

ECOO GUEST ARTICLE



Image FHNW Olten, Switzerland

IF YOU WANT A BRIGHT FUTURE - SHAPE IT!

Developing optometry in your country is a strategic decision and must be planned. It's not just a "let's try it" because other universities are accredited. If you want to be a real healthcare profession, you need the European accreditation – and your students need the European diploma in optometry accreditation. All your students.

Having first successfully installed this kind of education in your universities and achieved the accreditation, you will become a valuable partner in your country's healthcare system.

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Society needs regulated healthcare

We all know about the expected developments in age and health conditions of our population within the coming decades. These are facts - not wishes or nightmares. Many countries in Europe already have very long patient waiting lists, very high healthcare costs and often no access to the necessary eye care specialists. Optometry can play a major role in primary eyecare. Optometry can help respond to the above-mentioned challenges in the future as it widens the scope of service and care to our patients.

Just measuring the correct refraction value (RX) misses any health care attributes, it is more or less physics and experience. The inspection of the

visual system and the management of found results are what is really needed. Sooner or later the stand-alone RX will be replaced with the help of AI. We need to utilise and showcase our clinical skills for the benefit of primary eyecare for our citizens.

How to become a valid partner of regulation bodies

In most European countries regulatory bodies and governmental representatives have little or no experience of optometry. They just don't know about it! To show its enormous value and possibilities, you need official testimonials, terms of reference and competency-based syllabi from known associations like WHO and ECOO.

With a successful accreditation you will be in a much better position in any negotiations. You prove the gold-standard of (all) your students according to the scope and syllabus corresponding to the European Diploma in Optometry and Optics (EDO).

Why should your healthcare authorities grade you up?

There are several areas where healthcare professionals are open to persuasion:

- Reducing the costs per patient in typical eye care related conditions
- Reducing the waiting list for patients
- Reducing the load in ophthalmology in normal standard eye conditions

- Reducing the education costs in comparison to ophthalmology
- Depending on your country's law, reducing the load on health insurances costs.

Convince your own team

The process of achieving accreditation requires a huge amount of work. It is time consuming and costs money. You have to convince your colleagues, your employees or just the staff of your universities that it's worth the effort.

This is strategic planning for mid- and long-term development of the whole profession and not of a single university. The discussion is also not about the single professor who will be retired in five years or about the maybe a bit lazy dean.

One of the main difficulties with the EDO is meeting the needs and duties for the patient experience of your students.

Students have to show and record their direct patient experience in a logbook. Many universities believe that they have to offer a clinic where students can work on all clinical cases. But that's not necessarily needed. Only a defined number of cases must be proven within their own clinic. Most cases can be worked on with external partners from optometry, optics and ophthalmology. Use your network and expand it! Develop cooperation agreements. Partners are looking for potential employees and are very willing to take on students.

Show students why they benefit in long term

Students often can't see any benefit in achieving the EDO. Mostly they think it's just to get a job abroad and

to be honest, at least for Switzerland, this is mostly not of interest. But the EDO holder proves to any employer how well educated and experienced in clinical work he or she is. It's the reproduceable content - the quality promise is part of the EDO.

But a student's alma mater must live(!) this vision of changing the profession - away from selling and handy craft to healthcare.

Talk to your universities – talk to your associations

If you are part of the executive committee of an association and you believe in a healthcare future, go and talk to all your universities! Take them together and evaluate the possibilities. They may even share clinical opportunities, instrumentation or parts of the theoretic education e.g. anatomy, physiology or pathology.

If you are part of one of the universities, talk to your associations, talk to your colleagues in other universities!

Don't ask ophthalmology – just do it!

There is no reason why ophthalmology should be the expert group in such kinds of decisions. Ophthalmology does not represent any law or regulatory organisation. It's a partner in healthcare.

As many authorities tend to "ask ophthalmology" (as they know this profession but not yours), it's of course of great benefit to have a robust network also within ophthalmology.

Healthcare means also being part and partner of the many other professions you have to work with. Learn from them, talk to them, share experience with them!

Learn from other experienced countries

If you are reading this short article, you are maybe already part of ECOO – well done! ECOO is of very great benefit for you! Use the network, talk to other countries, get their experience. They may have had similar problems, found solutions, decided to go a specific line of argumentation.

Switzerland was very happy to have this relationship, to learn about successful and not so successful approaches and not to have to reinvent everything on its own. We are very thankful to so many colleagues and friends.

Look beyond and plan ten to fifteen years ahead

Changing the scope of practice is a long road to go down! From seeing the needs, having the political decisions, motivating involved colleagues, financing and introducing learning outcomes, to finally being on the real market takes at least 10 years. So, if you want to shape your future – start now.

Find out more about the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) [here](#).