



Message from the President

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

Dear friends and colleagues,

We have new members knocking on the door for membership. During the next General Assembly, they will have the opportunity to present themselves before their membership application is considered for a vote. This represents a positive development for ECOO, as representing a wider pool of members is key in advancing our profession in Europe.

This summer, 17 students received the European Diploma in Optometry, with more to follow this fall. This is a testament to the enthusiasm and hard work of students and universities, who see the opportunities and benefits the Diploma brings. We look forward to welcoming them as part of the alumni network, which has recently been launched. Education at a high common standard is a factor of success for the profession, and contributes to fulfilling ECOO's core objective, which is to have a uniform scope of practice across Europe. We are happy to see that two universities in Finland have recently expressed their interest in seeking accreditation. It is important that we all communicate on the advantages of the Diploma in our respective countries.

Another way to drive the profession forward is through the work that we do in collaboration with the European Coalition for Vision (ECV) and the European Forum Against Blindness (EFAB). By working together with other professions and groups such as ophthalmologists and patient associations, we

are stronger in raising awareness about the need for better eye health in Europe, and present a common case in conversations with regulatory experts and politicians. Building bridges with other stakeholders and consolidating our position at EU level is one of the main objectives for ECOO over the next three years, as endorsed by the General Assembly in Berlin.

We are working closely with the World Council of Optometry in updating our Blue Book. With your input from your respective countries, we have achieved to produce a comprehensive overview of the state of optometry and optics in Europe. This has been very useful in providing input to the European Commission in its work on the Mutual Evaluation process. ECOO has also been in contact with the WCO about the need for a balanced representation that reflects the regions, and we feel this has started a positive discussion in the WCO executive.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to prepare for the elections that will take place at the next General Assembly in October. Registrations for the meeting in Ljubljana on 14-16 October have opened, and I hope to see you all there!

Wish you all a nice sunny summer and hope to see you all in Ljubljana in October!

Paul Folkesson
President ECOO



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Photos from the ECOO General Assembly in Berlin

ECOO members met on 19-21 May in Berlin for the General Assembly and related meetings. A selection of photos from the event is available below. Members had the opportunity to breakout into several discussion groups and address key topics of relevance to optometry and optics in Europe. The input collected from members will feed into the different position papers.

The meeting was also an opportunity for members 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 a practitioner. The ECOO business plan for the next three years was adopted and new opportunities to engage in public affairs activities in Brussels were discussed.

The ECOO General Assembly in Berlin



Credit for photos Per Michael Larsen

Shaping ECOO's agenda: a message from the Committees

By Martin O'Brien (chair of PS Committee) and Per Michael Larsen (chair of PAE Committee)

ECOO is a membership organisation where each country has one vote at the General Assembly. The Executive committee is elected to oversee the work of ECOO, supported by the Secretariat and the Secretary General. Over the years ECOO has had a number of different standing committees, of various names, covering the full scope of work that ECOO carries out. At the moment there are two main Committees under the stewardship of the Executive: the Public Affairs & Economics Committee (PAE) and the Professional Services Committee (PS).

At recent General Assemblies, there has been some discussion of the distinction of topics between the committees. The Chairs of the PAE & PS Committees have therefore jointly authored this article to outline the *raison d'être* of the current committee structure.

One concern of delegates has been that the names of the two committees do not seem to fully or accurately indicate the 'work' carried out by each of the two committees. The role and work of

the committees is not tightly proscribed and is generally agreed on a consensual basis between the committees via the committee secretaries and chairs. All delegates, not just particular committee members, are welcome to suggest projects or tasks for either of the committees to work on. When suggestions are received they are discussed at the Executive and assigned to one of the committees based on several criteria including- relevance to ongoing projects, committee members with a special interest in the topic or relevant expertise and where a committee has capacity.

In general the Public Affairs and Economic Committee tends to be involved in projects looking outward from the profession and engaging with regulators, other stakeholders etc., along with issues that have an economic impact (e.g. VAT). The Professional Services Committee tends to look more at issues that have an impact on the professions themselves.

To take an example, Display Screen Equipment / Visual Display Unit: the



two committees may both have ongoing work on the topic- the PAE Committee would tend to look at whether and how to lobby for updating of the EU Directives, and how best to engage with other stakeholders etc. The PS Committee would tend to look at guidelines for use by professionals, information sharing in relation to best practice etc.

All delegates attending ECOO are eligible and welcome to stand for election to either of the committees and delegates are reminded that details for nomination for elections in October will soon be available from the ECOO Secretariat.

Regulatory Updates

The **mutual evaluation** exercise continues to be an important topic for ECOO. As a follow-up to the conference organised by the European Commission on 18 May ([recording available online](#)), a [new consultation has been launched](#). The consultation seeks to gather further input from interested stakeholders, until 19 August. There are two parts to the consultation. The first part gathers feedback on the national action plans and the second part on an analyti-

cal framework for use by EU countries when reviewing regulation to ensure that measures are proportionate.

Following months of negotiation on the medical devices regulation (and the in vitro diagnostic **medical devices** regulation) a compromise deal has been struck by the Council, Parliament and Commission. As expected, plano contact lenses have been included in the scope of the new regulation, which

will ensure highest patient safety. In terms of next steps, following their legal-linguistic review the two draft regulations will be adopted by the Council and the Parliament plenary, probably at the end of the year. The new rules will apply three years after publication in the official journal for the medical devices regulation (and five years for the in vitro diagnostic medical devices regulation).

Country updates

Optometrist involvement leads to top healthcare award for cataract post-operative scheme in Ireland

By Martin O'Brien, Chair of Education, AOI; chair of PS Committee, ECOO

The award for Overall Best Project was presented to the Ophthalmology Service being delivered by Sligo University Hospital and Sligo, Leitrim and West Cavan Community Health Organisation. The Ophthalmology Service in Sligo University Hospital joined forces with local optometrists to create an improved model of care for patients. Ophthalmology departments all over Ireland have one of the longest waiting lists for patients to access services and care, with the average delay before an appointment with the doctor of 18-24 months.

Project lead, consultant ophthalmologist Paul Mullaney contacted the Association of Optometrists Ireland (AOI) to suggest a pilot project to reduce waiting lists and improve patient service, with community based optometrists carrying out post-operative follow-up review of patients in optical practices rather than returning to the hospital. The AOI and Sligo University Hospital agreed a protocol for optometrists to follow.

The AOI underwrote the cost of the IT infrastructure to enable the project and covered the administration costs of setting up the pilot and provided subsidised training to participating practitioners (some of which were optometrists practicing in the area who were not members of the AOI). One of the key technology enablers for the success of the project was the IT framework to allow community optometrists to directly access and complete the Electronic Patient Record (EPR) of the patients held in the hospital. This allowed the project lead and other hospital administrators / clinicians to review the work carried out in the community by 70 trained and accredited community Optometrists in 45 practice locations.

Data from the first audit review by the hospital, following the first year of operation of the pilot scheme, showed that 1,422 patients were referred to community Optometrists. This freed up a similar number of appointments

in the hospital ophthalmology department which were used to reduce waiting times from over 2 years to less than 12 months. Based on 1422 per year @ 15 mins. per patient, there is a clinical cost saving of 355 clinical hours per year.

[A paper](#) regarding this pilot project was presented at the European Society of Cataract & Refractive Surgeons (ECRS) in London 2014. Quoting directly from the conclusions of the Abstract – *"As a result of the shared care scheme there were fewer postoperative follow-up appointments to the hospital over the course of the six months. Optometrists provided an excellent postoperative care service with superior postoperative feedback rates compared to hospital doctors and similar rates of re-referring for second eye surgery. The use of EPR facilitates a postoperative shared care pathway that is of high quality and efficiency with major economic advantages."*

The final seven projects for the Health Service Excellence Awards 2016 were selected from an original entry of 426 projects. They were chosen by the Selection Panel after 39 projects were shortlisted and invited to make presentations detailing their projects aims and objectives.

Even though the award was presented to the Sligo University Hospital, without the contributions and dedication of the optometrists who participated; and the financial and in-kind support of the Association of Optometrists Ireland the project could not have operated nor have been successful.



Use of diagnostic drugs by optometrists now permitted in Sweden

By Paul Folkesson, Optikerförbundet President; ECOO President



The Swedish Optometric Association (Optikerförbundet) has been working hard for numerous years on behalf of well-educated Swedish optometrists to obtain the possibility to use diagnostics. The efforts of Optikerförbundet have been supported by the Swedish Professional Association of Ophthalmologists, as well of The Swedish Medical Association (SMA).

In its decision of 2 May 2013 (SFS 2013:246), the Swedish Parliament stated that optometrists meeting requirements of education should have access to diagnostic drugs. However, this decision required a deliverance by both the National Board of Health and Welfare and the Medical Products Agency in co-operation. In the view of the Swedish Optometric Association, having a delivery of a Parliament decision by more than one public authority is affecting decision gravely.

However, thanks to a continuous dialogue with the relevant authorities in Sweden and numerous meetings, Optikerförbundet was able to have the Parliament decision delivered by the public authority (National Board of Health and Welfare (HSLF-FS 2016:41); the Medical Products Agency (HSLF-FS 2016:34). Thus, from September 1st, all Swedish optometrists that meet requirements have access to using diagnostic drugs.

Optics and optometry in Slovenia

By Matjaž Mihelčič, DOOS president



Optics and optometry in Slovenia were historically strongly influenced by DACH model, as Austrian, German and Swiss colleagues were helping the Slovenian Optical Association (Društvo očesnih optikov Slovenije - DOOS) to educate first "optical masters" already more than 25 years ago. Former DOOS president and past ECOO president, Janez Gobec, organized several courses in collaboration with renowned specialists as Gustav Pöltner, Edi Posch and Hilmar Busacker. In 2002, in Slovenia the "Meister" model was officially adopted and the exams in refraction and contact lens fitting took place every year. The examination rooms were set in the optical school in Rogaška Slatina. After 2004, also Croatian group was educated in this facility; the courses were led by Janez Gobec, Gustav Pöltner and Matjaž Mihelčič. This came very handy some years later, as this group of Croatian colleagues pushed forward the project of Optometry study in Velika Gorica in Croatia, which today still is the only University offering optometry programme in both countries.

In the years 2005 – 2008 the "Meistercourses" were slowed down by anticipation of the possible optometry course at the University of Ljubljana. The programme was prepared and the habilitation field was opened, there were even some lecturers registered. Even an agreement with University Eye Hospital about clinical praxis was made and there

was a large agreement about implementation of optometric profession into primary care. However, the University required at least 30 students per year, which was far too much for 2 million population of Slovenia and the Hospital withdrew the agreement. In 2008 the courses in Velika Gorica in Croatia started, so Slovenian candidates were able to study there and there need to have an own school decreased (the distance between Ljubljana, the capitol of Slovenia and Velika Gorica is only about 120 km).

Meanwhile, some political steps forward were taken: in 2008, the profession of optometry entered the National standard classification as an independent healthcare profession. The scope of practice, as well as regulation of the profession was not yet made. In the field however, there were and still are good relationships with ophthalmologists, many private practice MDs employing optometrists in their clinics.

The major issue in the optical / optometric field at the moment in Slovenia stays the insurance system causing inequalities in business. On one hand, the system offers relatively high reimbursement for glasses and contact lenses (40 to 300 EUR each 2 years, depending on the ametropia), provided, the aids were prescribed by an ophthalmologist at an exam, which was also paid by the state. On the other hand, an optometrist cannot

make a contract with the insurance company, since the profession is not regulated. Some optical chains employing ophthalmologists managed to get the registration to bill the prescription of glasses with insurance and sell them at the same time, which is also true for some private practice ophthalmologists. In the reality, many patients wait for months to get free glasses from such a company - which is seen as violating the rules of equality in business in the eyes of most opticians and optometrists. At the recent meeting, all the parties (Ministry for health, Handicraft chamber and Ophthalmologist society) agreed that the system should be changed, but this might last since politics is involved. Nevertheless, during the last year, the standard in Slovenia is rising again, so even "small optical enterprises" with tradition and good services (optometry being certainly most important one) seem to be able to survive on the middle run. The association keeps focus on education: we organize CET seminars at least three times yearly and a big regional conference in Portorož, which shifts every second year with OCCSEE conference in Croatia. The quality of optical services stays at a good level and we at the association are looking into future with big expectations.

The next autumn ECOO meeting will be organised in Ljubljana, Slovenia.

Update from the Academy

European Academy of Optometry and Optics most successful conference to date

By Caroline Christie, EAOO Manager

The 8th Annual European Academy of Optometry and Optics' conference, Berlin 2016, hosted by Beuth University of Applied Sciences 19-22 May 2016, has been hailed the most successful to date.

The three day conference and European Council of Optometry and Optics' (ECOO) spring meeting, attracted over 370 delegates – a record number. Delegates from 42 countries including Hong Kong, South Korea, The Russian Federation, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Trinidad and Tobago, Chile, Canada and the USA, as well as a core of European nations, meant the European Academy's meeting had a truly international feel, while retaining its uniquely European ambience.

Berlin 2016 saw an increase in attendance of both under and postgraduate students from across Europe and beyond resulting in the overall delegate group encompassing the entire scope of the professions of optometry and optics – from training, through clinical practice and research to the educators and leaders in the profession. The scale and scope of Berlin 2016's content reflected 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.

The programme content organised in three primary tracks included – clinical hot topics, educational advancement plus the latest research findings. Within each track there were plenty opportunities for delegates to engage with a wide range of topics in a variety of learning modes - skills (hands-on) workshops,



round-table peer discussions, rapid fire short presentations, dedicated poster sessions, in addition to the opportunity pose questions to Keynote presenters. The Academy Special Interest Groups (SIGS) were as ever filled with lively debate around the chosen specialist subject areas and the SIG leaders wish to encourage participants to become active members of the on-line forums once the excitement of this weekend has passed, it is a great way to stay connected with the Academy and fellow members with similar interests whether they be clinical, educational or research.

One unique characteristic of the academy conference is the co-location with the European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) meeting. This means that the clinicians, educators and researchers are joined by the representatives from the leading national organisations for optometry and optics in Europe, ensuring a rich and diverse mix of delegates that fuels enjoyable and challenging conversations both in the sessions and in the networking spaces in between.

The Closing Ceremony, included the award of Fellowship to 14 new Academy Fellows, from across the spectrum of optometry and optics. The prestig-

ious award of Fellowship is recognition of members who have made a significant contribution to the practice of optometry and/or optics at a local, national or international level.

Commenting on the event, Dr Mireia Pacheco-Cutillas, President of the Academy said: "It is inspiring to see so many delegates here from so many different backgrounds, and particularly so many students, the future of our profession. We are here with a common goal - to further advance eye care across Europe. The Academy conference goes from strength to strength each year and I'm delighted Berlin 2016 has been the most successful to date. I wish to thank our hosts, presenters, facilitators, exhibitors, and the Academy Team who have worked so hard to contribute to this success. I am already looking forward to 2017, when the Academy Conference will be hosted in association with The Spanish General Council of Optometry in my home city of Barcelona."

**Save the Date,
Barcelona 2017,
12th -14th May, 2017.**

Update from the World Council of Optometry



A Passage to India

By Mark Bullimore, Executive Director WCO

Please forgive my borrowing the title of EM Forster's classic of 20th century English literature, but I wanted to highlight ongoing optometric developments in India.

Optometry was introduced in India in 1958 at a "diploma in optometry" level under a national program by the Ministry of Health. Optometry subsequently evolved and there are some 50 programs featuring Bachelors, Masters and even PhD degrees.

Earlier in 2016, the Indian Ministry of Health approved a four-year Bachelors of Optometry curriculum. This is due to the efforts of many within Indian optometry and, in part, support from the world optometry community. The curriculum will replace all diploma programs by 2020 and thus optometry will be exclusively a graduate profession in India.

This upgrade lays the groundwork for optometry become a fully regulated profession in the near future, so that nobody without a four-year optometry education may call themselves an "optometrist". We congratulate our colleagues in India for this landmark step and look forward to further advances.

In a related story, plans are accelerating for our 2nd World Congress of Optometry in Hyderabad on September 11-13 2017. The [website](#) is live, although there is little to see beyond our new logo. Please bookmark the page so you can keep up to date as the program evolves and more information is posted. Of course, we'll be sending regular emails to all our constituents and friends.





2nd WORLD CONGRESS OF Optometry

An initiative of the World Council of Optometry

Hyderabad - India
Hyderabad International Convention Centre

11, 12 and 13 of September 2017

Presented In Conjunction With The 21st APOC



ECOO upcoming meeting

ECOO Autumn 2016, Ljubljana (Slovenia)

We're excited to announce that registrations are now open for the ECOO Autumn General Assembly on 14-16 October 2016 in Ljubljana. The meeting is kindly organised by the Optical Association of Slovenia (Društvo očesnih optikov Slovenije - DOOS), who are preparing an interesting event!

You may find more information on the programme, the conference venue and hotel, by visiting the [ECOO website](#).



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:

E-mail: secretariat@ecoo.info

Telephone: +32 (0)2 580 05 32

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