



Message from the President

Dear members, dear friends,

I would like to start this message by thanking you all for yet another successful meeting. Your input is as always valuable in terms of helping shape ECOO's vision and offering concrete feedback from the ground at national level. I left Ljubljana energized by our debates and collective commitment to move forward our profession in mirror of European ambitions.

During this General Assembly, new positions were elected. It is with pleasure that I welcome Dr. Cindy Tromans as our new President-Elect. I am delighted to have such a distinguished professional as our new member in the Executive Committee. Dr. Julie-Anne Little unfortunately steps down from her position in the Executive Committee. She will now be working with Bob Chappell as Vice Chair of the Board of Management of the European Diploma. The other members of the Executive Committee re-elected were: Jesus Garcia Poyatos as Treasurer, Per Michael Larsen, Chairman Public Affairs and Economic Committee, Martin O'Brian, Chairman Professional Services Committee. I am very happy that Paul Folkesson will assist me in his new role as immediate past president. Paul will continue to represent ECOO at the World Council of Optometry (WCO).

The Slovenian Association of Optometrists and Opticians (DOOS) made us very welcome in Ljubljana. Congratulations to the President of DOOS Dr. Matjaz Mihelcic who received two weeks beforehand his PhD and organised our meeting in Slovenia. Well done!

In the coming days the European Commission will release its report about the outcome of the mutual evaluation exercise on regulated professions and the way forward. Again I would like to note that ECOO has been able to establish a good dialog with the Commission, it is ECOO's data that has been included in the Commission's final report on the Mutual Evaluation of regulated professions – Opticians. In Brussels we already had meetings with other professions to build new coalitions to strengthen our goal of a harmonised profession.

In November, ECOO participated as a member of the European Forum Against Blindness (EFAB) and the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) at a breakfast event in the European Parliament: The event was hosted by MEPs Marian Harkin (ALDE, Ireland) and Heinz K. Becker (EPP, Austria) and moderated by Prof. Ian Banks (chair of EFAB). More details on this event are included in this newsletter.

From 28th till 30th January ECOO is invited to optiMunich, the largest optical trade Fair for Germany, Austria and Switzerland. This gives ECOO for the first time, the opportunity to address German speaking professionals directly. Cindy Tromans will give a presentation about visual standards for driving in Europe, Bob Chappell will talk about the Status of the European Diploma in Optometry and I will present the work of ECOO.

Festive Greetings!

Peter Gumpelmayer
President ECOO



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ECOO General Assembly in Ljubljana

ECOO members met on 14-16 October in Ljubljana for the General Assembly and related meetings. Members had yet again the opportunity to share updates from their respective countries, either in terms of upcoming legislation that could have an impact on the profession, or on concrete challenges faced on the ground as practitioners. Delegates also participated in a number of workshops, and the input will feed into ongoing ECOO activities. A workshop on association management also sparked a good conversation on best practices to provide value to members in different set-ups at national level.

This General Assembly welcomed two new association members, and saw the election of new positions in the different committees: Cindy Tromans (President-elect),

Jesus Garcia Poyatos (Treasurer), Per-Michael Larsen (Public Affairs Committee Chair), Martin O'Brien (Professional Services Committee Chair). The new team for the Public Affairs Committee includes: Raúl Alberto Ribeiro Correia de Sousa, David Hewlett, Gerhard Gschweidl, Per Kristian (Pelle) Knudsen, Christian Müller, Luiza Maria Krasucka. The new team for the Professional Services Committee includes: Maarten Hobé, Marten Fortuin, John Fried, Massimo Revelli, Sylwia Kropacz-Sobkowiak, José Carlos Cardoso.

Finally, delegates joined in celebrations for World Sight Day, taking selfies with key messages to spread awareness about the need for regular eye tests and screening to help detect eye diseases as co-morbidities of non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes.

The ECOO General Assembly in Ljubljana





Credit for photos Per Michael Larsen

On the EU agenda



Although the recognition of skills and qualifications remains the responsibility of EU Member States, the EU has sought to facilitate this exercise over the years through a range of initiatives. The latest is the publication of the [New Skills Agenda for Europe](#), which includes a review of the European Qualifications Framework and the related annexes for a better understanding of qualifications and to make better use of all available skills in the European labour market. This initiative is spearheaded by the European Commission Directorate for Employment and Social Affairs (DG EMPL), but is a cross-cutting priority. DG EMPL has commissioned a study to identify the key bottlenecks in recognition processes the obstacles to recognition of skills and qualifications. The study will be reviewed by ECOO.

ECOO continues to engage in the mutual evaluation of professions exercise launched by the European Commission back in 2013. The premise of this exercise is that there are restrictive conditions discouraging young people from entering qualified profes-

sions, and that different regulatory frameworks across Europe prevent professionals from applying to jobs in other member states. Opticians were selected by the European Commission to be part of the pilot of professions to be evaluated. The most recent exercise includes a consultation on the effectiveness of national action plans, which ended on 19 August. ECOO and members submitted a number of contributions, which will be assessed by the European Commission Directorate General for Growth (DG GROW) and feed into an impact assessment. This impact assessment will show the evidence basis on which the Commission has taken a decision.

There is also increased interest in this topic from the European Parliament, as shown by recent Parliamentary Questions asked by a number of parties ([ECR](#), [EPP](#), [ALDE](#)) across different Member States.

Another important item on the EU agenda and of relevance to ECOO is the VAT Action Plan, which provides

orientations towards a modernised policy on EU rules governing VAT rates. Noteworthy next steps include a legislative proposal in 2017 proposing a reform to give more freedom to Member States in setting up rates and proposing two options. Option 1 would include the extension and regular review of the list of goods and services eligible for reduced rates. Option 2 would entail the abolition of the list, but this is considered as an ambitious approach for Member States. To feed into this process, ECOO members will be asked to fill in a survey to better understand the current situation faced by practitioners on the ground at present.

Finally, the European Commission is pushing ahead with the rolling out and implementation of initiatives contained in the Digital Single Market (DSM). Two strands of relevance for ECOO within the DSM are the e-Health and the impact of conducting online services for the profession.

Raising awareness about preventable blindness in the European Parliament

On November 15, ECOO supported the European Forum Against Blindness (EFAB), the European Coalition for Vision (ECV), and the European Alliance for Vision Research and Ophthalmology (EU-EYE) in their awareness-raising activities around preventable blindness on the margins of World Diabetes Day.

ECOO was present at the European Parliament event “Preventing sight loss in an ageing population - The role of screening and early diagnosis in identifying eye diseases as comorbidities of non-communicable diseases”. The event was hosted by MEP Marian Harkin (ALDE, Ireland) and MEP Heinz Becker (EPP, Austria), and was moderated by Professor Ian Banks (chair of EFAB). Panellists included Professor Einar Stefansson (EU-EYE), Professor Sehnaz Karadeniz (IDF Europe), David Hewlett (ECV), and Dr. Grigorij Kogan (European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation).



The aim of the event was to call for the EU to raise eye health and sight related issues to a par with other chronic disease and disability areas when considering EU funding tenders for health and social care research. The number of people affected by preventable blindness represents an economic burden, as well as a burden to European health systems. Moreover, preventable blindness and vision impairment compromises citizens’ quality of life.

One message that resonated clearly was the need to make eye tests part of regular health checks in order to reduce eye disease and vision loss. This is a classic example of what can be achieved when all eye care professionals work together for a common goal.

Although ‘health policy’ is a national competency, the EU can make recommendations and issue guidance. In this context, it is important that advocacy continues at national level as well, which is also a key message to take home.



The event also saw the launch of a position paper to emphasizing the need to embed eye care services for early diagnosis of eye diseases. This position paper sets out three key areas that EFAB, ECV and EU-EYE believe to be fundamental to addressing preventable irreversible sight loss in Europe: research and development, early case finding and diagnosis, and access to treatment and services. These three elements underpin the most critical factor: increasing public awareness and understanding of the importance of maintaining eye health through regular eye and sight examinations at clinically recommended intervals.

Country insights

Brexit and the impact on the profession of optometry and optics

Cindy Tromans, Chair of Joint Optical Committee of the European Union (JOCEU)

Much has been discussed about the UK's Brexit vote and its fallout since the UK's surprise referendum result in the summer. Of course, no one really knows how the Brexit process will work or what the consequences will be, as it has never happened before. Although UK Prime Minister Theresa May has said "Brexit means Brexit", there is still a lot of debate about what that will mean in practice - hard or soft? And what might the consequences be for optometry and optics? What is certain is that, from European trade to immigration and research funding, the decision will have ramifications for optometry in the UK and the broader sector and it won't be until negotiations officially begin, that we will start to get a clear idea of what kind of deal the UK will agree with the EU. With this in mind, it's important to note that the 'great repeal bill' will end the authority of EU law by converting all its provisions in British law on the day of exit from the bloc, so in practice, for quite some time there will be no change to legislation in the UK.

The free movement principles that allow nearly three million EU nationals to live and work in the UK will also be under review in the coming months. However, this principle is not likely to have a sizeable impact on optometry as between June 2014 and January 2016, the GOC registered just 65 EU nationals, as such, this review is not likely to have a large impact on optometry. Equally, for the two million UK citizens living in the 27 other EU member states, the EU law allowing them to work in EU states may change, so it may be that optometrists practicing in Europe may have to return to the UK. Again, this would affect only a small number of people. While this free movement may not have a significant

impact on the availability of optometrists or dispensing opticians, will be a staffing consideration for anyone employing any of the EU nationals working in the UK.

We wouldn't anticipate any major changes to day-to-day practice for optometrists and opticians when the UK exits the EU, although it is likely there will be changes in the route to registration for those from the EU who want to practise in the UK. At the moment, EU-qualified optometrists need to register with the GOC, where applications are reviewed based on the applicant's level of training. Those from outside the EU must pass an exam before they can practise in the UK, and perhaps this will be the route in the future, but it's difficult to know.

Dispensing opticians may experience a change, Peter Black, Vice Chair of JOCEU explains; "Brexit could be good for the European Diploma in Optometry and the European Qualification in Optics. Currently dispensing opticians from the EU can freely move into the

UK, get a job as an optical assistant and then upgrade their qualification, usually meeting the paediatric dispensing competency and completing the ABDO final practical exam / portfolio of case records / pre-registration period. If free movement is withdrawn it may be that even if there is a shortage of trained opticians, untrained individuals may not be allowed to migrate. As such, assuming the GOC recognises the European Diplomas, EU nationals may wish to seek an immediately registerable qualification at home in order to facilitate a move to the UK. Also, UK training institutions may take on the European qualifications in order to attract foreign students and also to enable future UK practitioners to practice in other European countries. So, Brexit could bring profession harmony and consistent educational standards closer."

Another factor to consider is the question surrounding drug and medical device regulation. If the UK decides to negotiate to stay in the European Economic Area (EEA), it's likely that



there would not be a difference to regulation. But if the UK stays out of the EEA, drug companies may need to go through a separate process with British regulators for new products as the centralised European route would not be applicable to the UK. This is likely to have a big impact on the availability of new drugs. Beyond drug and medical device regulation, the UK will continue to operate within EU regulatory frameworks; everything we purchase from the EU will comply with EU rules, and unless UK manufacturers and pharmaceutical companies only want to produce for the UK market so will they.

When it comes to research funding, Mike Bowen, Director of Research for the College of Optometrists says; "A number of mechanisms exist to enable scientific institutions and research-

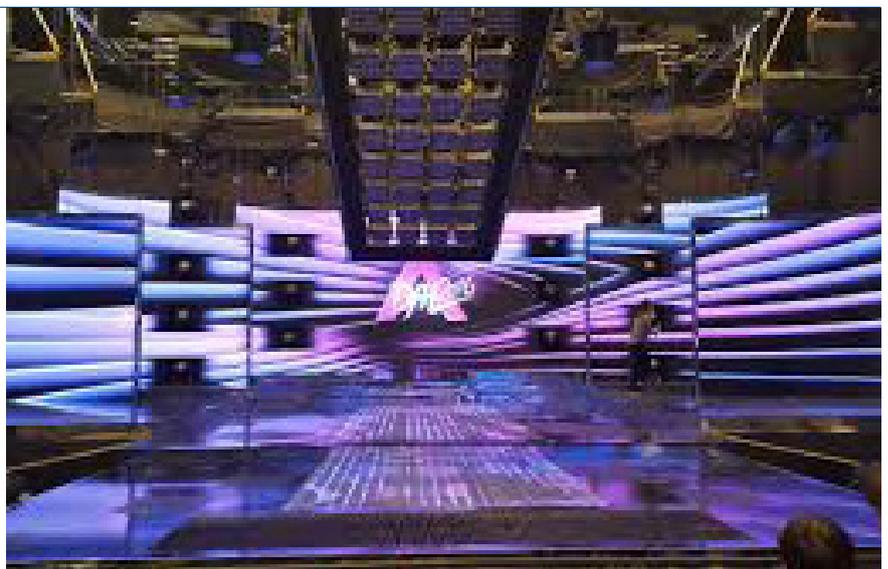
ers in non-EU countries to participate in, and receive funding from, EU Programmes. This would require the UK to continue to contribute financially to the system at the same levels as we currently do, but we would have no seat at the table where decisions about funding priorities are made. After the UK leaves the EU, we may benefit from one of these mechanisms, enabling our researchers and organisations to apply for funding projects with the same status as those from EU Member States. Although the UK government has guaranteed support for existing research projects funded by the European Union even after the UK leaves the EU, doubts over the UK's ability to win future project grants mean some EU partners are already avoiding working with British researchers."

Suffice to say, the vote to leave the EU was the start, not the end, of a process. Now a period of uncertainty has begun, of unknown length, and unpredictable outcome. Commentators and experts vary in their opinions, from the wildly optimistic to the deeply pessimistic. The UK may be an island but it has always sought to trade vigorously, exchange knowledge and expertise and be on good terms with its neighbours. A multitude of links and values shared with our continental partners in the EU will remain post-Brexit, including through the many multinational companies which have been long-established in the UK. The true test will come when we see the plan for Brexit and Article 50 is triggered, at that point we will begin to see the true effect for everyone, including optometrists and opticians.

Increasing awareness of good eye sight among Eurovision fans

Followed by around 180 million viewers worldwide, the Eurovision Song Contest is one of the most popular shows in Europe. Over the years, it has become much more than grandiose music and catchy phrases; the show, styling and visuals play just as an important role for the overall experience.

However, poor eyesight may prevent people to capture these details and enjoy the same experience, missing an important part of the show. Contact lens manufacturers and bloggers seized this opportunity to raise awareness on the importance of good eye sight – creating an [original campaign](#).



European Diploma in Optometry

The number of graduates for the European Diploma in Optometry is growing each year, and more universities are expressing interest in the accreditation process. In 2016, 63 students received their European Diploma, becoming ambassadors of a high standard qualification and contributing to the recognition of the profession across Europe.

A new video on the European Diploma is available on the ECOO website. The video is intended to better explain the opportunities that the European Diploma brings to students, and how it raises the profile of accredited universities.



Graduation ceremony in Berlin, July 2016



Graduation ceremony in Olten, October 2016

ECOO at the 3-day festival of optics and design in Munich

pti, the 3-day festival of optics and design in Munich, takes place from 28th to 30th of January 2017 (Saturday to Monday). Over 550 exhibitors with all the leaders in the areas of frames, contact lenses, lenses and shop design will participate. New main topic in 2017 is "optic 4.0 – Digital Solutions." Opticians get an overview about their four working fields in which digitalization plays a role: digital information and communication, digital production and automatization, digital process management, digital services. Furthermore opti has expanded its circle of exclusive trade show partners. Peter Gumpelmayer, President of ECOO, is excited about the partnership with the trade show in Munich, saying that: „We are delighted to start cooperating closely with opti, the most important platform in the optics sector. In Munich opticians have the possibility to advance our profession by seeing and discussing the latest developments.“ ECOO will have the opportunity to raise awareness of the various projects and work streams that are spearheaded by



the association. For instance, ECOO will present the European Diploma in Optometry and Qualifications in Optics on the stage at opti, which will underline the importance of achieving a high common European standard in optometric and optics education. This will help create a strong network to support the next generation in their career planning.

Update from the Academy

New website

The Academy is about to launch our newly designed website (<http://www.eaoo.info/>). The website is easier to

navigate and has a more user-friendly design and includes on-line electronic payment features, which will make

it easy for conference registration and subscriptions payment.

Barcelona 2017 conference

Our next annual conference will be in Barcelona, Spain, between Friday 12th and Sunday 14th May 2017. This is a joint conference the Spanish Consejo General de Colegios de Ópticos Optometristas (CGCOO), and will be held aside with the European Council of Optometry and Optics (EAOO) Spring meeting. The Conference Venue is the Hotel Barceló Sants, Barcelona.

The main theme for the conference is "Vision and New Technologies". The call for abstracts has been opened and we are inviting abstracts (oral or poster papers) for presentation until the 12th of December. Abstracts are invited within this theme on any topic or content that can provide delegates with information they can apply to practice, discuss with colleagues, or in any way use to develop their career. This can be approached from two points of view; (i) the impact of technology on vision, or (ii) the benefits derived from the new technologies for diagnoses and treatment.

The conference will bring together key stakeholders from over 30 countries to discuss and share the latest research, education and clinical practice in op-

tometry, optics and dispensing, and vision science.



Fellowship applications now open

Applications for the Fellowship Program 2017 have opened and the deadline for application for May 2017 is currently end of December 2016.

The Fellowship program guidelines have been amended and improved. The application process is easier and more transparent which incorporates a new point system. If you are an exist-

ing member of the EAOO and would like to consider to become a Fellow of the Academy have a look at the Guidelines for Fellowship in our website (<http://www.eaoo.info/>).

New administrative support

The Academy has reached an agreement with the Association of Irish Optometrists (AIO) to provide admin-

istration services and management of accounts. The Academy is grateful for the support the College of Optom-

etrists (UK) has provided for all these years, which helped to structure and shape the Academy from its birth.

World Council of Optometry – Advocating and Collaborating for Accessible Eye Health and Vision Care



In October WOC held its' Governing Board meeting in Durban, SA. Many of our trustees also had the opportunity to attend the IAPB 10th Annual General Assembly. With the conference theme "Stronger Together", the IAPB General Assembly underscored the key value it delivers to the eye care sector – building partnerships to help ensure Optometry presents a single voice.

WCO is an important and integral part of the eye care sector, and 'stronger together' also speaks to our mission. Our partnerships with IAPB, WHO, OGS and other optometric and eye care organizations continue to strengthen as we work towards a common goal of accessible and quality eye and vision care.

WCO board trustees perform important roles within many of our partner organizations as well as their national associations. In IAPB, Dr. Scott Mundle, President-Elect sits on the Refractive Error Committee, Dr. Uduak Udom, President, sits on the Human Resources for Eye Health Committee, Dr. Bina Patel on the Diabetic Retinopathy Working Group and Dr. Kovin Naidoo was chair of the 10 GA.

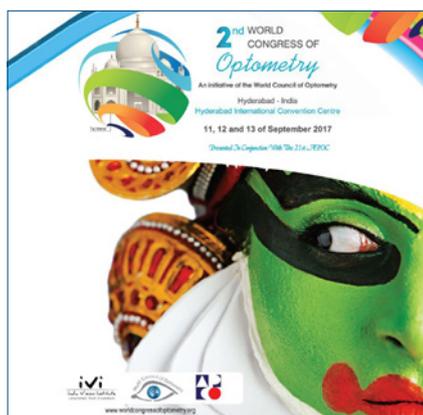


WCO is a founding partner of Optometry Giving Sight and is actively involved both at the global and national levels. OGS is the only global fundraising initiative that specifically targets the prevention of blindness and impaired vision due to uncorrected refractive error – simply the need for an eye exam and a pair of glasses.

WCO is also proud to be a Global Supporter of 'Our Children's Vision' (OCV), a worldwide initiative whose initial target is to provide eye care services to 50 million children by 2020. With the support of our members, we are looking forward to being an integral partner in reaching this attainable goal!

The World Council is pleased to announce the 2nd World Congress of Optometry, taking place in Hyderabad, India, September 11-13, 2017 in collaboration with our partners, the Asia Pacific Council of Optometry and the India Vision Institute.

The 1st World Congress of Optometry, held in 2015 in Medellin Colombia, attracted over 2300 attendees. Building on this success, it is anticipated that over 2500 optometrists, optometric educators, researchers and optometry students from more than 40 countries will participate in the 2nd World Congress of Optometry, including significant participation from the host country India. The theme of the meeting, 'Accessible, Quality Vision and Eye Health' was chosen to complement the WHO Universal Eye Health – A Global Action Plan 2014-2019. We are looking forward to you joining us for this exciting and forward thinking meeting!



ECOO upcoming meeting

ECOO General Assembly, Barcelona, Spain

The next ECOO General Assembly will take place on **12-14 May in Barcelona, Spain**, and is kindly organised by the EAEO in collaboration with the Spanish General Council of Optometry (CGCOO).

More information will shortly follow. In the meantime, please save the date!



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 the ECOO Secretariat:

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