

NEWSLETTER
JUNE | 2022

VOLUME 18 | ISSUE 2



European
Council of
Optometry
and Optics

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DEAR ECOO MEMBERS,



Firstly, it was so good to see many of you in person at our recent Spring General Assembly in Dublin, Ireland. What a difference it made to be able to network and renew our personal relationships, and indeed to meet and make new contacts. This is all so important to the work and function of ECOO. It was particularly moving to hear our members talk about their humanitarian work for Ukrainian refugees and the good work that is being done to help orphans in Hungary. I would like to reiterate my sincere thanks to the team at Optometry Ireland for making the event happen – and so successfully - in such uncertain and changing times.

I am also glad that we were finally able to thank Bob Chappell in person for his enormous contribution to ECOO over the years, including as a past ECOO President and more recently as Chair of the Board of Management. We owe him a huge debt of gratitude for all of his efforts to harmonise optometry and optics across Europe and whilst his presence will be sorely missed, that great work continues.

Looking forward, we will meet again at the Autumn General Assembly in a few months time. I am confident that we will continue to build on our recent work and discussions and have another successful meeting. I look forward to meeting up with you in Malta!

Dr Cindy Tromans
ECOO President



Spring Meetings 2022



ECOO SPRING GENERAL ASSEMBLY MEETINGS IN DUBLIN



After over two years of online events, ECOO was delighted to finally be able to hold an in person General Assembly and spring meetings 12-14 May 2022 in Dublin. The meetings were hosted by ECOO member Optometry Ireland and held alongside the European Academy of Optometry and Optics conference.

Highlights of the meetings included a [video message](#) from the Irish Minister for Health, Stephen Donnelly TD, in which he recognised the pivotal role of community optometrists to the delivery of core eye-care services and the potential to play an even greater role as part of the transformation of health and social care services.



The General Assembly also heard more about the impact of the pandemic on eye care services, with the results of a survey of members being presented. The results highlighted that there was a widespread sense of the pandemic providing opportunities for eye care providers despite the challenges. As a result there was a sense that the sector had emerged more resilient and in many cases better able to engage with healthcare authorities and other healthcare providers. ECOO partner, GfK, provided a presentation on the optical market as it emerges from the pandemic which showed signs of recovery across the board.

There were also both welcomes and farewells at the GA. ECOO welcomed Synsinformasjon from Norway and the newly formed Austrian Optometric Association as new members. And it also bade a fond farewell to retiring Chair of the Board of Management, Bob Chappell ([see full article on page 8](#)).

There were lively discussions in the two committee meetings, and in particular at the workshop, which encouraged members to consider what more they could do to have eye care understood as an important part of healthy ageing, and included in strategies, work programmes and people's own health care management.



It was clear that ECOO members really relished the opportunity to talk to each other in person, to share information and ideas, to catch up with old friends and to make new connections.





ON THE EU AGENDA

CONSULTATION ON THE REVISION OF THE DRIVING LICENCE DIRECTIVE

As part of the ongoing review of the Driving Licence Directive at EU-level, ECOO responded to a public consultation in May 2022 and participated in a targeted survey, conducted in the context of a support study on the impact assessment for the revision of the Directive. On 19 May 2022 ECOO also attended the third of three workshops for experts of Member States and representatives of selected stakeholders which considered, among other issues, medical fitness. ECOO was invited to present at the workshop and highlighted that adequate vision standards are an integral part of medical fitness to drive and emphasised that the minimum requirements need to be defined and respected throughout Europe. The role of opticians/optometrists in carrying out relevant eye examinations has also been outlined. The proposal of the revised Directive is expected to be published by the end of the year and will then enter the legislative decision making process.

EUROPEAN CARE STRATEGY

The European Care Strategy was announced by Commission President, Ursula von der Leyen, and aims to ensure that people who need care have access to good quality affordable care at all life stages. On 29 March 2022, in response to the Commission's call for evidence on the European Care Strategy, ECOO called on the European Commission to include vision and eye health in the European Commission

Communication on a European Care Strategy and in its proposal for a Council Recommendation on long-term care, which are expected to be released in Q3 of 2022.

E-HEALTH

The European Commission published the proposal for a regulation on the European Health Data Space (EHDS) on 3 May 2022. The EHDS aims to empower people to control and utilise their health data in their home country or in other Member States and to foster a genuine single market for digital health services and products. It will also offer a consistent, trustworthy and efficient framework to use health data for research, innovation, policy-making and regulatory activities, while ensuring full compliance with the EU's high data protection standards. ECOO continues to monitor the progress of these proposals and attend Commission meetings to develop this proposal.

We also continue to monitor developments in e-health, m-health and artificial intelligence (AI) and will as appropriate provide information and guidance to members.

SUSTAINABILITY

The European Commission has begun to publish information about a range of initiatives as part of the Green Deal and the circular economy. ECOO is monitoring those that may have specific impacts on eye care professionals or optical practices and will provide information and briefings accordingly.

FLUORESCEIN STRIPS

THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSEVERANCE WHEN LOBBYING

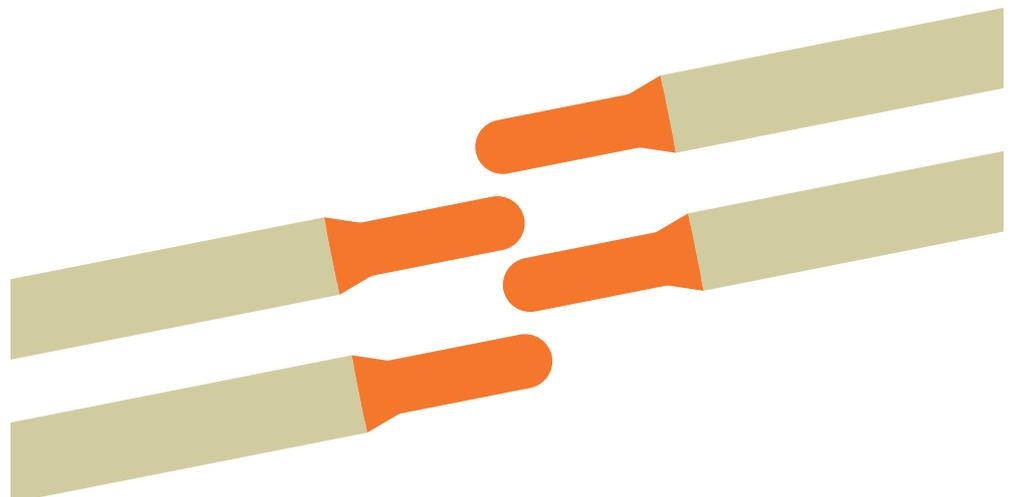
Since they were first manufactured fluorescein strips have been used as medical devices by eye care professionals across Europe on a regular basis. However, in 2012 a supply issue arose with regard to fluorescein strips as medical devices when national competent authorities enforced a non-binding EU guidance document stating that fluorescein ophthalmic strips for diagnostic purposes were medicinal products.

This marked the beginning of a ten year period of uncertainty around the classification of fluorescein strips, which are also extensively used as medical devices for non-diagnostic purposes in the fitting of contact lenses by qualified eye care professionals. When this issue became apparent, ECOO raised the matter with the European Commission and has engaged on a regular basis, presenting explanations and the evidence base for the various safe uses of fluorescein strips.

Following the Medical Devices Regulation coming into force on 26

May 2021, the guidance documents have been revised to ensure they are in line with the new legislative framework for medical devices. This presented an opportunity to ensure fluorescein strips were correctly classified. ECOO and its members, in cooperation with other organisations such as EUROMCONTACT, reached out to the relevant contacts at EU and national level and had constructive discussions on this issue.

In April 2022, the new guidance document was published and includes fluorescein strips with a dual classification. This means that for the fitting of contact lenses they are classified as a medical device. Our perseverance in pursuing this clarification in the guidance document has proven successful and this outcome ensures that qualified eye care professionals can use fluorescein as medical devices in contact lens fitting, which is a crucial factor to ensure the safe fitting of these devices. At the same time the supply of the strips as medical devices has also been ensured.



A FAREWELL TO BOB CHAPPELL



At the ECOO GA in Dublin, Cindy Tromans expressed her delight at finally being able to properly mark the retirement of Dr Robert Chappell, OBE, and to pay tribute to him in person. Bob retired as Chair of the Board of Management (BoM) at the end of 2020, after more than 10 years in that role, and from many years of active involvement with ECOO.

As Cindy noted, “Bob started his political career early on when he got fed up with the way that optometry students were being treated and was told to get on and do something about it! He duly did so and became the first President of the new City University Students Union. And Bob has continued to do something about lots of things ever since!”

Bob has made an immense contribution to optometry and optics in the UK, Europe and world-wide, driven by his desire to achieve improvements for the sector. He has always had a particular interest in facilitating the free movement of professionals between countries and mutual recognition of qualifications. As Chair of the BoM, he set up and managed the examination activity for the European Diploma (ED), and then, along with Adrian Jennings, led on

the transition as the ED moved to an accreditation scheme.

Julie-Anne Little, his successor on the European Qualifications Board, observed that “Bob is the hardest working man I know, but his knowledge and professionalism makes this appear effortless. Filling such big shoes as Bob’s has taken two people to continue the work that Bob has started.”

Commenting on the work Bob had carried out for ECOO and others over the years, she added “We really would not be in the position we are in were it not for Bob’s deep commitment to optometry and optics.”

It was therefore only fitting then, that when addressing ECOO members Bob chose not to just reflect on the past but to set a new challenge for those who follow him. He reminded members that the EU motto is “united in diversity”, and that the optical sector 30 years ago “had plenty of diversity but not much unity”. There have been great steps forward towards harmonisation and accreditation. But the big barrier remains the relationship with ophthalmology. Bob therefore set all members the challenge to engage more at national level with ophthalmology so that optometry and optics can continue to progress as part of primary care.

Bob Chappell was a long term member of the ECOO Board, including time as President of ECOO from 2006-2007. He became President of the World Council of Optometry in 2009 and has also served on the board of the International Association for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB). In the UK, Bob was a Council Member of the British Optical Association from 1978 and upon creation of the College of Optometrists in 1980 became a member of College Council, remaining on the Council until 2007, including as President from 1992 – 1994. He was Master of the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers in 2003 and a member of the General Optical Council from 1983 – 2008.

For his services to optometry Bob was awarded an OBE in the 1995 Queens Birthday honours list. In 2009 he was awarded Life Fellowship of the UK College of Optometrists for his outstanding contribution to the profession. And in 2017 the WCO presented him with the Distinguished Service award in Hyderabad.

COUNTRY UPDATES

BULGARIAN OPTOMETRISTS AND OPTICIANS PROVIDE EYE CARE TO UKRAINIAN REFUGEES

Mina Stoyanova – Dimitrova, NABOO



It all started quite casually, without much effort, but we were committed from the bottom of our hearts and the initiative developed extremely fast!

On 9 March 2022 a very close friend of mine called me. She was very excited but also worried. She asked me, "Can you give me advice on where to make 7 pairs of glasses for Ukrainian refugees?!" She also wanted me to advise her where cheaper glasses could be made, because people fleeing bombs and war have lost, broken or forgotten their glasses and they have no money!

I replied that I could not give advice – but I could give a solution! I invited these people to come to my optical centre. Later in the day, it turned out that three of the children concerned were in Varna and she panicked that they would not be able to come to Sofia - the distance is over 530 kilometers. I asked her to give me some time.

On 29 October 2010, I and two other colleagues had created a Facebook

group, Opticians and Optometrists in Bulgaria, which now has over 1600 members, colleagues from across the country. I asked the group specifically about the children in Varna and if anyone would be ready to help three children from Ukraine - And a MIRACLE happened!!!

In only a few minutes over 10 opticians got involved and still more wanted to!

In order for this initiative to have authority, we promoted it through NABOO. NABOO also has its own Facebook page, and on the evening of 9 March I published details of all the opticians who had expressed a desire to help and there was a wave of support!!!

By 13 March 2022 there were already 35 opticians signed up and the number of applicants was growing every day. The Facebook post had over 11,500 views and a lot of shares. I myself had not expected such a wave of sympathy.

So we hired NABOOs' lawyer to prepare all the documentation which would be necessary. This included:

- A review of personal documents for establishing refugee status or a personal document certifying when they entered the country
- Donation agreement between the optician and the Ukrainian refugees
- A donation agreement between those wholesale suppliers who had readily joined this initiative and the opticians involved
- GDPR Declaration
- Consent for a medical examination (mandatory for children!) or a test by an optometrist.

Not long after, I received an invitation to participate in a TV interview and I connected the journalist with the colleagues from Varna who had made the first gesture even before this initiative was started.

By 25 May 2022 Bulgarian opticians had donated 142 pairs of glasses and 40 pairs of contact lenses with consumables. As I write, we are still making glasses for people from Ukraine – we have now provided over 190 pairs - and we will continue to do it while we can!

I am really proud of the opticians and optometrists across Bulgaria! Many of the colleagues involved in the initiative are not even members of NABOO, but simple words such as empathy and mutual help united us!

Every day we receive gratitude and thanks! And the sweetest words I heard were from the host of the TV interview: “Mrs. Dimitrova, YOU and NABOO made the optical map of Bulgaria called GOODNESS!”

HUNGARY: PROGRAMME TO PROVIDE EYE CARE TO CHILDREN IN ORPHANAGES AND FOSTER HOMES

Zsolt Szabadi, Magyar Látyszerész Szövetség



The Hungarian Optical Association (Magyar Látyszerész Szövetség) has been working for the past year on a project to provide eye care for children in orphanages. With the strapline “See, that they may see too!” the project demonstrates the values of working in partnership to achieve positive outcomes. This has been done in partnership with the Ministry of Human Resources, the Hungarian University of Sports Sciences, and the Klebelsberg Institute, the head office of all Hungarian elementary schools.

The idea for the project started in 2018, as part of the **Month of Vision** campaign, when 65 eye examinations were carried out on children in orphanages, resulting in 40 pairs of glasses being provided to children. This had many positive outcomes - happy children but also happy eye care professionals. In the past glasses had been provided as a charitable service, but only on an individual basis. It gave a good feeling personally to help others and it was good to be active in group work. Added to which it gave lots of publicity, on both TV and radio, for the optical sector

There was a strong desire to repeat the experience and to grow it. And so work began in 2020 and was given the green light in April 2020. The Covid lockdowns actually helped because it gave us time to work out what we wanted to do and plan how to do it. Our objectives were to start a new charity activity with a clear focus, to reposition how the optical profession is seen and to build new contacts.

The pilot finally got underway in October 2021, since when 5 events have been held, 170 children have been seen and 110 pairs of glasses have been provided. More than 70% of the children had never had an eye examination before, and 60% of the children needed vision correction. So again, the results were happy children, shocked teachers, and politicians starting to understand the importance of our profession and again more publicity for the sector.

I was proud to present the project to my European colleagues in ECOO at the General Assembly in Dublin. Following this, in June 2022 the Hungarian Optical Association organised a meeting with all partners and all the big players in

the optical sector – practice owners, manufacturers and distributors – where we provided an update on the pilot.

But we have still bigger ambitions. The full project has 4 levels: i) providing free eye examinations and glasses to children in all orphanages (around 8,000 children), ii) providing a special discount card to members of the foster parents network, iii) optometrists providing vision checking for the baby care nurse network, and iv) running the elementary school optical programme. We are optimistic we can do this because following our June meeting, we received many promises of support, including from Hankook Tire Hungary, who will provide support (accommodation and employment)

to children when they leave the orphanage at the age of 18, and we also hope from a major pharmacy company.

Because of this project, the Hungarian Optical Association has a renewed and strengthened partnership with political decision makers and is now in discussions to increase the competences of optometrists, and to have independent legal status for our own optical school. The project also resulted in an invitation from the President of the University of Sports Sciences to give a presentation to sports teachers and coaches about the importance of eye health and providing vision correction. This in turn has led to invitations to present to trainee teachers at three more universities.

***But for us what really matters is the children.
Our salary is the smiles of the children!***

OPTOMETRY IRELAND AND THE EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS HONOUR MARTIN O'BRIEN



Martin O'Brien, ECOO delegate for Optometry Ireland (OI), who led for OI on the organisation of the ECOO spring meetings in Dublin and the Academy conference, was recognised for his contribution to optometry at the ECOO Dublin meetings. Optometry Ireland awarded him an honorary fellowship of the association, and the European Academy of Optometry and Optics also awarded him a fellowship.

Martin O'Brien (right) with Optometry Ireland President, John Weldon and ECOO President, Cindy Tromans.

MALTA TO WELCOME ECOO MEMBERS

Kerstien Gabarretta, Malta Association of Optometrists



Despite the fact that the Malta Association of Optometrists is very small and a relatively new member of ECOO, we decided to take the opportunity to host the ECOO autumn meetings and General Assembly this coming October, 2022. We believe this will give ECOO members a chance to find out more about our association. And we believe Malta will be an excellent location, especially since October weather is usually fantastic.

As an introduction to our profession in Malta, I should explain that optometry is a relatively new profession here. It has been regulated since 1990 by the Council of Professions Complementary to Medicine (CPCM), which is also the body responsible for the regulation of 19 allied health professions including physiotherapists, radiologists, and also orthoptists and others.

The University of Malta does not offer courses in optometry and all prospective optometrists therefore have no choice but to pursue their education overseas. Most of them go to university in the United Kingdom, particularly since, historically, Malta is a member of the Commonwealth

and English is widely spoken across Malta. The Maltese healthcare system is traditionally also linked to the British health system. In view of this, the standard set by the CPCM for registration is that of a BSc in Optometry followed by a minimum of six months working under supervision.

Optometrists in Malta are allowed to examine the health of the eye using investigative techniques which may include the use of diagnostic drugs. They may refract and prescribe optical devices, including spectacles and all forms of contact lenses. Binocular vision assessment, low vision assessment and visual ergonomic assessment may all be performed too.

Optometrists have an excellent working relationship with ophthalmologists and orthoptists. Most optometrists work solely in the private sector, in optical outlets. The National Health Service offers optometric services at the principle hospital Mater Dei as well as at some of the health centres spread around the island. Considering that tourism is the largest industry in Malta, the population may spike to well over 500,000 at any time, and this means that the optometric patient ratio is extremely high.

The Malta Association of Optometry is still in its infancy and, since there is no academic institution for optometry in Malta, it faces many challenges. This is also because optometrists from different parts of the world are starting to consider practicing optometry in Malta, mainly due to the very high standards of living and excellent quality of life that the country has to offer. However, our Association is very hopeful that building good ties with other European associations is clearly the way forward to overcome the obstacles it is currently facing.

So it is with great honour and pleasure that we look forward to hosting our fellow ECOO members in Malta in October!



WORLD COUNCIL
OF OPTOMETRY

UPDATE FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY

PEDIATRIC EYE CARE WEBINAR

On 22 June 2022, WCO and AFCO hosted a webinar focusing on pediatric eye care, with lectures from Dr. Naomi H. Nsubuga and Dr. Glen T. Steele.

Videos from this event are now available at

<https://worldcouncilofoptometry.info/webinars/>



UPCOMING MEETINGS

The ECOO autumn meetings will take place 14- 16 October 2022 in Malta. More details will be available later in the summer.

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