

ECOO ARTICLE



RIAN LOVE
Student Visitor

THE EXPERIENCE OF BEING A STUDENT VISITOR

Rían Love qualified as an optometrist in 2024 and is now a clinical research optometrist in the Centre of Eye Research Ireland. He has 20 years of experience in the optical industry, first completing the SMC (Tech) qualification in 2009 (a diploma awarded in the UK for optical technicians) and then qualifying as a dispensing optician in 2014. Rían has a keen passion for paediatric eyecare and research, completing the Health Research Board (Ireland) summer scholarship in 2023. In this article he describes his experience as a student visitor for the ECOO Accreditation Agency.

I applied for the student visitor role in the second year of my optometry degree. I had previously qualified as a dispensing optician and was the course coordinator in the UK for ABDO College's optical support programmes. This role gave me great

insight into the education system for dispensing opticians and parallels across various countries. The student visitor role with the ECOO Accreditation Agency offered similar insights but for optometry. The student voice and experience are integral for any successful education programme, and as a mature student, I felt I could provide an additional perspective.

I was lucky enough to participate in two accreditation visits, one to Institut des Sciences de la Vision in St Etienne, France and the other to Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya in Barcelona, Spain. Seeing a range of teaching methods and clinical facilities and the different approaches to an optometry programme was fascinating. The institutions I visited had an unbelievable passion for their programmes and were striving to be the best for their students.

Being part of the panel can feel overwhelming because you are

sitting alongside incredible optometrists who have achieved fantastic things in their careers. However, I quickly learned that the student's voice is crucial. As a student member, you are there to consider the impact of new learning outcomes and new methods or approaches and critically view what support is there for the students in all aspects of their education.

These visits demonstrated the high esteem that the European Diploma in Optometry is held in and underpinned the importance of standardised competencies to protect both the patient and the optometrist. We are lucky to live in an era where relocation to new countries is the norm, but we must work together to ensure we can use and access the skills of optometrists who relocate.

I have learned a lot from being part of the accreditation process. There

are multiple ways to achieve learning outcomes, and there is a real value in peer learning and sharing best practices between institutions. Optometry is an evolving industry; discovering new methods and new instrumentation, our role as optometrists becomes more holistic as we see more than ever through the eye. However, this comes with additional responsibilities and actionable outcomes, and the European Diploma empowers the learner with the knowledge needed to achieve the highest standard of care.

Participating as a student visitor has been an enriching experience that has broadened my perspective on optometric education and its future in Europe.

ABOUT ECOO

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) represents the interests of optometrists and opticians across Europe. Our members are national professional associations from 25 countries who together represent more than 200,000 opticians and optometrists. ECOO aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.

ABOUT THE ECOO ACCREDITATION AGENCY

ECOO has developed the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) and European Qualification in Optics (EQO) as a syllabi and competency frameworks, and operates an accreditation scheme for institutions to benchmark against this framework. The Accreditation Agency has been set up to run this accreditation work.

To find out more about its work visit: <https://ecoo.info/ecoo-accreditation-agency/>