



THE COLLEGE OF  
OPTOMETRISTS

# **College professional formation and development handbook**

**June 2024**

## **Introduction**

The College professional formation and development sessions are designed to help prepare you for 'Clinical Learning in Practice', the long work-based placement experience which is a part of your degree. We are going to hold online sessions at key points in the lead-up to your placement so that we can advise you about what's coming next and help you get ready.

So, for example, we will organise a session a few months before you need to apply for a placement opportunity. At that session, we can tell you what to expect and you can start to think about your priorities when applying and what key strengths and experience you have which you can include in your job application.

We will run online sessions which you can choose to attend, so you can ask us questions or make suggestions directly. But we'll also record the same content and make it available for you to view and work through at any time you like.

As well as guiding you through the stages of preparing for the placement, we also want to help you to think about how you are developing as a future professional optometrist. What makes you want to do this work, and do you have interests in any specific areas? How do you think you need to develop in order to be a good clinician and to work most effectively for your patients? And what kinds of experience can you gain before the long placement which will be most valued by employers?

We'll be arranging speakers for our sessions who will be involved in the Clinical Learning in Practice placements, so you can get the best idea of how you should be developing in order to be ready for this important stage.

*The content in this Handbook covers the areas discussed in Session 1 of the College professional formation and development programme. We will expand this handbook and publish new versions as we deliver each session.*

## Contents

<b>1: About the College of Optometrists</b> .....	<b>4</b>
(a) What is the College?.....	4
(b) Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) overview .....	4
(c) The College’s role in your degree programme .....	5
<b>2: Forming your professional identity</b> .....	<b>6</b>
(a) Your professional formation and development.....	6
(b) Analysing your previous experience .....	6
(c) Gaining experience while studying.....	6
(d) Developing a profile for job applications .....	7
<b>3: Recording your experience</b> .....	<b>8</b>
(a) The CLiP Portal.....	8
(b) Keeping records in your logbook .....	8
(c) Why keep logbook records?.....	9
(d) Suggestions for logbook records.....	9
(e) Finding past records .....	9
<b>4: Timeline and next steps</b> .....	<b>11</b>
(a) CLiP timeline and communication.....	11
(b) Contact details .....	12

## **1: About the College of Optometrists**

### **(a) What is the College?**

We are the professional body for optometry in the UK, working in a range of areas to support optometrists in their work and advise the public on eye health. We run qualifications and training to help optometrists develop their knowledge and skills, we produce publications and support research and work to influence policy. We also publish Clinical Management Guidelines and produce patient resources.

We have been the main body which qualifies optometrists so that they can register and practise for some years now, and will continue this work partnering with UK Universities on the Clinical Learning in Practice programme.

### **(b) Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) overview**

Your University has arranged for the College to manage a part of your degree programme. This is the extended work-based clinical practice part of your degree. This placement, organised with the College, is called 'Clinical Learning in Practice' or 'CLiP' for short.

The GOC have set out requirements for qualifications which lead to registering as an optometrist. The work experience requirement is that, during the course of your degree, you need to gain at least 48 weeks of clinical experience, working with patients, under supervisory arrangements. There is also a requirement that this experience increases as your degree continues. That is, the main work-based learning should come toward the end of your degree.

Your University will be arranging short experiences for you during Years 1 – 3 so that you have completed at least 4 of these 48 weeks before you start CLiP.

The College's CLiP programme will provide the remaining 44 weeks of work-based learning. We will organise the application process for the placement and we'll work with your employer to make sure that they understand what they need to provide you with. This includes making arrangements for your supervision while working in practice, and we will also train and support those supervising you. Finally, we will assess you while you are on the placement, and let the University know when you have passed the programme.

More detail about the CLiP placement will be available in due course but you don't need to focus too much on it in the first year of your degree. For now, we suggest:

- Consider the suggestions made above about gaining and recording relevant experience
- Bear in mind that (for most students) your CLiP placement will start soon after you complete your academic Year 3. Try to avoid making other big plans for that year, as you will need to be present in your place of work, with a strong focus on developing your clinical experience.

### **(c) The College's role in your degree programme**

We will be helping to organise and oversee the standards for:

- The professional support and development you need to help prepare you for your long placement.
- The process of finding your work-based placement, including searching for opportunities and making applications.
- Providing support and liaising with employers if you have any problems securing a placement opportunity.
- Providing you with support and advice to prepare for your placement.
- Approving placement employers and ensuring they are committed to giving you the experience you need.
- Providing guidance, support and training for some of the people who will be working with you – particularly your supervisors and assessors.
- Organising assessment visits and providing the University with your results from these.
- Managing the CLiP Portal, the platform on which you will record your experiences in a logbook and make material available for your assessment visits.

## **2: Forming your professional identity**

### **(a) Your professional formation and development**

Choosing a career as an optometrist means that you are part of a profession with values and expected behaviours. For example, you will need to work in a way which focusses on putting patients first, continuously improving your practice and co-operating with other members of the healthcare team.

It is worth referring to the General Optical Council (GOC) Standards for Optical Students for more information on these expectations. These are also reflected in the GOC outcomes, on which your degree and the CLiP programme are based. Some of the main sections are called 'Ethics and Standards' and 'Communication'. When we refer to 'professional formation and development', part of what we are talking about is how you develop these behaviours and values as part of your everyday practice.

You will also need to consider how you want to develop as a professional. Is there a particular area of interest in optometry which you want to pursue in your career? Is there a particular type of setting you want to work in or type of role you aspire to?

We want to help you think about what it means to be an optometrist and a healthcare professional, and to think about what particular direction you want your career to take.

### **(b) Analysing your previous experience**

A crucial part of working as an optometrist is being able to talk to people. Many jobs take place in a retail environment and there may be times when you need to deal with general work including customer enquiries. In your clinical practice, communicating with the patient is an essential element. Again, this is reflected in the GOC outcomes, which start with sections on 'Person centred care' and 'Communication'.

For these reasons, it is worth reflecting on any experience you have had in which you needed to deal with the members of the public and either ask or answer questions. This does not need to be in the context of paid employment. It could have been in a role you were given at school or in another organisation you've been part of. It could have come about as part of volunteering, or membership of a club or other organisation.

Of course, recording any relevant experience you've gained in an optical environment is also going to be important.

### **(c) Gaining experience while studying**

Whether you have an employment history at this time or not, it will be really useful to think about what types of work experience you can gain during your degree.

Your University will be arranging some clinical experience as part of your degree programme and you may be working in an optical setting for a short period before you come on to the CLiP placement. In addition to this, you might be able to find

weekend or holiday work which will give you valuable experience and strengthen your application for placement positions.

If you can gain experience in an optical setting that is great, but remember any experience you can get working with people, and getting used to communicating in different ways with people who you haven't met before, is going to be useful.

#### **(d) Developing a profile for job applications**

The experience you gain working before or during your degree is going to provide you with real examples of your capabilities which you can use when you apply for a CLiP placement role. You are going to be asked to give examples of how you've communicated with people and dealt with challenging situations – see the next section for more detail.

Even examples of when things go wrong can be really useful for your application. No one is perfect, so reflecting on your experience to develop and improve your practice is an important part of being a healthcare professional. Employers will want to hear that you can learn from difficult situations and improve your skills. As you gain some experience and think about how you might talk about it, look out for ways in which you have shown improvement and try to record examples of times you didn't get things exactly right, but then improved as times went on.

The way in which you might write about and record these types of experience is the subject of our next section.

### **3: Recording your experience**

#### **(a) The CLiP Portal**

From Year 1 of your degree, you will become a student member of the College of Optometrists and will be given an account on our CLiP Portal. The CLiP Portal is the software platform which you will use on a daily basis, during your placement, to record clinical interactions and to reflect on your experience. Prior to this, your University may ask you to use the CLiP Portal to record your experience on certain modules in Years 1-3 of your degree.

The CLiP Portal is used for a range of purposes:

- For the University to share your details with the College securely.
- For information about your progress to be shared between the College, University and employers so that you can be supported more effectively.
- As the platform for you to find opportunities for a CLiP placement and to apply.
- Access to your logbook.
- For recording your assessment results and progress, to which College Supervisors, Assessors, your University and your employer will all have specific levels of access.
- To give you access to learning support and resources for College professional formation and development.

#### **(b) Keeping records in your logbook**

There are three types of record you can keep in your logbook: an 'interaction', a 'reflection' or a 'note'.

- Interaction – this record has set fields which allow you to record a clinical interaction you have observed or carried out yourself.
- Reflection – this has fields which allow you to reflect on a specific interaction you've recorded and comment on, for example, what you learnt from it or whether anything could be done differently. The reflection entry also has an open field which allows you to reflect on anything you like, without relating it to an interaction, so you can make stand-alone reflections.
- Note – this is an open text box which allows you to record anything, with no specific fields required. For example, you may want to use it like a professional diary or journal, to capture your thoughts and achievements.

When you receive your login details for the CLiP Portal, you will also be able to refer to user guides which give you more detail about how to access the logbook and create these records.



### **(c) Why keep logbook records?**

As part of your degree and the CLiP placement, you will need to keep logbook records to evidence and to reflect on your experience. Apart from those logbook entries you have to complete, you may also find it useful to keep up this practice and get used to writing short entries about what you are doing.

One practical reason for recording your experience is that it will give you content to refer back to when it comes to making a job application and preparing for interview. When you make your job application, there are going to be some set questions in the form about prior experience, which employers will review when making their selections.

It will be really helpful for you to start recording any experiences you've had in the past, any which you have on your degree or when working during your degree which you can potentially draw on to answer these questions.

### **(d) Suggestions for logbook records**

To prepare for the types of questions you will be asked in the application form and in interview, try to record examples of experience you have already gained prior to or during your degree:

- Times you have dealt with members of the public – meeting new people, asking them for information or finding answers to their questions.
- Any jobs you have had in which you had to serve or interact with customers.
- Any relevant experience you have had in an optical setting, on your degree or in jobs you arranged yourself.
- Examples of dealing with difficult situations, such as complaints...
- ...and ways in which you learnt from these experiences and improved your way of doing things.

Employers really value applicants who can show that they use every opportunity to improve their performance. They will also be keen to see that you can apply what you are learning on your degree in clinical practice. To this end, while you are studying it is worth recording:

- Examples of memorable modules, lectures or practical work – why you enjoyed them and what you learnt.
- Information you've learned on your degree which you think will have a lasting influence on the way you work.
- Clinical work you have observed, or carried out, which made a strong impression or changed the way you think about what you're doing.

### **(e) Finding past records**

The great thing about using your CLiP logbook to note down experience and achievements, is that it automatically records the date of your record, giving you one easy method to track things down. Your logbook records can also be filtered on any

category or you can search using a key word. So later on, you can retrieve any record that mentions a particular word and see everything you wrote about it over time.

Another thing you can do to make records easily retrievable is to give them a memorable reference. When you make a logbook entry, there is a field you have to fill in called 'Reference' which allows you to give the entry any name you like. As you make these records, you may want to give them similar 'Reference' names (e.g. 'Work experience' / 'Dealing with a complaint') so that they are easy to filter and find when you need them.

#### 4: Timeline and next steps

##### (a) CLiP timeline and communication

We're going to be in touch throughout your degree, both in the lead-up to CLiP and during the time you are on placement. Here is a summary of when you can expect to hear from us and when important events relating to the CLiP placement will come:

Academic year	Date	Activity
Year 1	September	Introduction to the College when you start your degree.
Year 1	Oct – Dec	College student membership and access to the CLiP Portal.
Year 1	June	First College professional formation and development session.
Year 2	Oct – Dec	Second College professional formation and development session to prepare you for the upcoming job application process.
Year 2	January	Job opportunities available on CLiP Portal and applications open
Year 2	February	Deadline for job applications – mid Feb
Year 2	March – May	Job interviews and job offers made
Year 2	June – Sept	Support for students who were not successful finding a placement in the first round
Year 3	Oct – Dec	Third College professional formation and development session to prepare for placement

For most students, this will be the ongoing timeline:

Academic year	Date	Activity
Year 4	July – August	CLiP placement starts
Year 4	Sept – Oct	First CLiP assessment visits
Year 4	May	Final CLiP assessment visits
Year 4	June	CLiP placement ends – final assessment stages with the University

If you are a University of Hertfordshire student, your placement will start in Year 3 so this will be the ongoing timeline:

Academic year	Date	Activity
Year 3	Jan – Feb	CLiP placement starts
Year 3	April – May	First CLiP assessment visits

Year 4	December	Final CLiP assessment visits
Year 4	January	CLiP placement ends – final modules and assessment stages with the University

If you are a UCLan student, you should already be in practice and will not need to apply for a CLiP placement role.

**(b) Contact details**

Contact [clip@college-optometrists.org](mailto:clip@college-optometrists.org) for any enquiries.