European Council of Optometry and Optics

Guidelines for the accreditation of optician qualifications for the award of the

European Qualification in Optics (EQO)

Part I

EQO and the ECOO Accreditation Scheme

October 2018

Part I: The ECOO Accreditation System

1. Introduction

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) has a vision of Europe where there is easy access to affordable eye care provided by opticians and optometrists who practise autonomously to conserve and improve human vision.

One of the goals of the European Council of Optometry & Optics (ECOO) is to harmonise and develop educational standards and the scope of practice for optometry and optics. It is envisaged that this Qualification in Optics will have particular relevance to and be adopted by training institutions in countries where there is either a lower, or no, established standard for optics.

The European Diploma in Optometry has been an important tool in influencing the development of optometric education and raising the recognition, the level of competence and the scope of practice of optometry in Europe. There are three parts to the European Diploma in optometry. Part A is Optics and Optical Appliances, Part B is Clinical Investigation and Management and Part C is Biological and Medical Sciences and includes ocular disease and ocular pharmacology.

The World Council of Optometry also has developed a global competency-based model of the scope of practice for optometry to reflect the varying scope of practice across the world and which is based on the Parts of the European Diploma with the addition of level 4. Within this, they have defined four levels as follows;

- Level 1 Optical Technology services
- Level 2 Visual Function services, also encompassing Level 1
- Level 3 Ocular Diagnostic services, also encompassing Levels 1, and 2
- Level 4 Ocular Therapeutic services, also encompassing Levels 1, 2 and 3

The European Diploma in Optometry is set at level 3; the qualification in optics is set at Level 1.

However, given the broad range of education and scope of practice of both optometry and optics in Europe and the difficulty of the majority of members to relate closely with the European Diploma in Optometry there is a strong case for a qualification which would (i) establish a basic entry standard for optics at a European level and (ii) encourage professional bodies and training institutions to develop beyond this entry standard.

This draft competency framework has been developed with reference to Part A of the European Diploma and should serve as part of the 'ladder' of qualification in optics and optometry. It is envisaged that this qualification would allow exemption from Part A of the

European Diploma in Optometry. This framework has been designed to be similar to the WCO competency framework at level 1 and has been informed by existing European ophthalmic dispensing competencies. The intention is that delivery of this competency framework will be assessed by the accreditation of training institutions or by examinations run by other bodies and accredited by ECOO. ECOO does not envisage running any examinations for this qualification. This competency framework should also be an important reference to any syllabus revision or development for national training institutions.

The legal scope of practice within the countries of ECOO varies from assembling spectacles to the autonomous management of eye disease. In the spirit of the Bologna declaration ECOO has established the European Diploma in Optometry and the European Qualification in Optics (EQO) as a stimulus to the harmonisation of European optical and optometric education and clinical practice. The European Diploma (ED) is set at the European Qualifications Framework level 6/7 and provides a qualification appropriate for Optometric practice at Category 3 of the World Council of Optometry's four categories model. The countries of ECOO have adopted the Diploma as the "Gold Standard" for European Optometry. The EQO is a new qualification set at an entry standard for dispensing optics in Europe and is intended to be the first step on a ladder of qualification which could lead to qualification as an optometrist.

As harmonisation progresses an increasing number of schools and universities now base their curriculum on the ED, similarly it is hoped that the EQO will be used as a minimum standard by institutions teaching opticians. To foster this harmonization ECOO has established an accreditation agency to invite training institutions to benchmark their programmes against the ED and EQO.

Furthermore, the suggested number of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation point (ECTS) based on the credit point system of European Higher Education and European Credit for Vocational Education and Training point (ECVET) based on the more recently developed credit point system for educational programmes at vocational training institutions are included in this document. Both types of credit points express the volume of learning and workload on the defined learning outcome or unit for students. In addition, they are a numerical representation of the overall weight of learning outcomes in a qualification and of the relative weight of units in relation to the qualification. In most countries, 60 credit points reflect the learning outcomes and associated workload of a full-time academic year or its equivalent. Depending on the country, **one credit point** can equal on average between **25 and 30 study hours**. For those learning outcomes that are part of the ED as well as the EQO, both credit point systems are indicted to ascertain equivalency of learning outcomes. The syllabi may be found on the ECOO website at www.ecoo.info

2. What will be the benefits of the accreditation process?

All European Optics programmes can be compared against an agreed international standard, the EQO.

Training Institutions will be encouraged to match their programmes to all or part of the competency-based EQO - this will help to harmonize optics within Europe.

It may help training institutions, in the course of their national academic accreditation, if they can demonstrate that all or part of their programme meets the European standard.

Graduates of accredited EQO institutions can be exempted from Part A examination of the European Diploma in Optometry if they aspire a career in Optometry by attending an accredited European Diploma institution.

National “competent authorities” will find it easier to evaluate the training of applicants from another EU country – this will help to facilitate free movement of professionals.

3. What will actually be accredited?

Because of the diversity of Optometry/Optics training within Europe the system will be Competency-based. The emphasis will be on the quality of the graduate rather than on details of the training process.

The EQO is competency-based:
Competency is the ability to perform the activities within an occupation to the standard expected in employment. Competencies are the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to be able to practice.

In the context of this document “Competency” refers to the performance of the optometric/optical practitioner: the integration of skills, attitudes and knowledge that informs the practitioner in his/her professional activities. “Competencies” are the individual components of the skills, attitudes and knowledge that must be mastered to achieve “Competency”.

In training programmes the skills, attitudes and knowledge gained on successful completion of a module or course are referred to as the “learning outcomes” of that module or course. The student demonstrates the achievement of these “learning outcomes” by passing the corresponding module assessments (examinations) that are designed to test specifically for the acquisition of these “learning outcomes”.

“Learning outcomes” are typically defined in the format: “On successful completion of the module the student will be able to .....”. Hence “Learning Outcomes” can be conveniently matched against the EQO “Competencies”.

The accreditation system will consider the skills, attitudes and knowledge achieved by graduates of the programme. The approach will be to benchmark the learning outcomes of the training programme being considered against the competencies of the European Qualification in Optics.

4. The Accreditation questionnaire.

A questionnaire has been prepared that lists all the Competencies/Learning outcomes of the EQO. (See Part II).

An Institution applying for accreditation completes the questionnaire as a self-assessment document indicating where these European Qualification outcomes are being taught and assessed within the programme being considered.

The location of each competency/learning outcome within the programme is defined with respect to the Institution's formal Optometry/Optics **programme specification.**

The relative importance of each competency/learning outcome within the programme is given by the associated credit weighting.

The method of assessment of each competency/learning outcome and its contribution to the final examination mark is indicated by reference to the programme's **examination document** or equivalent.

The questionnaire is long, but it is simple. It does not ask for details of the teaching process over many years. It asks for evidence of the quality of the graduate - the learning outcomes and the practical competencies achieved by graduates after successful completion of the programme.

5. Additional documentation in support of the questionnaire.

In addition to completing the questionnaire, please supply the following:

- Programme specification (or equivalent).
- Examination document (or equivalent).
- Student timetable, didactic, practical experience
- Records of students' practical experience.

6. Analysis and verification of the Completed Questionnaire.

The completed questionnaire is considered by ECOO and a provisional opinion is given as to possible exemptions.

If the training institution wishes to continue with Accreditation a group of 4 ECOO nominated Opticians, Optometrists and Educationalists are invited to visit the Institution to verify the contents of the Questionnaire.

The procedure to be followed on the Visit by both the Visitors and the Institution is defined in the **Part III** of this document.

7. Guidance in Completing the Questionnaire.

Guidance in the completion of the questionnaire is given in the examples from the questionnaire reproduced below in Tables 1 and 2.

N.B The Self-Assessment Questionnaire itself is Part II of this document.

In the questionnaire (and Tables 1 and 2 below) the first column lists all of the thirteen EQO Subjects that cover the curriculum.

Knowledge base of Competencies

Some of the thirteen Subjects in the Competency-based EQO relate to the knowledge base that supports the competency and practical skill whereas other competencies require only theoretical knowledge, to ***"have an understanding of".***

The achievement of **"understanding"** can be acceptably demonstrated by indicating the formal written examination(s) in which the candidate demonstrated satisfactory understanding and knowledge of all aspects (including health-related aspects) of the specific competency. An example of how this part of the questionnaire could be completed is given in Table 1.

Practical base of Competencies

Some of the thirteen Subjects in the EQO relate to the practical skills as well as the knowledge base (see Table 2). The information required is how is the competency assessed? Where in the programme is it assessed? Number of clients i.e. how much practical experience do the students get? Is a record kept of this practical experience?.

Note: If the Learning Outcomes of a Subject are achieved across several different modules it may be more convenient when completing the questionnaire to subdivide the list of Learning Outcomes amongst the relevant modules.

Table 1. Example of the Knowledge Base for the EQO competencies

Subject 1: Geometrical Optics

***Learning outcomes**:* The student should demonstrate fundamental knowledge and insight into geometrical optics in order for the student to be able to understand, explain, and solve problems related to the eye and optical instruments/lenses, their function and correction. Knowledge and understanding should be demonstrated in the following areas:

Learning outcomes	**Where in the programme?**	**Credit weighting?**	**Method of assessment?**
(1) refraction at single spherical or plane surfaces	Geometrical Optics Course First Year See Programme Specification pXX	Geometrical Optics First Year Course XX Credits See Programme Specification pXX	Closed book written MCQ Examination. See Examination Document pXX
(2) thin lenses			

Table 2. Example of Practical EQO Competencies

Subject 4: Optical Appliances

Learning outcomes: The student should demonstrate the ability to produce a complete pair of spectacles to given specifications. The student should demonstrate Practical competency in the following areas:					
	Practical competencies:	**Competency assessment**		**Clinical experience**	
		How assessed?	**Where in the programme?**	**Number of clients examined?**	**Record kept?**
1	The ability to advise on and to dispense the most suitable form of optical correction taking into account visual performance and comfort, durability, comfort (anatomical), cosmetic appearance and lifestyle.				
2	The ability to measure and verify optical appliances, taking into account relevant standards.	Ophthalmic Dispensing Clinic Assessment See Exam Doc p xx	Ophthalmic Dispensing Third Year See Prog Spec p X	20 (Third Year)	Student logbook

8. Programme details.

Duration of programme Number of years: _____

Full-time or part-time: _____

Number of students each year: _____

Is the programme competency-based? _____

Is there a period of supervised practical practice? _____

How many weeks does it last? _____

Is this organised by the training institution? _____

Type of Qualification awarded on completion: _____

Employment profile for graduates?

National scope-of-practice: _____

Legislation pending to change scope of practice? _____

If so what changes? _____

END of Part I