



## Message from the President

**Greetings, ECOO members, and welcome to this issue of our ECOO Newsletter.**

We held our ECOO spring meeting of the General Assembly in Warsaw, Poland, in May along with the annual conference of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics. We would like to especially thank our Polish hosts for their hospitality and the secretariat of EAEO for their organisation. In addition to ECOO members, we were delighted to welcome EAEO members including the President Paul Murphy, and the new CEO of the World Council of Optometry, Natalie Briggs.

At this meeting we heard from a guest speaker, Mr Dominique Meslin regarding the work of the Vision Impact Institute to aggregate data and highlight the problems of avoidable blindness and sight loss. This prompted an interesting discussion of the General Assembly regarding the availability of data across Europe.

Since our General Assembly, I attended the 2nd Optometry Conference of Central and South-Eastern Europe in Croatia. This was an excellent event, bringing together many clinicians and optometric educators from across Europe to discuss and progress the optometric profession. I also had the pleasure to visit the Buskerud School of Optometry in Kongsberg, Norway to present the first European Diplomas by accreditation to 20 of their successful graduates. The continued efforts of many people for the European Diploma by examination and accreditation routes is testament in the increasing number of people to have been awarded the European Diploma in Optometry. These people are our ambassadors of high qual-

ty optometric eyecare in Europe and we need to ensure that they have the capacity to use their skills by promoting a high standard of eyecare in all our countries.

Our work with the European Forum Against blindness (EFAB) has continued with another successful national roundtable event in Ireland. This gave our national members from the Association of Optometrists in Ireland an opportunity to meet with other eyecare professions and discuss Irish eyecare issues.

The launch of the European Coalition for Vision this year is an important means for ECOO to work with a wider range of stakeholders to increase awareness of the importance of eyecare and the prevention of avoidable sight loss. We continue to be an active part of this work and a joint World Sight Day event between EFAB and ECV is provisionally being developed.

The Executive Committee will meet in July and we look forward to seeing you all in October at the Autumn General Assembly in Limassol, Cyprus.

Best wishes

**Julie-Anne Little**



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# Update from the ECOO GA in Warsaw

The Polish capital-city of Warsaw, in the heart of Europe, offered the venue for the Spring ECOO General Assembly in May 2014. Between 15 and 17 May 2014, ECOO members assembled and discussed latest developments

and challenges for their professions. Keynote speeches and presentations touched upon a wide range of topics. In this Newsletter, we recall several of the highlights, such as the latest developments in the EU regulatory field

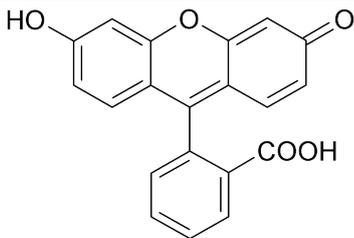
regarding Fluorescein and the Mutual Evaluation of Professions, updates from the European Academy of Optometry and Optics, the World Council of Optometry, and a selection of pictures from the event.

## The ECOO General Assembly in Warsaw



# Regulatory Updates

## Fluorescein to be discussed further in November



The classification of Fluorescein strips continues to be discussed at the European level, and ECOO remains active on the topic. While historically Fluorescein strips have always been categorised as **medical devices**, ever since the implementation by certain national authorities of the non-binding Meddev

guidelines they became susceptible of being considered **medicinal products**. The Medical Devices Expert Group on Borderline and Classification at EU level, which last met in Brussels in March 2014, favours the latter classification. The task of the Expert Group is to agree on a definition of the “medical diagnosis” before they issue a position on classification.

ECOO representatives met with the European Commission before the Expert Group meeting, and reinforced the arguments for why Fluorescein strips used for non-diagnostic purposes

should be categorised as medical devices. However, while the Commission officials understood the points, they also maintained their position in favour of classifying Fluorescein as a medicinal product.

The Expert Group will meet again in the autumn of 2014 to re-visit the matter. In the meantime, members are encouraged to feed back to the ECOO Secretariat should there be any related developments taking place in their countries.

## Mutual evaluation of professions – Optics is peer reviewed in the Member States

The European Institutions finalised the revision of the Recognition of Professional Qualifications Directive (RPQ) at the end of 2013. As a follow-up, they are now carrying out, at the European Union level, the so-called “Mutual Evaluation of Professions”.

This procedure was launched by the European Commission because it tries to assess the proportionality of regulations on qualifications governing access to professions or professional titles. It consists, in practice, of a peer review between Member States with the intention to understand and assess if certain regulatory aspects are still necessary.

In the first phase, six professions were chosen to illustrate the situation based on which further analysis and a more general discussion will follow. Optics is one of the six chosen professions and Member State representatives will meet on 24 November 2014 to discuss. Eventually, all professions will be re-

viewed by a written procedure.

Before their meeting in November, Member States are asked to submit to the European Commission an expla-

nation of their respective regulatory frameworks. After November, Member States will start to draft their National Action Plans, which have to be finalised until April 2015.



## Country News

### Austria: The Optical-Optometric Progress in Austria

By Peter Gumpelmayer, President of the Federal and Upper Austrian Council of Allied Health Science Practitioners

The main aim for the Federal Guild of Optometrists (Bundesinnung der Augenoptiker) is the positioning of Austrian optometric education from level 5 to Level 6 in the European Educations standard. At the moment our optometrists (Augenoptikermeister) are educated at Professional Academy level and are lacking the pharmacological and pathological aspect of Module C in the European Diploma.

The Austrian Federal Guild has committed €75.000 over the next 5 years to achieve this goal as the federal system is lacking the funding. So far the syllabus has been written, according to the syllabus of the ECOO European Diploma, as the ultimate goal is to achieve ECOO accreditation.

Under the Austrian Dual Education Model, young people aged 15 to 18 do an apprenticeship with an optometrist. The schooling, which is ten weeks per year at the state run professional educational school (Berufsschule) for opticians in Hall (Tirol), complements the training scheme to enter the pro-

fession. This system was abolished for photographers last year (i.e. in 2013) by the Federal Supreme Court. This caused the number of apprentice photographers to dwindle from 240 in 2013 to only 12 in 2014.



For us opticians/optometrists it is of outmost importance that this system stays in place and that there is a barrier-free transition possibility after the

apprenticeship to go into the tertiary university sector. Austria, together with Germany, claims to have the lowest youth unemployment rate because of this Dual Education system; a deregulation would cause not only an increase of youth unemployment, but also total destruction of this dual education pathway. It further hampers consumer protection, to mention just two of the most important arguments for regulation.

Optometry and Optics is a unified profession in Austria, we don't want to change this as this enables every professional to choose her/his individual pathway climbing a ladder system, it is also important as this keeps the profession attractive to get the most enthusiastic personalities to join the profession. Salaries in the profession are good as Austrian Opticians and Optometrists are members of the metal workers collective agreement. A freshly graduated optometrist earns on average 20% more than a newly graduated British optometrist.

### Croatia: 2nd Optometry Conference of Central and South-Eastern Europe held in Rovinj organized by the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica

By Alen Stranjik, President of the Conference Organizing Committee

The 2nd Optometry Conference of Central and South-Eastern Europe held from 29 May to 1 June 2014 in Rovinj in the beautiful hotel Lone gathered 378 participants from twenty countries. The second Conference in the field of optometry has confirmed the great interest for this new profession in the region. The Conference was organized by the University of Applied Sciences Velika

Gorica (VVG), the only higher education institution in the Republic of Croatia performing the study programme of optometry. This year's Conference was even richer in contents than the first Conference OCCSEE 2012. There were 14 different workshops, over 30 lecturers, about 80 papers, a round table on the topic of legal regulations, education and competences in the field of

optometric profession which filled the hotel Lone. The Conference was held under the patronage of the President of the Republic of Croatia Mr. Ivo Josipović, with the support of the European Council of Optometry and Optics, and with financial support of foreign and national sponsors and exhibitors. The Platinum sponsor Essilor d.o.o., the Golden sponsor Alcon&Splendor, the Bronze



sponsors E-Lab, Oktal Pharma, Johnson&Johnson and numerous exhibitors and partners gave their support in organizing the OCCSEE 2014 Conference.

Optometry is a profession which is required in Croatia and in the region since it provides a higher level of quality in measuring the visual acuity and in defining of visual aids for better quality of vision. On the other hand, optometry offers the possibility of optimisation and reduction of costs in the healthcare system, and it is precisely this winning combination which is necessary in the times of crisis – better service towards the clients, i.e. patients, at lower costs. Advancing towards higher standard of living should not encounter any barriers, but unfortunately this is precisely what is happening at the moment. The representatives of optometry from Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Montenegro, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Greece, Croatia, Italy, Canada, Lithuania, Macedonia, Malta, Germany, Slovakia, Slovenia, Serbia, Spain, Switzerland and United Kingdom have all expressed high determination in achieving the joint goal of regulating the optometric activities.

The invited lectures at OCCSEE 2014 were given in five working sessions: Optical Technology - Marcus Miller (A), Visual Functions Testing - John Siderov (UK), Contact Lenses - Shehzad Naroo

(UK), Eye Health - Julie-Anne Little (UK), Refractive Surgery Up-to-date – Marjan Irman (SLO). What gives reason for special joy is the joint work of opticians, optometrists, and ophthalmologists, and there are few countries that can take pride in that.

The University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica will continue with its activities in promoting the optometry. The great success of the OCCSEE 2014 Conference is no excuse to take a break but a motivation for further work. The plan includes the summer school of optometry for international and national students and interested attendees, establishing of a centre of excellence in optometry, joint humanitarian activities in measuring the visual acuity and making of spectacles for socially disadvantaged persons, which would include also many foreign partners, etc.



The University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica is among the first higher education institutions from Croatia that performs professional study programmes, and has passed the accreditation procedure and joined the ERASMUS Programme of international exchange of students and professors. VVG is taking extremely active part in the ERASMUS Programme, confirmed by the fact that until now about a dozen bilateral agreements on the exchange of professors and students with the European countries have been signed. Currently, as part of the ERASMUS Programme, four Czech students are taking part in the undergraduate study of Eye Optics and two students from Poland. Some twenty students from the University of Applied Sciences Velika Gorica have taken part in the studies abroad.

It is precisely on the assessment of these results and other international activities that VVG signed in April the new ERASMUS Charter for the period 2014-2020. The students of professional three-year study programmes Management in Crisis Conditions, Motor Vehicle Maintenance, Aircraft Maintenance, Computer System Maintenance, Eye Optics and specialist study programmes Crisis Management, Management of Logistic Systems and Processes, and Information Systems thus have the opportunity to participate in the study programmes abroad.

## Update from the Academy

European Academy delivers successful sixth annual conference - Warsaw 2014



Academy Trustee, Eduardo Teixeira (Portugal), said: "Warsaw 2014 was a very helpful and fruitful conference with very interesting talks and inclusive and in-depth discussions. I really had a good time in this year and feel that during these three days we were shaping optometry. Congratulations to EAOO."

Professor Paul Murphy, President of the Academy, said: "This was another great EAOO conference. We've seen many familiar faces this year but have been delighted to welcome many new colleagues. I am so thrilled by the quality of the presenters and by the enthusiasm of the delegates. "My thanks to all those who contributed and made the meeting a success. I look forward to next year in Budapest."

Over 270 optometrists, dispensing opticians and contact lens opticians from 36 countries attended Warsaw 2014, the sixth annual conference of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics' on 16-18 May. The conference, held jointly with the European Council of Optometry and Optics' (ECOO) Spring Meeting, included twelve clinical workshops and keynote lectures from Professor John Marshall on the ageing eye and Stefan Bandlitz on the anterior eye and tear film.

The conference programme also included sessions and workshops on contact lens practice, caring for the ageing eye, age-related macular degeneration, and glaucoma. Five new EAOO Fellows were announced at the event:

- Professor Roger Anderson (UK)
- Dr Annemieke Coops (Netherlands)
- Dr Simon Barnard (UK)
- Dr Einat Shneur
- Dr Helder Bértolo (Portugal)

At the closing address three conference prizes were awarded to Monika Wojtczak - New Researcher Prize, Dr Elena Cannavò - Poster Presentation Prize and Catriona Barrett - Outstanding Contribution Prize. Each winner was awarded a certificate and €200 prize.

The Academy's seventh annual conference and joint meeting with ECOO will be held in Budapest, Hungary, **14-17 May 2015**.



# Update from the World Council of Optometry

## A week in Mozambique

It is estimated that 43.5% of the causes of visual impairment in Mozambique are due to uncorrected refractive errors. In this country of 25 million inhabitants, optometry is a young profession with just 15 optometrists having graduated from the first university optometry programme in the country.

Between 14 and 15 June 2014, the World Council of Optometry (WCO) organised its Spring Board and other committee meetings in Maputo, Mozambique. This was an ideal opportunity for the new CEO of WCO, Dr Natalie Briggs, to meet Board members and engage in a packed but fruitful work agenda. This Board meeting offered more opportunities for interaction and discussion among Board members who also started discussions that will lead to the development of the **new Strategic Plan 2015-2020**, expected to be officially launched at the 2015 General Delegates Meeting.

In the coming months, WCO members will be consulted and engaged in a



process leading to the development of this Plan. The Board also approved the partnership with WCO member FEDOPTO (Colombian Federation of Optometrists) to co-host the next WCO Congress in Colombia in August 2015.

Between 16 and 18 June, the African Council of Optometry (AFCO) held its conference "**The role of optometry in the provision of primary eye care**". This was a collaborative effort between WCO, AFCO and Universidade Lúrio of Mozambique that brought together optometric expertise from across the world to support the development of

optometry in Mozambique. The Mozambican Minister of Health who officially opened the event expressed his recognition for the important role optometry plays in the provision of primary eye health care. About 150 delegates from 23 countries were offered a high quality programme with CET accredited sessions and strategic discussions. The last day the first regional advocacy training took place for 25 leaders from several African countries. This effort opens interesting opportunities to strengthen the collaboration between WCO, AFCO and key partners in this region of the world.



## ECOO upcoming meeting

**General Assembly in Limassol (Cyprus), 17-19 October 2014**

The ECOO Autumn 2014 General Assembly will be held on 17-19 October 2014 in Limassol, Cyprus. The Cyprus Optical Association has been preparing the event and is hoping members will attend and enjoy the programme and the venue. Registrations will open shortly and you will find all necessary information on the meetings including the schedule and logistics on the ECOO website.



## Save the date

**ECOO Spring 2015, Hungary**

The ECOO Spring meeting 2015 will take place together with the European Academy of Optometry and Optics annual conference on 14-17 May 2015 in Budapest, Hungary. Please mark your calendars accordingly.

## Newsletter

The Newsletters are sent to ECOO's members and contacts via e-mail. Please inform us of any additions to the mailing list or of staff changes in your respective organisations. Should you have any news or updates which may be of interest to

ECOO members, please contact Fabienne Eckert at the ECOO Secretariat:

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