

# ECOO NATIONAL ARTICLE



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## **AUTUMN: A TIME FOR REFLECTION AND RENEWAL**

It is hard to believe that it is autumn already – as ever the year rushes on. Even stranger, that this is my last article as President of ECOO, because October will see our next round of elections and Gabrielle Janssen, our President Elect, will take over from me.

The past two years have gone so fast that it can be easy to forget how much has happened, and what we at ECOO have achieved in that time. But it is important not to be so tied up with the everyday challenges and the new pieces of work that we forget to celebrate our achievements, reflect on what has gone well and what has not, and then think about how we can continue to move forward ever more effectively.

Members are the heart of ECOO. So it is with particular pleasure I recall that during my time as President ECOO was able to welcome Latvia into membership and the return of

both France and Greece into membership, as well as re-establishing our connection with Italy, where I was able to be present at some meetings during the last year. I appreciate the mediterranean spirit in our society very much!

Our General Assemblies are our flagship events, giving members the opportunity to come together in real life. And as they all make clear, it is the ability to meet in person and discuss shared issues of interest and concern that really matters to them. Following the challenges of the Corona-time, it has been really good to see our members return to meetings, and also to the conferences of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics, whose annual conference is run in parallel with our spring meetings.

But it is also important that we engage with our members throughout the year, not just at meetings. It is very clear that all the hard work our secretariat has put in to developing the ECOO website,

publishing articles and expanding our reach on social media is really paying off. And those communications are not just about sharing what ECOO is doing. Through member and guest articles, ECOO provides opportunities for them to share information, as well as promoting our own work. And one of the privileges of being ECOO President is that I am invited to attend events run by ECOO members, to share what ECOO is doing and to hear about their work.

On the regulatory front, after many years of hard work we may be seeing signs of progress on the issue of driving licences and vision. It is a real achievement that all of ECOO's amendments were accepted by the European Parliament Transport Committee and were included in the revised draft Driving Licences Directive adopted by the European Parliament earlier this year. But there is still a way to go, and we will continue to press for these small but important technical changes.

There has also been important progress with the Medical Devices Regulation (MDR) and its accompanying guidance. We continue our work in this field, for example, working with our colleagues in EuromContact to support the use of electronic instructions for use (e-IFU) for contact lenses. And new issues have emerged – such as the proposed PFAS restriction which could seriously impact on our patients who need to use RGP contact lenses.

One of ECOO's priorities is promoting the highest standards of optometric

and optical education, through the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) and the European Qualification in Optics (EQO). I am constantly impressed by the work that our European Qualifications Board, chaired by Professor Julie-Anne Little, and the ECOO Accreditation Agency, which Julie-Anne co-chairs with Professor Brendan Barrett, does to drive this forward.



*At the Utrecht members' welcome reception*

It is thanks to their hard work that, earlier this year we welcomed Metropolia University, Helsinki as the latest to be accredited for the EDO Education. And they continue to be busy, which I hope will soon result in others joining the growing list of accredited institutions. As President this is one area where I get all the glory and little of the work, since it has been my pleasure to attend several award ceremonies and hand out certificates to the new ECOO diplomats.

A personal highlight is that ECOO is a partner in the Horizon I-SCREEN project. This includes six countries and over 20 optometry practices, combined with local eye hospitals or clinics. The project begins with OCT-based screening for dry AMD among patients at optometry practices. Should these optometrists identify any patients with early-stage dry

AMD via an AI assisted platform, they refer them to partner clinics who will follow up on those patients. The long-term aim is to offer those patients treatment, once it becomes available. For ECOO, the value of this project is in establishing efficient pathways for referrals within existing health systems – for diseases, which can be detected with the help of AI at the very early stage, at the very primary level.

So what comes next? Some projects will continue – like I-SCREEN – and we will continue to lobby on a variety of regulatory matters. But as well as

a pause to reflect, the start of autumn and ECOO elections is also a time for renewal. The new Executive and sub-committees will be developing new ideas to take forward our professions and advance primary eye care services. And we are already thinking about the next update of the Blue Book. It has been a busy and rewarding two years, and I look forward to continuing to work as part of the Executive Committee, supporting ECOO and its members, as I take on the role of past President for the next two years.



*Discussions at ECOO meeting in Poznan, May 2023*