

VARIATIONS AND DEPARTURES FROM THE UNIVERSITY'S REGULATORY
FRAMEWORK

Faculty of Life and Health Sciences

BSc Hons Optometry / MOptom Hons Optometry

The BSc Hons Optometry / MOptom Hons Optometry was validated on 3 November 2015 to replace the existing BSc Hons Optometry. It was noted that the following aspects of the provision were not in line with the University's Regulatory Framework and would require consideration by the Learning and Teaching Committee.

Proposals to:

- (i) introduce the award of BSc Hons Vision Science for students achieving a Third class Honours degree;
- (ii) award Certificate of Higher Education and Associate Bachelor's Degree exit awards with the title 'Vision Science';
- (iii) calculate the BSc Hons Optometry award on the basis of:

Year 2 [Level 5] – 20%
Year 3 [Level 6] – 80%

and the MOptom Hons Optometry award on the basis of:

Year 2 [Level 5] – 20%
Year 3 [Level 6] – 40%
Year 4 [Level 7] – 40%;

- (iv) not include provision for an Aegrotat award.

(i) **BSc Hons Vision Science Award**

The proposal to award students achieving a Third class Honours degree a BSc Hons Vision Science award was discussed with the Course Team at the validation meeting. The Revalidation Panel raised two issues with this proposal:

1. a student who had signed up for an Optometry degree and had achieved the standards of the Optometry programme would not graduate with BSc Hons Optometry;
2. in cases where students achieving a Third class Honours degree subsequently achieved the requirements for the General Optical Council pre-reg year by

completing an additional year of study, the title of their degree would remain 'Vision Science' and not 'Optometry'.

Subject Team Response

Under the proposals contained within the revalidated programme, students leaving the programme at the end of Year 3 will exit with a BSc (Hons) in Optometry if they achieve a 2ii classification or better. In keeping with new General Optical Council (GOC) recommendations those achieving a third class classification will be awarded a BSc (Hons) Vision Science.

The GOC have advised institutions offering optometry programmes that they have taken legal advice and state that 'Optometry' is a protected title and as such cannot be used for an award where a student is not eligible to proceed in the professional registration process. Presently, students require a 2ii or better degree to proceed forward towards registration as an optometrist.

Page 4 of the revised GOC 'Accreditation and Quality Assurance Handbook: Routes to Registration in Optometry' (July 2015) which set out the requirements and expectations of the GOC with regard to the approval of training institutions states:

Protected title

The award of qualifications using the protected title of optometry is limited to qualifications accredited by the GOC as meeting the professional standards required. Only students who meet all of the GOC specified requirements (specifically including the achievement of core competencies and patient experience) are entitled to receive an award using the title of optometry. Students who gain sufficient academic credits to receive a university award but do not meet the professional requirements must receive an alternative award to that approved by the GOC. The alternative award must not use the protected title of optometry.

Whilst this subject featured amongst discussions of the revalidation panel, we have sought further clarity from the GOC on this matter but have yet to receive an answer to our questions.

Nonetheless, the wording of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Handbook (quoted above), appears quite explicit and it is for this reason we have sought to award a 'Vision Science' degree, rather than a degree in 'Optometry' to those achieving a third class honours classification, thus ensuring we comply with the professional body requirements.

(ii) **Exit Awards**

It Is University policy for exit awards to carry the same subject title as the main award. The proposal is for CertHE Vision Science and AB Vision Science exit awards.

Subject Team Response

As noted in earlier comments, the GOC state that 'Optometry' is a protected title and cannot be awarded where a student is not eligible to proceed and become a registered

optometrist. This is the case for all the exit awards prior to the degree category. These exit awards (CertHE Vision Science and AB Vision Science) were agreed previously by the University and have been in place for several years.

(iii) **Degree Classification and Weighting**

The University's regulations state that the classification of the final result should be based on the assessment results from the modules at the final level. For this provision, the following is being proposed:

- BSc Hons Optometry / Vision Science degree classification to be calculated as follows:

Year 2 [Level 5] – 20%

Year 3 [Level 6] – 80%

Note: the Revalidation Panel and the students who met with the Panel were supportive of the proposal for Level 5 modules to contribute 20% to the final BSc Hons Optometry award.

- MOptom Hons Optometry degree classification to be calculated as follows:

Year 2 [Level 5] – 20%

Year 3 [Level 6] – 40%

Year 4 [Level 7] – 40%.

Subject Team Response

The current BSc Hons Optometry regulations align with the University's principle of awards being based upon final level 'exit velocity'. The rationale for this, as far as the course team understand, is that it allows for students to develop throughout the programme, and achieve their award based on the highest standard of development that they have achieved i.e. in final year. Academic awards, such as the Dean's List, also can be used to reward students who excel in all years of the programme. In addition, all students must pass all learning outcomes to proceed, so they are exiting having successfully achieved all the programme level learning outcomes.

While the course team recognise the arguments for the 'exit velocity' approach to classification, the view of the subject team is that this approach does not take account of the integrated nature of the optometry programmes and the need for the final award to reflect achievement in earlier levels of study, a belief that is broadly shared by both the revalidation panel and external examiners. Accordingly, the subject team are of the opinion that the above method for determination of the final award is fully appropriate for optometry and recommended for the following reasons:

1. The second year of the programme includes core professional learning, teaching and assessment that is not explicitly revisited in Years 3 or 4 (e.g. Low Vision, Dispensing and Law, Management & Ethics). Similarly, the third year of the Masters programme includes core professional learning, teaching and assessment that is not explicitly revisited in Year 4.

2. The GOC accreditation document for 2014 notes two conditions of continuing approval of the Ulster optometry programme; the second relating to concern over the use of final year marks only to calculate degree awards. Including contribution from additional years of the programme in calculating degree awards would align the programme with Optometry programmes across the UK, none of which have solely final year contribution to the exit award. A move away from exit awards based solely on final year contribution will also be important in allowing the third year research project to contribute to the MOptom classification.
3. External Examiners have strongly and repeatedly recommended that they would prefer to see contribution from Year 2 in the final award of the BSc Hons Optometry programme that they have been examining, as illustrated by the comments noted below:

“Year 2 has critical clinical and professional elements (not always simply revisited in year 3 and requiring full engagement).

(Harper, 2014-15)

EE Recommendation:

“That the University’s decision to reflect only the final year marks in the degree award (other than earlier progression) is reversed.”

(Harper, 2014-15)

“I continue to remain a little worried about the University’s decision to base the degree classification entirely on performance in year 3. Given the practical nature of Optometry it is my opinion that the degree classification should be based on performance in Year 2 and 3.”

(Subramanian, 2014-15)

“In my view there was *some* evidence for relative disengagement at the second year stage beginning to come through in discussion with the exiting third years of 2014. It is my view that this effect is the direct result of the final year mark only being reflected in the degree award. This EE remains of the view that Optometry should be exempt from this generic approach, not least given the critical clinical elements learnt in year 2 and build upon in year 3 ahead of the pre-reg year and employment.”

(Harper, 2013-14)

“I continue to remain a little worried about the University’s decision to base the degree classification entirely on performance in year 3. Given the practical nature of Optometry it is my opinion that the degree classification should be based on performance in year 2 and 3..... I would recommend that the University monitors the situation over the next couple of years and reviews its decision.”

(Subramanian, 2014-15)

All Optometry programmes in the United Kingdom, with the exception of Ulster University, adopt the approach whereby classification of the degree is based on the contribution from other years of study in addition to final year. The subject team request that consideration is given to the above information in respect to this case, and that they bring the Optometry programmes at Ulster in line with the practice of other departments and allow their final award classification to be more reflective of the

nature of optometric teaching. They thus commend the revised regulation structure to the Learning and Teaching Committee.

(iv) **Aegrotat Award**

There is no provision for an Aegrotat award within the BSc Hons Optometry / MOptom Hons Optometry programme.

Subject Team Response

An aegrotat degree is a degree without classification, awarded under the presumption that, had a candidate who is unable to undertake his or her exams due to illness or even death completed those exams, he or she would have satisfied the standard required for that degree.

Given the professional and regulatory restraints within which the programme operates, the aforementioned nature of protected titles associated with awards and the requirement for students to satisfy specific clinical core competencies in order to graduate successfully, the award of an aegrotat degree would be inappropriate.

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