, and effective communication with patients and the clinical team.*

Through this internship, the student transitions from supervised learning to a higher level of clinical autonomy, preparing for professional practice or further academic training in optometry.

In terms of learning outcomes, the Portfolio document states the following:

By the end of the Graduation Internship – Research / Bachelor’s Thesis Practice “Optometric Investigations and Contactology”, the student is expected to demonstrate the ability to:

- *perform comprehensive optometric examinations, including visual acuity assessment, refraction, binocular vision evaluation, and functional vision testing;*
- *assess the ocular surface and anterior segment in relation to contact lens wear;*
- *apply principles of contact lens selection, fitting, evaluation, and follow-up under supervision;*
- *identify and appropriately manage common complications related to contact lens wear;*
- *collect, document, and analyse clinical data relevant to optometric investigations;*
- *apply ethical principles, patient safety standards, and professional communication in clinical practice;*
- *critically appraise clinical findings and relate them to current scientific literature.*

The Panel saw an example of a completed logbook from a student in the previous academic year although the student who completed this is on the old 4-year programme.

The curriculum information above also indicates that while many modules are obligatory, a number of modules are optional, especially in year 3. The course team indicated that all of the EDO’s Learning Outcomes are covered in obligatory modules, however the Panel would need to see a greater level of detail to be certain that this is the case.

A variety of assessments are used to test learning outcomes in individual modules on the programme, including written and viva exams and tests of practical skills. At the end of the programme, the “Bachelor exam” takes place and this is comprised of a presentation and public defense of the bachelor’s thesis, and a computerized examination.

The institution maintains comprehensive records of students' clinical experience through practice logbooks. Each student is required to complete a dedicated clinical practice notebook in which all clinical encounters are documented in detail, including patient presentations, diagnostic procedures performed, findings, and the optical or clinical management provided. There is a clinical logbook for each of the three specialty internships (listed above). Each logbook is reviewed and validated by the supervising clinician. The Panel was provided with an example of a completed specialty internship logbook for the final internship (Optometric Investigations and Contactology). In the specialty internships, real patients examined under supervision and students record their experience in a logbook. The internships may also include simulated patients such as friends or family members of the student though it is not clear if the results of these clinical encounters are recorded in the logbook.

Senior Management at USMF informed the Panel that institutional development plans include the creation of a dedicated eye clinic, which will provide both facilities for the training of optometry and ophthalmology students and clinical services for patients. The concept envisages the development of spaces for optometric consultations, contact lens fitting, medical optics services, as well as a laboratory for the provision, modification and adjustment of spectacles. This infrastructure will support both educational activities at Bachelor's and Master's levels and the provision of modern eye care services.
This seems like a very welcome development given the growing numbers of students joining the Bachelors programmes and the strong interest among the Bachelor students in joining the Masters programme which all student cohorts expressed to the Panel. It seems that student numbers on both programmes may also grow because the University has ambitious plans to recruit internationally. Indeed the University already has a sizeable volume of international students on several of its other programmes, though not as yet on its optometry study programmes. It seems that plans for the new eye clinic are at an early stage of development and the Panel indicated to the Optometry course team that they would be willing to provide advice on size and configuration matters.

When the programme started, USMF optometry students had the opportunity to participate in an exchange scheme by travelling to the optometry school in Kongsberg, Norway, and students in Norway were able to travel in the opposite direction. One of the USMF optometry staff had visited Kongsberg to learn about how optics was taught there. The funding to support these Norway-Moldova exchanges has now come to an end but opportunities like these continue to exist for USMF Optometry students, albeit to a lesser extent than previously. When the Panel visited, one of the USMF Optometry students was part of an exchange to the University of West Attica in Athens, Greece. This is again consistent with the outward-facing, international approach to the USMF training and teaching which the Panel found to be very positive and refreshing.

5. Analysis of the Self-Assessment Document & Supporting Documentation

The Self-Assessment Document (SAD) is central to the ECOO accreditation process in that it allows the Panel to make a judgement about whether each of the European Diploma in Optometry's Learning Outcomes and Clinical/Practical Competencies have or have not been met.

The Panel received the completed SAD in advance of the visit but this document and the supporting course documentation was lacking in a number of ways. In several places, course/module descriptors to which the SAD referred did not appear to cover the Learning Outcomes or Clinical/Practical Competencies in question. Furthermore, many of the module descriptors provided in advance were overly brief to the extent that they did not allow the Panel to see the detail required in relation to the precise module/course content, the themes covered, the hours for the lecture and practical components of the module and the modes of assessment. The Panel raised these issues in advance of the visit. A number of issues were resolved through additional documentation provided before and in particular during the visit. The Panel is satisfied that detailed curriculum descriptors do exist for all of the modules on the programme. However, the Panel saw only a sample of these (around half) and the majority of these were only available in Romanian. The result is that the Panel was not in a position to be able to make decisions about the extent to which Learning Outcomes and Clinical/Practical Competencies of the EDO are covered.

These issues left the Panel quite unsure about the student journey for students on the programme. In particular, the Panel did not gain a clear sense about the skills the students have acquired at the end of 1st and 2nd years. In addition, the Panel was not clear about the details of the assessments undertaken by the students at different stages in the programme, and certainly not how the programme could determine that students have fulfilled the practical/clinical competency requirements of the EDO.

For the reasons set out above, the Panel has set a condition relating to the need for the mapping exercise required in the SAD to be completed and for supporting documentation to be made available.

Analysis of the Portfolio of Clinical Experience

Whilst the Panel was shown examples of documentation completed by students as part of their internships, this was not in the form of a portfolio that would meet ECOO's requirements for the European Diploma in Optometry's *Portfolio of Clinical Experience*. To an extent, this is not all that surprising given that there are currently no students in the final (3rd) year on the new, 3-year programme which ECOO was evaluating as part of this visit. However, the Panel noted the internship submissions did not appear to be evaluated by optometry teaching staff in that a staff member signed the submissions but there did not appear to be any marking or feedback.

Going forward, the course team is encouraged to look closely at the requirements for the European Diploma in Optometry's Portfolio of Clinical Experience (see: https://ecoo.info/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/Part-III-ECOO-Portfolio-Guidance_June-2025.pdf). Of note, the Panel point out that students need to be trained in how to present their record of clinical experience, and that the Course Team will need to develop an evaluation approach to decide what the required standard is, so as to decide whether an individual portfolio meets or does not meet this standard. These points are the subject of a Condition below.

6. Conclusions

Ordinarily, at the conclusion of an ECOO accreditation visit, the Panel makes a 'met' or a 'not met' decision in relation to Parts A-D of the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) syllabus. This corresponds to the view of the Panel as to the extent to which the programme being accredited meets the Knowledge Base and Clinical /Practical Competencies of the EDO. Additionally, the same judgement is typically made by the Panel at the end of the visit in relation to the Portfolio of Clinical Experience.

Owing to the fact that:
(1) the programme being accredited (i.e. the 3-year, Bachelor programme) has not yet had a graduating cohort and does not currently have final-year students;
(2) the evidence of clinical experience which the Panel saw was not presented in the format of a Portfolio with the additional, associated material that the *Portfolio of Clinical Experience* is expected to include (e.g. 20 detailed cases are presented with introductory/background material, differential diagnosis material, reflective text and bibliography);
(3) detailed course information about the Bachelor programme was available for some courses/modules but not for all, and the Self-Assessment document did not accurately map the course content to the EDO's learning outcomes and clinical/practical competencies;

Consequently, the Panel was not in a position to be able to make decisions about the extent to which the EDO's learning outcomes and clinical/practical competencies are met by the Bachelor programme, or about the adequacy of the *Portfolio of Clinical Experience* which students of the programme will produce.

In order for USMF to make progress with the EDO accreditation process, the Panel have set a number of conditions which would need to be met before the Panel will be in a position to re-evaluate the programme against the Knowledge Base, Competencies and Portfolio of the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry.

The Visitors wish to acknowledge the hard work and commitment of the Head of the Department of Optometry & Ophthalmology, Associate Professor Lilia Dumbrăveanu, from Dr Rodica Bilba, Head of Medical Studies within the Department and from the entire team involved in the delivery of the programme, both within USMF and external to it. The Panel also wishes to acknowledge the efforts of Dr Evelina Gherghelegiu, who provided enormous support and assistance to the Panel in the run-up to, and especially, during the visit.

ECOO recognises that putting a programme forward for accreditation is optional, and that it consists of a huge investment of time, effort and resources. The Panel recognises that this is a programme which, although at an early stage of development,, already has many strengths. The Panel looks forward to continuing to work with the team at USMF, and will endeavour to support them in their pursuit of full accreditation.

7. Conditions & Recommendations

The Panel has set 3 conditions and 1 recommendation.

Conditions

1. Complete the mapping exercise by revisiting ECOO's Self-Assessment Document in order to more clearly show how the programme meets the Learning Outcomes and Clinical/Practical Competencies of the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO). In particular, this will need to carefully show how the EDO requirements are met for the three-year Bachelor's programme.

Rationale: Prior to, and during the Visit, the Panel was provided with insufficient information in order to establish the extent to which the EDO's learning outcomes and clinical/practical competencies are currently met by the Bachelor's programme at USMF.

2. Carefully consider the volume and scope of clinical practice in the programme in order **to ensure that USMF candidates for the EDO will have the opportunity to conduct the required number of full, primary-care eye examinations.**

Rationale: The Panel recognises that the various internships in the programme provide very valuable access to patients with a broad range of ocular pathologies. However, the Panel was not convinced that arrangements are in place in order to provide EDO candidates with the required volume and scope of clinical experience that will allow them to demonstrate their skills as an autonomous primary eye care provider, and submit a Portfolio of Clinical Experience which will meet EDO requirements.

3. Carefully develop plans regarding (i) the training of students to be able to meet EDO's requirements for the Portfolio of Clinical Experience and (ii) the approach which USMF will take to evaluating the Portfolios which EDO candidates submit.

Rationale: Given that the Panel did not encounter students in the latter stages of the 3-year Bachelor's programme, there were no Portfolios of Clinical Experience for the Panel to evaluate. This condition requires the USMF team to develop portfolio plans for assisting students to prepare cases to the required standard for the EDO portfolio. This will involve training and supporting EDO candidates in how to present their detailed case reports. In addition, the condition requires that USMF sets out in detail its approach to evaluation of portfolios which have been submitted, and in particular how decisions will be made about whether or not a candidate's portfolio reaches the standard expected.

Recommendation

As well as the above Conditions, the Panel makes the following recommendation. The path to full EDO accreditation will we anticipate be more achievable if students were required to complete both the USMF Bachelor's and Master's programmes. A number of other institutions (including USN, Kongsberg; also the Karolinska Institute, Stockholm, and others)

have gained full EDO accreditation by meeting ECOO's requirements through a combination of their Bachelor's and Master's programmes.

The Panel also makes this suggestion because the additional time and training afforded in a Master's programme makes the required scope and volume of clinical experience necessary to meet the requirements for the EDO Portfolio of Clinical Experience more achievable. Of course, the decision as to whether the Bachelor programme alone, or the combination of USMF's Bachelor's and Master's programmes, is offered against the EDO requirements at the next accreditation event rests entirely with the course team at USMF.

In relation to ECOO's expectations as to when the Conditions set out above should next be evaluated, ECOO will wish to review USMF's progress in meeting the Conditions once there has been a full cycle of the new programme. In other words, it would be timely for us to review progress once the new Bachelors programme has graduated at least one cohort of students.

This report was checked for factual accuracy by USMF in July 2026. This version of ***the report therefore corresponds to the final version which will now go to the EQB*** meeting in Denmark in October 2026.

Date of this report: 24 July 2026