



L. Trevor Young, MD PhD FRCPC

Dean

Vice Provost, Relations with Health Care Institutions

September 8, 2022

DEAN'S RESPONSE

External Review | Department of Ophthalmology & Vision Sciences

On behalf of the Temerty Faculty of Medicine at the University of Toronto, I would first like to thank the reviewers, Dr. Eve Higginbotham and Dr. Martin ten Hove, for a comprehensive and rigorous review of the Department of Ophthalmology & Vision Sciences (DOVS) on January 24-25, 2022. On behalf of Temerty Medicine, I would also like to thank Dr. Sherif El-Defrawy, Chair of the Department, the administrative staff, and all those who contributed to the preparation of the outstanding self-study report. I also wish to thank the numerous staff, trainees, and faculty members who met with the external reviewers and provided invaluable input.

The reviewers reflected that *“Long considered as one of the premier departments of ophthalmology in Canada, the DOVS continues to evolve, leading the country in a number of notable dimensions, particularly in the areas of education, training, clinical practice, and research. Under the leadership of the current chair, Dr. El-Defrawy, the DOVS has exceeded expectations in all components of its mission, setting the stage for the next chair to take the DOVS to the next level of departmental achievements.”* The insightful and thorough report provided by the reviewers serves as an invaluable guide for future strategic directions and program enhancements of the Department. I am in full agreement with Dr. El-Defrawy's response of the Chair. After consultation with him, I comment below on the specific recommendations made by the reviewers.

- 1. Reviewers' Comment:** *“Develop a research strategic plan that engages key stakeholders including subspecialty representation in addition to members of the Executive Committee, hospital chiefs, the Donald K. Johnson Eye Institute, and the Krembil Research Institute”*

Decanal Response: The reviewers commented that the recruitment of a new Department Chair provides an opportunity to more closely align the Department's strategic objectives with those of the Temerty Faculty of Medicine. Observing that research in the retina subspecialty is the current focus of the Department, the reviewers stated that greater opportunities exist for research in other areas including cornea, glaucoma, and oculo-plastics. As noted by the Chair, departmental research includes basic science research in cornea and glaucoma, as well as AI and neuro-ophthalmology. At present, the departmental and hospital leadership teams include disproportionately more retina subspecialists which may influence the research priorities. The Department will actively consider strategies to mitigate this concern by enhancing the diversity of the leadership team, including diversity of subspecialty practice. The Department will also develop terms of reference to codify these strategies.

- 2. Reviewers' Comment:** *“Explore the availability of research space at the Temerty Faculty of Medicine, providing access to core laboratories and a critical mass of senior scientists”*

Decanal Response: As is the case for other departments in Temerty Medicine, catalyzing “groundbreaking imagination” in research can best be achieved by synergizing research efforts and collaborations across departments, the university campus, and TAHSN sites, including affiliated research institutes. Such partnerships enhance access to specialized and core facilities,

and importantly, to highly accomplished scientists with unique expertise. Building “an ecosystem of collaboration”, that is, building new partnerships and enhancing existing relationships lies at the heart of the Temerty Medicine Academic Strategic Plan.

- 3. Reviewers’ Comment:** *“Continue to strengthen the central administrative functions required to conduct effective research, specifically efficient IRB approval processes and pre-and post-award review”*

Decanal Response: Recommendations from the previous external review included “*centralization of the IRB amongst all the clinical sites*” and “*streamlined centralized research administration to better manage pre and post award activities*”. The current review reports that progress towards these goals has been made. This is still an area of ongoing effort that will require closer synergy between campus-based and hospital-based research practices and processes. To address pre-award research activities, Dr. Justin Nodwell, Vice Dean of Research & Health Science Education, is developing a program to subject grants to a robust internal review process before they are submitted to funding agencies. It is anticipated that implementation of such a program will result in higher success rates for grants submitted. This has been the experience at The Hospital for Sick Children Research Institute.

- 4. Reviewers’ Comment:** *“Consider strategies to recruit and develop additional clinician scientists that are not primarily dependent upon the availability of funds from practice plans”*

Decanal Response: As noted by the reviewers and by Dr. El-Defrawy, sustainable models of support for Clinician Scientists cannot depend exclusively on available funds from practice plans. Opportunities to recruit and support clinician-scientists may exist in collaboration with hospital-based research institutes grounded in shared priorities and visions. Creative opportunities for interdisciplinary hiring and support can be explored through new partnerships with other Temerty Medicine departments and other faculties at U of T. In addition, opportunities to recruit and develop clinician-scientists can be further explored with the Office of Advancement at Temerty Medicine. The presence of a dedicated advancement officer for major gifts will be helpful. In addition, as noted by the reviewers, other opportunities for revenue generation (such as through continuing professional development activities) can be actively explored.

- 5. Reviewers’ Comment:** *“Determine additional strategies to access patient care opportunities outside metropolitan Toronto, consider the option of expanding to a site on north of Toronto”*

“Expand access to additional clinical space at each of the Hospital sites.”

Decanal Response: As suggested by the reviewers, Academic Full Time (AFT) appointment may be beneficial for the Department, but an associated challenge pertains to physicians spending substantial amounts of time at private clinics instead of fully-affiliated institutions due to a lack of space. A potential solution could be the creation of a satellite clinic in the northern part of the GTA; this will be explored in the future, particularly with the appointment of a new Chair.

- 6. Reviewers’ Comment:** *“Enhance the gender representation of leadership in the DOVS. Consider gender when choosing the next Chair of the DOVS”*

Decanal Response: The reviewers observe that there is a paucity of women in departmental leadership positions, at the executive level, and at the level of hospital leadership. As noted by Dr. El-Defrawy, there are a significant number of women in the Residency Program and among the junior faculty, and therefore, intentional attention must be given to the career development, leadership development, mentorship, and sponsorship for women at all stages of their careers. In the immediate term, aspiring leaders can be sponsored to participate in existing leadership programs such as Temerty Medicine’s NEAL (New and Emerging Academic Leaders) Program and Drexel University College of Medicine’s ELAM (Executive Leadership in Academic Medicine) Program. Across all departments and units in Temerty Medicine, the need to more actively develop our people has been recognized, with particular focus on women and individuals from minoritized communities. Accordingly, Temerty Medicine has determined that the career and leadership development of these members of our community must be an explicit priority.

7. **Reviewers' Comment:** *"Enhance the communication between the Executive Committee and the Clinical Subspecialty Leads"*

Decanal Response: The reviewers commented that there is over-representation of retina subspecialists and men among the Department's executive leaders and hospital chiefs. Diversification of the leadership team may be one way to enhance communication and to ensure that multistakeholder perspectives inform collaborative decision making. Creating a dedicated Research Committee that would include a Director of Resident Research is an excellent suggestion and would serve to strengthen relations between researchers, leaders, and trainees.

The incoming Chair will also be encouraged to develop a communications strategy to streamline the exchange of information between and to more closely align the processes of the Department's committees.

8. **Reviewers' Comment:** *"Consider hiring a career advisor or strengthening the role of the Vice Chair for Faculty, to support the retention and professional development of faculty as well as guiding the transition of faculty at all stages of their career"*

Decanal Response: Currently, a single faculty member has been appointed Vice Chair, Faculty Development, Global Health, and Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion. Faculty wellness is also included in this Vice Chair's portfolio. As observed by the reviewers, the scope of the portfolio in its present form is enormous and separating this into its subcomponents, including faculty development, so that each may receive focused attention would be highly beneficial.

9. **Reviewers' Comment:** *"Ensure that there is adequate administrative support for the centralized functions of the DOVS, particularly related to UME and GME support. It is also important to ensure that the current staff are adequately supported and compensated. A review of compensation of key staff has not been conducted in a few years."*

Decanal Response: The Residency and Fellowship Programs are the largest and most comprehensive in Canada, and among the most comprehensive programs in North America. New educational initiatives, including Competence by Design and a dedicated Clinician-Investigator training position are being implemented or actively explored, respectively. The continued and future success of the educational program requires dedicated administrative resources that reflect the scope and volume of work. A careful needs assessment of administrative support will be an important job of the new Chair.

In conclusion, the Department of Ophthalmology & Vision Sciences is outstanding in its achievements and has benefitted from the thoughtful leadership of Dr. El-Defrawy. These sentiments are best summarized by a faculty member who commented *"I think what came out loud and clear from this External Review is the outstanding job that Dr. El-Defrawy has done as Chairperson of the department. He has supported academic pursuits in terms of research, teaching and clinical care. He has fostered an atmosphere of excellent communication and collaboration. The Executive committee meets regularly and deals with all aspects of the functioning of the department. As a result of his leadership, organizational skills, communication, and collaboration, I feel that the department has benefitted tremendously."* I congratulate Dr. El-Defrawy on his visionary leadership and the members of the Department for their numerous contributions to its success.

Sincerely,



Trevor Young, MD, PhD, FRCPC
Dean, Temerty Faculty of Medicine
Vice Provost, Relations with Health Care Institutions