

A 21st Century eLearning Ophthalmic Experience

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The authors share their experience of the Master of Science (MSc) in Primary Care Ophthalmology offered by the University of Edinburgh.

Where does the MSc in Primary Care Ophthalmology fit in?

The MSc in Primary Care Ophthalmology is a distance learning course offering a postgraduate Certificate, Diploma or Master of Science degree depending on the number of modules completed. The programme can be undertaken in between 1 and 6 years.

The MSc is designed on a well-established virtual learning environment (VLE) at the University of Edinburgh. The VLE has been hosting MScs in the surgical sciences since 2007 and last year won the Queen's Anniversary prize for higher education; widely recognised as the highest national honour in UK education.¹ This initiative is collaboration between NHS Education for Scotland, The Royal College of Surgeons Edinburgh and the University of Edinburgh.

What are the aims of the MSc?

The MSc aims to expose students to a wide variety of ophthalmological conditions and gain familiarity with investigations used in this increasingly technologically driven speciality. The interpretation of images is an integral part of diagnosis and management.

What does the MSc entail?

The MSc covers six subspecialty areas in year one, with the same areas being covered in year two at a more in depth level. These are basic sciences, examination & investigation, glaucoma, macula, red eye & acute visual loss and e-triage. The third year is devoted to a student-selected research project. Completion of each year leads sequentially to a certificate, diploma and masters qualification. The full course can be covered continuously in three years, but students can choose to cover this in a maximum time frame of six years.

How is the course delivered?

The content is delivered by consultant ophthalmologists, senior NES optometry tutors and higher specialist trained ophthalmic trainees. The methods of delivery are personal live lectures, image case-based discussion and image-animated cases. The basic science module refers extensively to a rich e-learning catalogue of anatomical books and animation packages.

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None

Interaction and discussion with tutors is on weekly discussion boards, with a different subject covered each week. Students are organised into groups of 8-12, directed to engage with the content set out and are given homework. This homework is supported by a comprehensive e-library that hosts all the popular global ophthalmic journals such as the British and American Journals of Ophthalmology and popular text books such as Kanski's Clinical Ophthalmology. Students have full access to the e-library and are also directed weekly to relevant educational websites and ophthalmic clinical guidelines. In addition to the teaching Discussion Boards there is also an open Discussion Board where students are encouraged to talk to each other, building a good team rapport and providing moral support.

What opportunities are provided by the MSc?

The MSc also provides ample remote and live research opportunities as the tutors belong to three large active teaching hospitals with a wealth of auditable clinical material. The Lothian Optometry Teach and Treat (LOTT) clinic in Edinburgh was specifically designed to support under- and postgraduate teaching and research. Through the links with the University of Edinburgh, students can also partake in laboratory science, stem cell and gene research via the Centre for Regenerative Medicine.² The course will develop students' research and statistical analysis skills as well as support design of Ophthalmology-orientated audit and research projects.

Are there any exams?

Assessment is on a continuous basis coupled with an end of year exam. Continuous assessment is based on participation on the discussion board, mini essays and a reflective e-portfolio. The end of year exam involves two exam papers that have single best answer and extended matching questions.

What technical equipment is required and what support can be expected?

The MSC requires access to a broadband enabled laptop. Entry is password protected, verification of which opens up access to the main navigational home page. Like most home pages, the MSc page permits the user to view various sections of the course. During the semester the VLE platform is replenished weekly with teaching material, student tasks, reading matter and homework. There is continuous online support from the University of Edinburgh technical staff and the e-facilitator over and above weekly course tutors. The combination of a well-established platform and accessible support makes this an intuitive system to use.



REVIEW

When: Every Year, see website for specific dates

Where: Distance Learning with University of Edinburgh

Costs: £3220 per year

Recommended: ★★★★★

Info: www.ed.ac.uk

Can anyone enrol for this course?

The course is aimed at junior doctors, community and hospital ophthalmic practitioners, general practitioners, optometrists and allied health professionals with a science degree.

In September 2014 forty four potential students, from 18 countries, applied for the course. Twenty eight; based on the entry criteria; were accepted. In September 2015 a Masters of Surgery in Clinical Ophthalmology (ChM) degree will be open for higher ophthalmic surgical trainees and ophthalmologists, the design of which will be similar to the MSc.

How much did it cost?

This is dependent on the duration of the course but the annual fee is £3220 with a total cost of £9600. The course supports bursaries awarded to students who fulfil the award criteria

Would you recommend the course?

The MSc in Ophthalmology is a user-friendly, interactive and exciting new programme, encompassing all the advantages of 21st century e-learning whilst aiming to provide an insight into Ophthalmology in an attainable manner.

The course can be combined with a working life as it is on a virtual platform, thus contributing to its practicable appeal. It aims to provide an excellent introduction to Ophthalmology and will undoubtedly enhance any CV. Completed in its entirety; the MSc provides short and long term opportunities for collaborative research within the region and with other students, enhancing any participants' personal and professional development. ■

References

1. The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh [Internet] Royal Award for Edinburgh E-learning Innovation. 2013 Nov 22 [cited 2015 Mar 9] Available from: <http://www.rcsed.ac.uk/the-college/news/2013/november-2013/queen's-awards-for-essq.aspx>
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