Diploma and Apprenticeship in Ophthalmic and Vision Science

WHY THE DIPLOMA IN OPHTHALMIC AND VISION SCIENCE?

An ageing population and rapidly advancing ophthalmic technologies and treatments are putting eye services under intense pressure. Between 2007/08 and 2012/13 out patient attendances for ophthalmology in England increased by 30%, from 5 million to nearly 6.5 million. All patients attending eye clinics have diagnostic tests, but many of the staff who perform these tests have, at best, limited in-house training. With comprehensive and standardised education, training and assessment, ophthalmic support staff can provide more consistent and reliable results, will require less supervision and can work flexibly in different areas of ophthalmic practice. This can enhance the productivity and efficiency of clinical services, and can also facilitate the transfer of services into community settings.

THE CURRENT AND FUTURE WORKFORCE

At present there is no agreed career framework for ophthalmic support staff and there are a plethora of job titles and work roles that include:

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<th>Health Care Assistant</th>
<th>Visual Field Technician</th>
<th>Ophthalmic Technician</th>
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<tr>
<td>Ophthalmic Assistant</td>
<td>Ophthalmic Science Practitioner</td>
<td>Ophthalmic Photographer / Imager</td>
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We are introducing the Modernising Scientific Careers career framework, and we are proposing the following job titles and training for Ophthalmic and Vision Science support staff up to practitioner level:

- Ophthalmic Assistant Practitioner (Certificate level)
- Ophthalmic Associate Practitioner (Diploma / FD level)
- Ophthalmic Practitioner (BSc level)

THE DIPLOMA IN OPHTHALMIC AND VISION SCIENCE

The Diploma is designed for staff at Ophthalmic Associate Practitioner level (including apprentices at this level when the apprenticeship structure has been agreed). The curriculum of the diploma follows and is equivalent to the first two years of the Practitioner Training Programme BSc in Neurosensory Sciences / Ophthalmic and Vision Science. We will offer a certificate level qualification and BSc equivalent top up after commencement of the Diploma programme, depending on demand.

HOW WILL WE DELIVER THE PROGRAMME?

This is a work-based e-learning programme. Each student is given an iPad and learning materials are accessed in a series of iBooks. The student will be assigned an assessor who will agree the training programme with the student and the workplace and will undertake summative assessments. The employer will provide a mentor, and the Royal College of Ophthalmologists has agreed that ophthalmic trainees (specialist registrars) will be actively involved in workplace mentoring. Assessment of knowledge and competence will be documented in an Ecordia eportfolio.

WHO WILL AWARD THE DIPLOMA?

Academic institutions and awarding bodies will not provide or award qualifications without guaranteed student numbers. The ophthalmic support workforce is distributed in nearly 200 hospitals and clinics throughout the UK, and in the last few years almost all locality-based courses for ophthalmic support staff have been discontinued. A UK-wide e-learning programme should attract sufficient numbers for viability and in the first instance AHPO will award the Diploma, but we will review options for external accreditation in the future. Most ophthalmic-related professional bodies and Vision 2020 UK are members of AHPO, and we have the professional commitment to ensure the Diploma is of a high academic standard.

1 Survey of training of ophthalmic support staff Updated Feb13. You can find this document here: www.ahpo.net/assets/Survey of training of ophthalmic support staff Updated Feb13.pdf
2 Modernising Scientific Careers – Explaining the Facts. You can find this document here: www.ahpo.net/assets/ExplainingTheFacts.pdf