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## Message from the President

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Dear Members,

The New Year for ECOO has got off to a busy start with a flurry of activity in the European Commission around some of our key topics. We were invited to attend the European Commission's Driving License Committee, where I made a short presentation on aspects of ECOO's Vision and Driving paper. Also the European Union's Medical Devices Regulation has been taking up much time and Peter Gumpelmayer has been working very hard for us in that regard.

In February, we held our Executive Committee in Düsseldorf, Germany at the offices of the ZVA. This was the first meeting of the new Executive and we spent time planning our priorities for the year ahead. It was also a great opportunity to engage with a member organisation, gain feedback on the work that ECOO does, and to exchange views.

ECOO is a growing family and we have recently had contact with some countries that are currently not ECOO members - Moldova, Ukraine and Malta. We hope that we can foster their aspirations to develop optometry and optics in their countries and we are encouraging them to attend our meetings so they can see the benefits of ECOO membership and the support that colleagues across Europe can offer to them.

Planning for the next GA is at full speed and I think we are putting together a great programme with involvement of the European Commission and a great guest speaker, Professor David Elliot, who will be talking about vision and falls, a topic close to all of our areas of work.

I hope to see and meet as many of our members as I can in Rome so please book your place!

*Cindy Tromans*

## Recent developments

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### Launch of the Diabetic Eye Disease Toolkit

As part of the [Retina Action Initiative](#), a "global initiative for a lifetime of vision", ECOO has contributed to the development of an educational Toolkit on Diabetic Eye Disease (DED). The DED Toolkit was launched in February 2019 and is now [available online](#).

ECOO ensured in particular that a [section](#) on "The Role of the Optometrist in Diabetes and Diabetic Eye Disease Management" was added, which highlights that optometrists are in the unique position to educate and counsel patients with diabetes and pre-diabetes. This section also notes that optometrists have come to play a key role in educating and encouraging people to make lifestyle changes, which helps to prevent retinopathy and reduces the need for people to visit a retina specialist. In this regard, optometrist should take a few extra minutes to provide clear and concise patient education, make patients aware of the need for timely eye care to reduce the risks of vision loss, and inform people of the importance of controlling systemic risk factors for the development and progression of DR and vision loss.



## On the EU agenda

### Vision & Driving

ECOO attended the meeting of the European Commission's Driving License Committee on 5 February 2019. This committee, consisting of national Member State representatives, assists the European Commission with the implementation of the European Union's Driving License Directive. ECOO presented a discussion paper, explaining the need to update the vision requirements included in Annex III of the Driving License Directive, in particular with regards to visual acuity and referencing of appropriately trained and qualified eye care professionals. ECOO remains in contact with the European Commission and Member States on the need for updating the vision requirements included in the Driving License Directive.

### Medical Devices Regulation

ECOO continues to closely follow the developments around the European Union's Medical Devices Regulation, which will enter into force on 26 May 2020, as it also directly impacts the professions of optometry and optics. The Regulation was adopted in May 2017 and stakeholders are currently exploring how to best mitigate the challenges that emerged since the adoption. For instance, there are challenges around the establishment of special notified bodies for the conformity assessment. The British Standards Institution (BSI), the national standards body of the United Kingdom, was the first body approved to operate as a notified body for the full scope of the Regulation, but given the uncertainty about Brexit, it is unclear if the BSI will be recognised as such when the United Kingdom leaves the EU. Moreover, the Regulation does not contain "grandfathering" provisions, so that all currently approved devices must be re-certified. The regulation also requires the application of a Unique Device Identification (UDI) is applied on every medical device by the manufacturer.

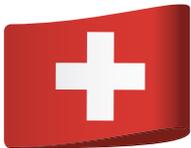
### 2019 European Parliament elections

The European Parliament elections are coming up in May 2019, representing a key milestone that will define policy strategies until 2024. The elections, which occur every five years, are expected to change the constellation and dynamics of European policy-making, especially because the European Parliament also influences the appointment of the next President of the European Commission and holds hearings to approve each Commissioner at the end of the year. Several EU legislative and non-legislative initiatives have directly impacted the professions of optics and optometry and ECOO has been actively engaging with the institutions on these topics. ECOO is committed to continue these efforts and will share a European election manifesto with the elected Members of the European Parliament to introduce the importance of the vision sector, harmonised educational and professional standards and the need to raise awareness on eye health.

### Artificial Intelligence

On 18 February 2019, the European Competitiveness Council endorsed Council Conclusions on the European Commission's [Coordinated Plan on Artificial Intelligence \(AI\)](#). The plan had been presented in December 2018 and is relevant to ECOO because of the potential impact of AI on how professionals carry out their work. The Council conclusions encourage Member States to put in place, by mid-2019, national Artificial Intelligence strategies or programmes, and highlights that the Council will monitor the implementation and the annual updating of the Coordinated Plan on AI. Finally, the conclusions encourage all stakeholders to participate in the development of standards for AI technologies to increase competitiveness. Just prior to this, on 12 February 2019, the European Parliament adopted a [motion](#) to call on the European Commission and the EU Member States to draw up a "comprehensive European industrial policy on artificial intelligence and robotics". The European Commission's High-Level Expert Group on Artificial Intelligence will present a final draft of the ethical guidelines on AI in April 2019.

## Country Updates



### Switzerland — Optometry: official health profession from 2020 onwards

by OPTIKSCHWEIZ / SBAO

In order to promote quality in healthcare, Switzerland is enacting a new law by 2020 that regulates the training and competencies of seven selected non-medical so-called «health professionals»: nursing, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, nutritional advice, obstetrics, osteopathy and optometry.

Swiss optometrists holding a Bachelor (Bsc) Degree (3 years full-time study in the ECOO Gold Standard at the Institute of Optometry FHNW, since 2007) are now nationwide defined as specialists for prescription determination, contact lens fitting and optometric examinations including preventive health screening.

The diploma-qualified opticians who were previously qualified for prescription regulations and contact lens fitting (Higher Professional Examination, abolished in 2011) retain their demonstrably acquired competencies and professional rights as «old-law» professionals. The new «health professionals»-law and the associated implementing provisions are not yet in force. A public consultation on these issues was completed at the end of January 2019.

In line with the expectations, ophthalmic organisations expressed criticism, particularly of the right to use diagnostic ophthalmics, as provided for in the Competence Regulations for Optometrists BSc. The legislative project is also being tackled by the big chain companies, which fear higher wage costs and complain about bottlenecks in personnel recruitment due to the obligation to employ BSc optometrists or experts recognised as equivalent in future. OPTIKSCHWEIZ and SBAO/SSOO, on the other hand, are of the opinion that the new «optometry standard» will benefit not only the entire population, but sooner or later all quality-oriented optical market participants.

From 2020 onwards, the new federal law must be integrated in 26 independent and different cantonal health laws, in which the practice of optometry has been regulated to date at the level of the graduated ophthalmic optician.



### Lithuania — The current status of optometry and optics in Lithuania

by Vaida Kačergienė

Since the 1 November 2018, optometry is a regulated health care profession by the Ministry of Health of the Republic of Lithuania. According to the law, optometrists are now officially allowed to examine the exterior and interior parts of the eye, perform subjective and objective refractions, check binocular vision, evaluate colour vision, carry out ophthalmoscopy, tonometry and perimetry, prescribe and fit spectacles and contact lenses, use diagnostic drugs, test ocular motions, and refer patients to ophthalmologists. The Lithuanian Association of Optometrists, founded in 2006 and currently consisting of 140 members, considers this development as a significant achievement in the recognition of optometry as a profession by the Lithuanian authorities. Prior to this legal act, the above listed services were provided to patients without legislation, even though optometrists have been practicing for more than ten years.

Originally, the optometry programme was established in 2004 at the Department of Physics, Faculty of Natural Sciences, at the Šiauliai University. Therefore, the approximately 260 optometrists currently practising in Lithuania hold a Bachelor's Degree in the physical sciences. In accordance with the new legislation, they will need to complete professional training courses of a set number of academic hours (150–450 hours depending on practice years) provided by the Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University. To obtain a licence to practice optometry, these training courses must be completed before 1 January 2023. The Lithuanian Association of Optometrists contributes to organising professional conferences and workshops with the aim of providing continuing education hours required for the licence.



*Board and sponsors of the Lithuanian Association of Optometrists (LAO)*

The recognition of optometry as a health care profession has led to the establishment of a Bachelor's degree in optometry and a programme with a curriculum in the biomedical sciences at the Faculty of Medicine, Vilnius University. Consequently, the optometry programme at Šiauliai University has been closed, and it is expected that a new programme of optometry will be available for studies at Vilnius University from 1 September 2020 onwards. However, it should be noted that the optics profession has not obtained official status and is not legally regulated. At the moment, educational institutions in Lithuania do not offer studies in optics.



## Spain — White Paper on Visual Health in Spain 2019

*by Juan Carlos Martínez Moral*

The Spanish General Council Optometry (the professional Association of Opticians-Optometrists) has issued a [White Paper on Visual Health in Spain](#). The Libro Blanco consists of three parts: expert opinion, social research, and future challenges.

The first part outlines the views of different health experts and key social experts on eye health in Spain. All experts underline the important primary care role Opticians-Optometrists play in the Spanish National Health System. Among the experts are Dr. García-Sala, chairman of the Spanish Paediatric Primary Care Association (SEPEAP); Dr. Llisterri, chairman of the Spanish Association of Primary Care Physicians (SEMERGEN) and Dr. López Trigo, chairman of the Spanish Geriatrics and Gerontology Association (SEGG).

The second part of the *Libro Blanco* reflects on the outcome of a social research project, which was based on an eye health survey targeting the Spanish population. The survey revealed that 67% of the Spanish people experiences visual impairment and that this problem affects more than 28 million individuals in the country. 32% of Spanish citizens indicated that they do not frequently get their eyes tested and 40% of those who do usually go to the optician-optometrist. 33% of Spanish citizens go to a private ophthalmologist. The survey also revealed problems around access to eye care services, mainly due to the fact that the Public Health System only covers 20% of the healthcare demand. 73% of periodical vision tests are carried out in privately-owned facilities or clinics.

“Future challenges”, the third part of the Libro Blanco, touches upon the significant role of Optician-Optometrists as primary visual health care professionals. Providing qualified professionals and an extensive network of primary healthcare facilities that help address the challenges faced by the public healthcare model, Opticians-Optometrists are vital in supporting disease detection, disease prevention and fostering health promotion more broadly.

# Update from the European Academy of Optometry and Optics

## 10 Years of EAOO and upcoming annual conference

By Ana-Maria Nia

This year represents an important milestone for the European Academy of Optometry and Optics – we are turning 10 years old! Since our launch in 2009, we have provided a forum where researchers, experts and practitioners can come together to share successes and challenges and learn from each other's experiences. Our flagship event, the annual conference, has grown year after year, and has established itself as one of the leading scientific conferences in optometry and optics.

A testament to this growing recognition is the fact that we have received a record number of 150 abstracts for this year's conference. For ROME2019, we are delighted to bring you a rich programme that dives into key topics for optometry, optics and visual sciences, including:

Keynote lectures:

- **Saturday 18 May - Managing Myopia: Why? How? Who? And When?**, delivered by Prof. Ian Flitcroft, consultant paediatric ophthalmologist principally based at the Children's University Hospital, Dublin (Ireland), and Associate Clinical Professor of Ophthalmology in UCD and Adjunct Professor of Vision Science in DIT.
- **Sunday 19 May - Vision and falls**, delivered by Prof. David Elliott, School of Optometry & Vision Science, University of Bradford (United Kingdom).
- **Monday 20 May - "Uberisation" of the optometric profession**, delivered by Jean-Philippe Sayag, Acep ABS.

Joint EAOO – AOO Symposium:

- **Sunday 19 May - Evolving Eye Care for Children: Current Perspectives on Vision Screening, Amblyopia Treatment, & Myopia Control**, presented by Prof. Susan Cotter, Prof. Bruce Evans and Dr. Einat Shneur.

Dedicated tracks on optics and optical concepts, anterior eye, paediatric care, binocular vision, myopia, contact lens, and many more! Check out the preliminary conference programme [here](#) and don't [forget to register!](#) ECOO delegates benefit from a combined ECOO + EAOO ticket.



The poster features a background image of the Roman Forum in Rome at sunset. At the top left is the EAOO logo, a stylized eye with stars. To its right is the text 'ROME 2019' in a large, serif font, with 'DOMVS OF OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS' in a smaller font below it. The dates 'May | 18 · 19 · 20' are centered below the title. The main title 'EAOO Annual Conference' is centered below the dates. A paragraph of text follows: 'The conference will bring together professionals from over 30 countries to discuss and share the latest research, education and clinical practice in optometry, optics and vision science.' At the bottom, there is a line for 'Programme & registration at' followed by the website 'www.federottica.org/rome2019'. On the right side, there are logos for 'eaoo' (European Academy of Optometry and Optics) and 'Federottica', with the text 'with AdOO, ALOeO, SOPTI' below them.

## Update from the World Council of Optometry

### WCO Partners with BHVIF for Myopia Awareness Week

by the World Council of Optometry

The World Council of Optometry (WCO) is excited to be partnering with myopia leaders, Brien Holden Vision Institute Foundation for Myopia Awareness Week - May 13-17, 2019. Together we will be inspiring action in caregivers to protect their children's vision and changing the way optometrists understand and treat myopia. "We know that almost half the world's population will be myopic by the year 2050, with nearly one billion people in the high myopia category. Myopia Awareness Week is about getting people talking about myopia in homes and optometry practices around the world," stated WCO President Dr. Scott Mundle.



### Upcoming meetings

The WCO invites you to join us for the 3rd World Congress of Optometry and Academy 2019 Orlando joint meeting in sunny Orlando, Florida, USA from October 23-27, 2019! We are pleased to be partnering with our member, the American Academy of Optometry (AAO) for this exciting event. The 3<sup>rd</sup> World Congress of Optometry aims to strengthen the presence and impact of optometry globally by offering opportunities for education, collaboration and networking. We hope you will join us! Watch the video [here](#) and please visit [the website](#) for additional information and submission guidelines.



### Committee meetings

Finally, our Education, Public Health and Legislation, Registration and Standards Committees regularly meet and discusses issues relevant to the ECOO region. For more information, please contact [garry.marlen@worldoptometry.org](mailto:garry.marlen@worldoptometry.org).

## ECOO upcoming meeting

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The next ECOO General Assembly will take place from 16 to 18 May 2019 in Rome, Italy. Registration is open, and all the information is available on the [ECOO website](#).

## Subscribe to the newsletter!

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The ECOO newsletters are sent by e-mail to members and affiliated members of ECOO. For information on how ECOO manages your data, please consult our [Data Privacy Policy](#). If you wish to access or modify your data, please send an e-mail to [secretariat@ecoo.info](mailto:secretariat@ecoo.info). You can also consult our [Access Right Policy](#).

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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