

## Optometry Online Offer Holders Event – Q&A

We had lots of questions at our latest offer holder information session, which were answered by our staff and recent graduates. We have split them into sections so you can read the ones that are important to you:

- [Admissions](#)
- [Pre-registration year](#)
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### Admissions questions

**If I don't meet the entry requirements for the BSc, can I do a foundation year?**

**Admissions Manager:** There isn't a standalone Optometry foundation year. If you meet the [widening participation](#) requirements and you have lower grades (below 3 Bs), you may be permitted to undertake a Pharmacy foundation year. The Pharmacy foundation year includes Chemistry, Biology and Maths, so you wouldn't be disadvantaged progressing into Year 1 of Optometry.

Find out more about widening participation and contextual data:

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/applications/after-you-apply/contextual-data/>

Find out more about the Pharmacy foundation year:

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/courses/2020/07958/mpfarm-pharmacy-with-a-foundation-year/>

**I do an Access to HE course and my remaining units are predicted. If the predicted grades match my grade requirements, is that still okay?**

**Admissions Manager:** It depends on whether you are talking about your predicted grades and whether they will turn out to be your assigned grades assigned by the exam board that looks after the Access to Higher Education Diploma. If your assigned grades end up as your predicted grades and they meet our requirements, then yes, we would accept them as we would with A-levels. We're now moving away from predicted grades and talking about assigned grades via each exam board.

### If I want to do the exam in autumn, when will I be able to enter Optometry, and will I enter without an interview?

**Admissions Manager:** If you have an offer now, then you will have had an interview already so any interview notes will be carried over for the subsequent year. We very rarely would ask somebody to attend an interview if they deferred or re-applied the following year.

The entrance exam in autumn is something we are aware will potentially happen, but we don't have much of a steer on this at the moment. It could be that our academic year is delayed slightly or it could be that the autumn entrance exam would mean that the candidate would have to start the following year.

For something like this, it probably won't be a decision from ourselves as an Optometry Admissions team; it will likely be a steer from the University and from the government. The University is putting FAQs on the website about a lot of these queries, so every time we get some specific information, the website will be updated.

Currently, we don't know much more than the fact that there could be an entrance exam in the autumn, but we don't know whether that means people will be able to apply for that year, or it means they would have to defer.

Get the latest information through the University of Manchester update page for applicants and offer holders:

<https://www.manchester.ac.uk/coronavirus-applicants-update/>

### Would A\*BB be equivalent to AAB?

We make grade-based offers rather than UCAS tariff-based offers, but if you were taking three sciences, we would look at A\*BB as equivalent to AAB. If you were doing two sciences and one non-science subject, we would have to look at that individually to see if the A\* is in a science or a non-science.

### I do the Manchester Access Programme (MAP). Will I still be able to get in if I get lower grades than I was offered?

**Admissions Manager:** If you have a MAP offer of BBB, we wouldn't tend to go lower than that MAP offer. However, things could be different this year. In general, we couldn't consider below BBB for this year. We may be able to consider you for next year if you did re-sits.

### If I completed the Manchester Access Programme (MAP), would it still be valid for next year?

If you were a MAP student one year, we would consider you as a MAP re-sit student for the following year.

### What is the admissions criteria for the MSci year?

**Course Director:** The admissions criteria for the MSci is the same as the BSc. You will apply for the BSc and, at the start of the second year, we have a call for applications of interest for the MSci course. The first year of the course is exactly the same, so you can start to think about the MSci at the beginning of your second year when you know a bit more about Optometry and what you want to do.

Find out more about the MSci from a student perspective:

<https://manchesterbmhstudents.wordpress.com/2018/08/28/why-graduation-didnt-spell-the-end-for-my-time-at-manchester/>

## Pre-registration year questions

### What is the process of the pre-registration year after graduation? Is it hard to get a placement?

**Course Director:** We do offer our students support in getting pre-reg positions. We go through a CV and letter writing process, and we would expect our students to get the best pre-reg years going. Although the pre-reg is separate to the University, we do facilitate the big companies coming into the University to talk about what they have to offer.

**Graduate:** For hospitals and stores, I think it is a little bit different. Vision Express hold events on campus for everyone who has applied to them. They carry out group work and one-to-one interviews. For Specsavers, when you apply you go to the store. I have a few friends who have done it that way.

Hospitals are a little bit different; for the NHS you have to apply and write a supporting statement explaining why you think you are better than everyone else who has applied, explaining all the extra things that you have done. Then you go for an interview, but the hospital interviews are a little bit more technical than the store interviews, so they do touch on your optics knowledge - low vision and other modules.

All of the hospitals and the stores are interested in your communication - that's probably the biggest thing I would say. If you want to secure a pre-reg then you need to be hot on that!

Find out more about the pre-registration year:

<https://www.college-optometrists.org/qualifying/scheme-for-registration.html>

### Is it hard to get into Royal Manchester Eye Hospital?

**Graduate:** It was a bit more difficult compared to normal practice. You do have to do a lot more to make yourself stand out. I'd recommend doing a lot more voluntary placements and extra activities around the University just to show that you have the communication and clinical skills to help support your statement. You need to make sure that you do go above and beyond, because everyone's got an Optometry degree; it's just showing what makes you different.

Find out more about the Manchester Royal Eye Hospital:

<https://mft.nhs.uk/royal-eye/>

Meet Patrick who works at Manchester Royal Eye Hospital:

<https://manchesterbmhstudents.wordpress.com/2018/08/01/patrick-gunn-optometry/>

### Does the hospital pre-reg give you a higher qualification?

**Graduate:** No it doesn't. You do end up getting the same qualification as everyone else, but the learning experience in hospitals is different. You do sessions such as refraction low vision and contact lenses, but you also get sessions to sit in with ophthalmologists, and with the contact lenses it is the complex cases that you are dealing with, so you do end up with a wider variety of knowledge.

There were a lot of things that I was taught in university that I thought, "well I'm probably not going to see that day to day" but you do see it day to day at the hospital, so you do learn a lot more.

### Is Optometry a well-paid job and do you get paid during the pre-reg year?

**Graduate:** At the hospital the pre-reg year is paid at a Band 4.

Find out more about NHS pay rates:

<https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/working-health/working-nhs/nhs-pay-and-benefits/agenda-change-pay-rates>

### Was it hard to get into Vision Express?

**Course Tutor:** What makes Manchester graduates stand out more than others links back to the work we do with our academic advisor groups and how we prepare you for pre-reg. There are different

topics that we cover through the personal and professional development unit that we teach on the course. That starts in the first year and carries on all the way through to third year.

You can become a member of a society while you are studying at university, there's lots of volunteering opportunities and you can represent The University of Manchester on some of the optometry boards.

Emily is the Manchester rep at the British Contact Lens Association, and we've had other students who've been the Association of Optometrists representatives for a year. You can go and do factory tours for some of the contact lens companies, and you can get involved with activities that are offered by Johnson and Johnson.

It's being able to take part in those additional opportunities that aren't part of your academic teaching that shows to prospective employers that you may be a bit more of a rounded student - that you've had those opportunities made available to you and you've taken part in those is what makes a Manchester graduate stand out a little bit more.

**Course Director:** Everybody on our course gets assigned to a small tutorial group. This happens on the first day of Welcome Week. It's usually a group of seven or eight students with someone like me. You stick with that group and with your tutor all throughout your time at university. We do help with all those softer skills of communication - letter writing CVs and other things like that.

**Graduate:** You do really need to make sure that you stand out and make yourself a little bit special compared to the rest of the crowd. Manchester equips you with a lot of clinical knowledge to stand out, and companies do recognise that. It can be difficult trying to get a place close to home, but the course covers lots of ways to make yourself stand out. In the first and second year, your tutors will look through your CV and give you advice.

#### How many places can you apply to for a pre-reg?

**Graduate:** As many as you want. I applied to three different hospitals, all of the main multiples and some independents.

#### Can you use previous experience you may have, such as a part-time job at an optician's practice, to help get on a pre-reg?

**Graduate:** I worked in an independent opticians while I was at college and the first year and a half I was at uni. When you are going for a hospital pre-reg, they want hospital experience, so I wrote to the local hospital and asked if I could come for a week just to see what it's like. So that's a really good experience to have if you know you want to get into hospitals.

**Course Director:** It is a very busy course. It's not really a course where you can have a part-time job over the whole three years for three days per week. But working a day a week - for example, working a Saturday or Sunday in a practice to get some experience that supports the course and opens your eyes to career opportunities - we do support that.

## Teaching and learning questions

### How many hours a week do you spend in lectures and then individual study?

**Course Director:** By the time you get to third year, it's pretty intense, less so in earlier years, but in third year it's between 12 and 14 hours in the clinic, around 10 hours in lectures. You are also doing a dissertation and a list of core competency assessments that we put you through separate to those formal teaching hours that I've just mentioned.

So that's 25 hours of doing work and, in addition, you need to keep on top of lecture notes and the information we're giving you - also getting prepared for the next day and reflecting on the previous day.

It is pretty full on. That makes it a great course, but it is busy and you need to be highly organised to do Optometry. Less so in the first year - you'd expect to get around a full day off per week depending on how your clinic rota falls. It ramps up as we go through the course.

Find out more about teaching and learning in Optometry:

<https://www.bmh.manchester.ac.uk/study/optometry/teaching-learning/>

### How is the course assessed? Is it exams, practicals or any coursework?

**Course Director:** The course is assessed by a variety of methods, but quite a bit is through old-fashioned exams! Each of the units we run has coursework assigned to it that you will be doing during the semester.

There's also lots of practical and clinical exams, particularly in the third year, where you will be evaluated on your ability to measure somebody's intraocular pressure, or do somebody's visual field or do a contact lens examination and a whole list of other things. So, it's quite a mixed portfolio in terms of the way we assess things.

**Course Tutor:** In terms of optometric examination for the first two years, it's probably split 50% practical work, 50% exam. The final year of optometry is pretty much all practical assessment. So, it does vary a bit depending on which year of the course you are in.

## What is the pass mark for most assessments?

**Course Director:** For most units it's 40%. Some have a lower pass mark of 30%, but the majority are 40%, especially anything that is clinical.

## The future of optometry

### Are optometrists in demand and will it increase in the upcoming years? How will the roles of optometrists change in 20 years' time?

**Course Tutor:** It's likely to change quite dramatically considering how much it has changed in the last 20 years. When I graduated in the 90s, optometrists told you what your spectacle prescription was, issued you with contact lenses and, if anything unusual was detected, it was referred on to a doctor or an ophthalmologist or a specialist hospital clinic. We really didn't have that many hospital optometrists back then, so that's progressed quite significantly, and optometrists in a hospital setting work alongside ophthalmologists.

With the introduction of independent prescribing and higher qualifications, it does mean that optometrists can now manage and treat some of the more minor conditions themselves in practice, rather than having to refer those to a hospital clinic.

Some optometrists who've got additional glaucoma qualifications can actually manage and treat glaucoma patients as well, so that some glaucoma patients can be discharged from hospital and managed within community practice.

That is also happening with diabetic retinopathy and wet macular degeneration. They can be managed by optometrists now, and they're just referred back in to see an ophthalmologist if there is any indication of a change.

Technology has developed quite significantly within optometry in the last 20 years, and that is likely to continue. The current lockdown situation with COVID-19 has highlighted how optometrists can stand out as frontline NHS or eye care staff completely separate from the retail side of optometry.

A lot of practitioners with additional qualifications have been able to triage minor eye conditions remotely through telephone triage, rather than sending patients into an accident and emergency hospital optometry department. There are practitioners within optometry who are looking to build on that type of work in the future.

**Course Director:** We do see a more and more clinical role for Optometry. That is already the case in Scotland where people don't go to A&E if they have an eye problem. They go and see their local optometrist because they are often in convenient locations and open for long hours and at the weekends, and are highly trained with superb equipment. Hopefully, this will change for us in England as well to enable optometrists to become the first port of call for eye care, and this really is how things are going over the next 20 years.

Find out more about independent prescribing and the higher qualifications in Optometry:

<https://www.college-optometrists.org/cpd-and-cet/training-and-qualifications.html>

## Other questions

**Is there anything I can do to prepare for the course - any reading, for example?**

**Course Tutor:** Some schools are still continuing with some online teaching or, if you have access to the syllabus, continue with the syllabus for the exams that you would have been sitting and make sure that you have covered all of the course content.

**I wondered if a lot of students came from abroad or if they were mainly from UK?**

**Course Director:** We typically have around 5 students each year from outside the UK. They tend not to be from Europe but often from parts of Asia.