



## Message from the President



Dear members, dear friends,

The General Assembly in May was one of the most successful meetings we have had to date. I was pleased that we managed to cover quite a lot of ground on ongoing issues that are unfolding at EU level, and on issues that affect the professions we represent at national level. But after discussions comes action, and now is the time to step up our game. Our collective success at EU level is dependent of roll-out at national level. I urge each and every one of you to get involved, and to feedback to us on the challenges you face. Ongoing dialogue between us will make sure that we find the best way forward – one that will enable us to continue fulfilling our mission of improving eye health.

The Executive Committee will meet in Brussels in the first week of July. We will take the opportunity to meet with relevant stakeholders in the European Institutions and the WHO, as well as to learn from best practices from other professional associations.

The next General Assembly will then take place in October in Prague, where our Pavel and his colleagues from the Association of Czech Opticians and Optometrists are putting together a splendid program.

Let us keep the lines of communication open, even with summer and holidays approaching!

*Best wishes, Peter*

## Photos from the General Assembly in Barcelona



ECOO members met on 11-13 May in Barcelona for the General Assembly and related meetings. Members had the opportunity to breakout into several discussion groups and address key topics of relevance to optometry and optics in Europe. The Barcelona meeting was also an excellent opportunity to network with colleagues from other countries.

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## On the EU agenda

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### Services package

The stated primary objective of the “services package” published by the European Commission in January is to help Member States identify overly burdensome or outdated requirements for professionals. Part of the package is a [proposal for a proportionality test](#) before adopting new regulation on professions and [guidance on reform needs for Member States for regulation in professional services](#). Discussions on the pro-

portionality test directive have progressed: the Council of the European Union has adopted its [general approach](#), and the [ENVI](#) and [JURI](#) Committee providing initial input. Opinions so far stress that the regulation of professions should remain a national competency, and that healthcare professions should be kept out of the scope of the directive.

### Medical devices, and fluorescein

The European Union medical device regulation has come into force, marking the start of a multi-year transition period. By November, the European Commission is expected to draw up a list of codes to specify the scope of notified bodies. A Medical Device Coordination Group is also set to come into force in November. As a reminder, plano contact lenses now fall under the scope of the new rules.

later this year on the agenda of the European Commission. ECOO continues to raise awareness that fluorescein strips, used in contact lenses fitting and to assess ocular health, have been considered and used as medical devices since their invention. Confusion about its classification has caused significant supply problems in Europe, and puts at risk the ability of eye care professionals to safely fit contact lenses.

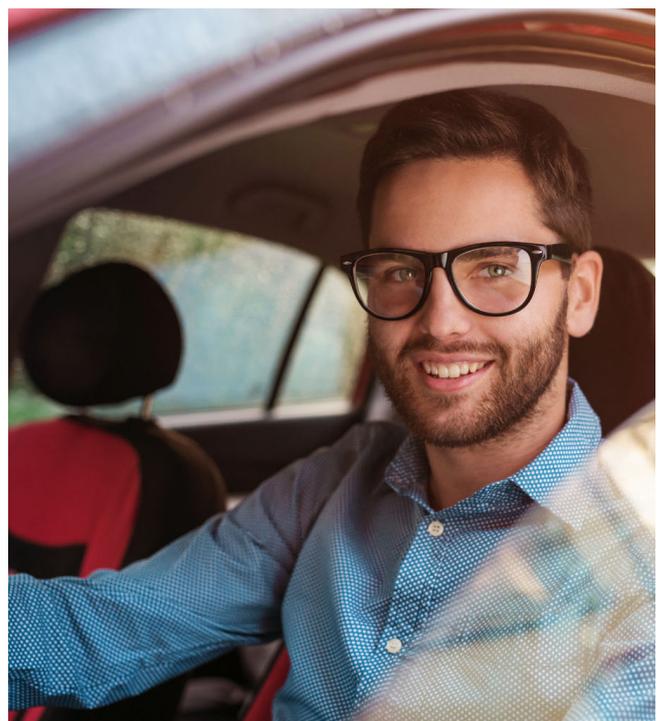
Related to this topic is the classification of **fluorescein strips** as a medicinal product or a medical device, which will feature

### Vision and driving

The study contracted by the European Commission to assess among others the measures concerning the medical fitness [has been finalized](#). Following a preliminary assessment of the report, we applaud the focus on ageing and the acknowledgement that good vision is paramount for drivers. ECOO has shared the [consensus report on the visual standards for driving in Europe](#), and will continue raising awareness on this topic.

### VAT

Finally, ECOO submitted input to the public consultation on the **reform of VAT rates** in the European Union, based on data collected from members. All responses are currently being analysed by Commission services, and a report outlining preferred options moving forward is expected.



## Country updates



### Optometry in Latvia

By Prof. V Grabovskis, I. Lacis

In Latvia, the birth of optometrist's profession was in 1992, when the optometry studies program was established in the Faculty of Physics and Mathematics at the University of Latvia. The experience of other countries was required for development of this program. Due to that in 1992 and 1994 the University of Latvia organized two big international conferences on teaching optometry. In 1994 AUESCO leading workers J.P. Roosen and I. Petrakjan came to Riga for a visit during International Optometry conference. In 1994 ECOO (European Council of Optometry and Optics) sent their representative, Swede P. Sederbeg to Latvia for spot assessment of the situation. 25 years on, what is the status of optometry in Latvia?

In Latvia Optometry is a regulated healthcare profession. According to codes of International Labour Organization, optometrists are healthcare senior professionals. The standard of optometrist's profession is an obligatory document to be taken in to account while developing the content of educational program. The optometrist profession's standard requires higher professional education of the sixth level, which can be obtained only in the accredited program, while getting a professional master's degree at the University of Latvia. A professional master's degree requires the studies of university level for five years. After graduation, the optometrist can practice for five

years. Afterwards further education and certification is required. Further education of optometrists is run by Association of Latvian Optometrists and Opticians (LOOA). Its qualification committee maintains the register of optometrists and issues professional certificates. According to the regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers, LOOA is responsible for alignment of education abroad and granting the license to practice optometry. Starting from 2020, "optometrist" becomes medical staff in Latvia according to Medical Law. It will change the procedures of registration and licensing. Optometrists will be listed in the national register, and will practice in medical institutions. Accreditation and registration of medical institutions will be done by state institutions.

Currently, optometrist's education, profession's standard and practice procedures are governed by three laws (Law of Higher Education, Law of Vocational Education, and Law of Regulated Professions) and two regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers. Starting from 2020, the Medical Law and three other regulations of the Cabinet of Ministers will be added. New laws will make additional requirements for optometrists, will regulate the supervision of their work and will guarantee a higher level of patient safety.



### State payment for optometrist eye examination in Ireland — a new era

By Martin O'Brien, Association of Optometrists Ireland

Since 2008 the economic landscape in Europe has undergone a huge amount of turmoil and Ireland was one of the countries hit hard by the economic downturn. One of the central parts of the Irish government's austerity plans at the time was a piece of legislation, FEMPI (Financial Emergency Measure in the Public Interest) Act. The effect of this legislation was very broad, but the purpose was to allow the government to reduce payments made to government employees, fees to professionals supplying services under contract to government and to amend national labour / union agreements. Those affected including, optometrists and dispensing opticians, had opportunities to make submissions in relation to cuts, but the final decision

could be made without agreement from affected parties.

Under FEMPI, the government reduced the eye examination fee paid under the medical card and PRSI schemes and placed a temporary suspension on the reimbursement for spectacle dispensing under the PRSI scheme. There were 3 rounds of cuts applied to dental services and medical fees under FEMPI; however as a result of the submissions from the AOI, the eye-care sector only had one round of cuts applied.

During this period, there was another parallel change for the professions, where optometrists and dispensing opticians came

under the aegis of an umbrella body called CORU (Health & Social Care Professionals Council) which has already been discussed and reported in the ECOO newsletter. The major difference in this was a fundamental change in the regulation of the profession with the scope of practice of optometrists being no longer limited by statute, permitting optometrists to diagnose and treat eye conditions. There is one caveat to this, the Medicines Act still limits optometrists to a very small range of treatment options, this is an area requiring further work.

The Irish economy has been performing ahead of expectations and the government signalled some time ago that there was a potential to review the position of professions and groups affected by FEMPI. Whilst the Government were reluctant to review cuts made under FEMPI, there was an acknowledgement that the eye-examination fees needed to be reviewed on foot of the submissions of the Association of Optometry Ireland going back over a decade. The basic eye examination fee is set to increase from €22.41 to €35, with further payments for supplementary investigation / examination.

Earlier this year a fundamental paradigm shift was agreed between the AOI and the Irish Government, as now optometrists are being reimbursed by the State for the provision of eye-care independent of the supply of spectacles and the clinical autonomy of a optometrists to make decisions on the management / treatment under their care has been acknowledged with reimbursement for the first time in Ireland. The cabinet has formally ratified the agreement and the new scale of fees are set to be introduced from November this year. This will include payment for eye-examination (refraction) and review of patients based on clinical factors i.e., repeat IOP, repeat visual field, OCT review, review following provision of management / treatment provided by an optometrist.

While the increase in the sight test fees is welcomed and will be extremely beneficial to practices; the payment of supplementary fees for examinations as clinically determined by optometrists is a landmark event in the evolution of optometry in Ireland.



### VPC, Periodic Membership Validation in Spain — a reality that will make us better professionals

*By Juan Carlos Martínez Moral, President of the Spanish General Council of Optometry*

The Spanish General Council of Optometry, after spending several months planning the way in which Opticians-Optometrists could join a methodology for the renewal of the membership, or a periodic validation of such membership, so that they could meet the highest standards of professional practice required both by the scientific community and by Society as a whole, is promoting excellence in professional practice on the part of its members.

Professionals, and especially healthcare professionals, should refresh their professional skills on a regular and regulated basis, appropriate for the practice of his / her profession.

On-going training could be given by means of face-to-face, mixed or online sessions, on the understanding that each type of training will entitle to receive a different number of credits, depending on the degree of efficiency witnessed for each on-going training process undergone by the relevant member.

In countries such as the U.S., Canada, the United Kingdom, for example, this process already acquired a compulsory nature since the beginning of the 20th century within the field of Optometry, so that the licence could be renewed and practitioners could pursue their professional career, usually for a period of

two or three years; after such period, all optometrists should repeat the process.

The Spanish General Council of Optometry, after receiving many opinions and petitions regarding the need to implement a voluntary process for the Periodic Membership Validation (VPC) and, after a period of thorough and scrupulous preparation, has decided to implement such process, on a voluntary basis, in our professional practice.

The Health Professions Organisation Act (Law 44/2003, of 21 November) establishes:

*"Health Centres will review, at least every three years, whether the health professionals belonging to their staff comply with the requirements established for the professional practice, in accordance with the requirements of this act and the remaining applicable regulations, including the academic qualifications required, as well as other diplomas, certificates or professional qualifications of the members of the staff, to ascertain whether they are still qualified to render patient care services ..."*

We should not forget that the government of the Kingdom of Spain is obliged to develop the LOPS (order for sanitary professions 44/2003 of 21 November) which, for the time be-

ing, has built up a delay of more than thirteen years. In article 8, paragraph 3, the law sets out that **“the qualifications to render patient care services shall be compulsorily reviewed every three years”**. Consequently, if we implement now (similarly to the OMC) the process for the Periodic Membership Validation (VPC), following a voluntary and gradual scheme, once it becomes a compulsory legal requirement, the procedure will have been already tested and adapted, and it will only have to be followed on a compulsory and official basis.

The information process concerning the development of the Periodic Membership Validation (VPC), will begin on 1st January through e-mail, etc., and the relevant applications may be filed starting on 1st April, subject to the following requirements:

- Periodic Membership Validation (VPC) is a voluntary, friendly and easy process, based on the transfer of knowledge and scientific evidence, which intends to validate the professional skills we have acquired in the last five years. For that purpose, a 40-point training should be completed, by following the different on-going training courses arranged by the General Council, the Regional Councils, regional branches, universities and private training bodies (provided that they have been registered as such before the Spanish General Council of Optometry and their courses have been recognised by the Associations of Opticians-Optometrists for VPC purposes).
- Credits will also be obtained through university activities, either as teacher or student, publications, scientific papers

and the attendance to congresses, meetings, clinical seminars and activities carried out in representation of the relevant association, participation in NGOs or any other activity recognised by the Associations of Opticians-Optometrists, both at national and international level.

- The application will also include a certificate indicating the professional background on the person concerned, the absence of sanctions in his/her records and the acceptance of the code of conduct.

As this is a voluntary and enriching process, those members of the association who obtain the VPC will be entitled to use, subject to the authorisation of the Spanish General Council of Optometry, the name and logo of the VPC during the effective term of five years, as a token of their on-going professional training efforts, and they should renew it before the expiry of such period of five years.

Given its voluntary nature (for the time being), the VPC does not prevent any member from practicing. However, it is a good idea, until the administration converts it into a compulsory legal requirement.

Slowly, but surely, we must incorporate the Periodic Membership Validation (VPC), which is an irreversible process and will allow us to guarantee the rendering by Opticians-Optometrists in Spain of a more up-to-date care, focused on excellence, within the field of Primary Eyecare.

## Clinical hot topics, educational advancement and latest research findings — overview of EAOO 2017

The 9<sup>th</sup>, European Academy of Optometry & Optics (EAOO) Conference was hosted in association with the Consejo General de Colegios de Ópticos Optometristas (CGCOO) in the vibrant city of Barcelona, under the theme “Vision & New Technologies”. The event attracted over 750 delegates from 42 countries — a record number, including a significant number of students from across Europe some of whom presented at 1st European Diploma Student Forum.

Clinical hot topics, educational advancement plus the latest research findings, opportunity for delegates to engage via a variety of learning modes - skills workshops, round-table peer discussions, rapid fire short presentations, dedicated time to engage with poster presenters, in addition to the opportunity to pose questions to world-class keynote presenters on the latest developments, in their specialist fields, in a relaxed setting made this event truly unique.

The Academy, Special Interest Groups (SIGS) were filled with lively debate, SIG leaders encouraging participants to become active members of new on-line forums as great way to stay connected with the Academy and fellow members with similar interests, throughout the year.

Another unique characteristic of this Conference is the co-location of the European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO)

Spring Meeting, hosting representatives from leading national organisations of optometry and optics across Europe. This rich and diverse mix fueling enjoyable and challenging conversations during networking breaks in the exhibition areas, where this year a record number of sponsors took the opportunity to showcase their latest innovations and products.

An extensive social program of drinks receptions and dinners hosted by COOOC, CGCOO, the Academy and ECOO allowed delegates and guests to enjoy the wonderful city of Barcelona, its culture and culinary delights in truly breath-taking settings. The Closing Ceremony, included the award of Fellowship to 12 new Academy Fellows, from across the spectrum of optometry and optics.

The scale and scope of Barcelona 2017 was reflected in the highest ever number of abstracts received, a clear sign that the Academy is meeting a real need and interest for a forum that can bring educators, researchers and clinicians – the leaders of the profession in Europe — together.

Academy 2018 Annual Conference will be held in Pula, Croatia in association with regional hosts, University of Applied Sciences, Velika Gorica in parallel with the highly successful OCCSEE Conference.

**Save the Date — 11<sup>th</sup> -13<sup>th</sup> May 2018!**



## Survey on falls prevention

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The European Coalition for Vision has recently been accepted to the A2 (Falls Prevention) Action Group of the European Innovation Partnership on Active Healthy Ageing (EIP AHA). The EIP AHA is a European Commission initiative bringing together key stakeholders in public health with the aims of:

- enabling EU citizens to lead healthy, active and independent lives while ageing;
- improving the sustainability and efficiency of social and health care systems; and
- improving the competitiveness of innovative products and services that focus on the ageing challenge at both EU and global level (i.e. creation of business opportunities).

The overarching target of the partnership is to increase the average healthy lifespan of Europeans by two years by 2020 through prevention and health promotion, care and cure, and active and independent living of older people. Given the proven links between visual impairment and falls, and between falls and reduced life expectancy among older people, the ECV is well placed to contribute to the achievement of this target.

The ECV has pledged to collaborate with our EIP AHA partners across Europe to increase official recognition of the link between falls and eye health (e.g. in local and national guidelines) and to design and promote activities that raise awareness of this link, such as social media campaigns, leaflets and panel events. This commitment and our progress against it can now be viewed on [the ECV Commission web page](#).

### How you can contribute and how you can benefit from this initiative

We are keen to showcase the wide range of ways that eye health professionals work to prevent falls – including through influencing policy – in different countries and practice settings across Europe. As a member of the Falls Prevention Action Group, the ECV will be able to widely promote the work of their members and partners at stakeholder meetings and via the European Commission web page.

Members who are happy to have their initiatives promoted can complete the following survey: <https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/9LJ8GRF>.

Members will benefit from synergies with other initiatives and the potential to scale up their work and bid for structural funds.

The European Coalition for Vision (ECV) is an alliance of professional bodies, patient groups, European NGOs, disabled people's organisations, trade associations representing manufacturers and research groups. The ECV's mission is to raise the profile of eye health and vision, help prevent avoidable visual impairment and secure an equal and inclusive society for those with irreversible blindness or low vision in Europe. ECOO is an active member of the ECV.

## ECOO upcoming meeting

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The next ECOO General Assembly will take place on 20-22 October in Prague, Czech Republic, and is kindly organised by the Association of Czech Opticians and Optometrists.

More information regarding the programme, registration and travel logistics is available on the [ECOO website](#).

## Subscribe to the newsletter!

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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:

E-mail: [secretariat@ecoo.info](mailto:secretariat@ecoo.info)

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