

GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ECOO

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What is your professional background, and what is your role at ECOO?

In 1982 I started my apprenticeship as an optician in the southern Austrian province of Carinthia. In 1985 I changed profession and started my training as a hearing aid practitioner.

Finishing this I looked for a place to study optometry. Austria had no university offering an optometry course and at that stage was not a member of the European Union, so the UK Universities turned me down. So, through the contacts of my father via the International Optometric and Optical League I took the opportunity to study optometry at the University of Durban-Westville (now KwaZulu-Natal University). While there I learned a lot more than optometry: rugby, cricket and the diversity of the rainbow nation. Durban 1990 is an everlasting moment of admiration.

Back in Austria I started in daily optometric practice, specialising in contact lens and low vision work. In the evenings I started to study for the UK Professional Qualifying Examinations, successfully registering with the GOC in 1995.

At that time ECOO had started to get serious with the European Diploma in Optometry. I volunteered to be a guinea pig for this new way of optometric thinking. Wow and what an experience it was, I have never studied so hard in my life. Having my father heavily involved in ECOO at the same time was not making it easier. I thoroughly enjoyed being presented with the ECOO European Diploma in 2004 in the Palace of Westminster, shouting “Vive L’Europe!” in this glorious building.

On the home front, in 2004 the Optical Guild in Upper Austria asked me to stand as their Chairman, a position I held for 16 years until 2020. My national association then endorsed me for the ECOO Education Committee failing to even ask me, only being told after the election that I have new job. That is how I got involved in ECOO. And on top of that, from 2010 to 2015 I chaired the National Association of Allied Health Care Professionals.

What are the most important skills/personal attributes needed to do your job?

Versatility, diplomacy, patience, interest in diversity, passion for optometry. Most of the work is done in the background, negotiating and finding consensus is a key aspect. To get to know the background of optics and optometry and the rich diversity of the scope of competence in Europe is most useful. The interest in the diversity of culture and language helps.

What has taken you by surprise in your work with ECOO?

The common passion in ECOO to promote optometry and optics, the

spirit and “can do attitude”. The friendliness of the ECOO members, the consensus finding to promote the scope of our profession, this makes the esprit of ECOO so special. No matter how big or small an association is there is mutual respect and the willingness to help each other.

What is your biggest achievement at ECOO so far?

Having been part of the Executive since 2010, the biggest achievements are: In Brussels after the hearing on the mutual evaluation of regulated professions, getting the response from the Commission: “Mr. Gumpelmayer ECOO was well prepared”. Indeed we were. Delegates can tell a lot of stories about this exercise. The other one is still ongoing, the Medical Device Regulation and the interaction this requires. And the fluorescein story is another item that could fill pages.

What is the best piece of professional advice you have received?

Think beyond the horizon, there is always something new. Expect the unexpected, take nothing for granted.

Bonus question:

When you manage to escape from ECOO or your day job, how do you like to spend your time?

Next to my passion for optometry, I love railways: en grand and en miniature. This I share with all male Gumpelmayers, to the detriment of the ladies. So at Christmas time the railway runs around our Christmas tree and in summer we go for the real thing.