

SWITZERLAND: OPTOMETRY REMAINS A PREREQUISITE FOR REFRACTION AND CONTACT LENS FITTING



**DOMINIC RAMSPECK AND
MARTIN KÜNDIG**

**OPTIKSCHWEIZ, der Verband
für Optometrie und Optik
and
Organisation für Schweizer
Optometrie (OSO)**

FEDERAL COURT OVERTURNS EXAMINATION REGULATIONS

On 22 September 2026, the Swiss Federal Administrative Court (Bundesverwaltungsgericht) overturned the examination regulations for the proposed new professional qualification “Expert in Optics”.

The qualification would have introduced a lower-level professional title, with competencies including refraction and contact lens fitting. Although the regulations had already been approved by the State Secretariat for Education, Research

and Innovation (SERI/SBFI), (SERI/SBFI), the Court overturned them following legal appeals lodged by OPTIKSCHWEIZ and the Organisation for Swiss Optometry (OSO).

THE DECISION

The Court did not rule on the substantive merits of the qualification or address any questions relating to optometry or healthcare. Instead, its decision was based on fundamental procedural flaws.

Under Swiss vocational education

law, the introduction of a new advanced professional qualifications requires the support of all major professional organisations in the field. The examination regulations were developed by the Swiss Optical Association (AOVS), which represents large mainly international optical chains.



However, both OPTIKSCHWEIZ and OSO opposed the regulations throughout the procedure and formally challenged them. Their opposition was clearly documented from the outset. In these circumstances, the regulations should not have been approved.

COURT CRITICISES THE FEDERAL REGULATOR

The court was highly critical of SERI's handling of the case. It found that SERI had effectively approved a project supported by only one part of the sector, while dismissing objections raised by other key professional organisations as unfounded. The ruling states that, "for lack of reasoning", it "remains unclear why the SERI considered the respondent [AOVS] to be an (important) representative organisation". The Court therefore concluded that the decision had to be annulled "on formal grounds alone".

The ruling represents a clear rebuke for SERI and a significant setback for the initiators of the qualification. The AOVS, as respondent, was ordered to bear the court costs and pay compensation towards the legal costs incurred by OPTIKSCHWEIZ and OSO. The Court referred the matter back to SERI for reconsideration in accordance with its findings.

Should the project proceed, the AOVS would need to involve other key professional organisations, including those that regard refraction and contact lens fitting as core competencies of optometry. The AOVS may still appeal to the Federal Supreme Court (Bundesgericht), although its prospects of success appear limited.



Organisation für Schweizer Optometrie OSO
Organisation Suisse d'Optométrie OSO
Organizzazione Svizzera di Optometria OSO

THE LEGAL BACKGROUND

Since 2020, under the Federal Health Professions Act, the Bachelor of Science in Optometry from the University of Applied Sciences and Arts Northwestern Switzerland (FHNW) has been the standard qualification in Switzerland for obtaining a licence to practise optometry, including refraction and contact lens fitting. The programme involves three years of full-time study or four years part-time at a recognised university of applied sciences. It is accredited by the Swiss

Federal Office of Public Health (FOPH/BAG) and ECOO, and graduates receive ECOO's European Diploma in Optometry (EurOptom). Throughout their studies, students also compile and document a portfolio of 150 real clinical cases, demonstrating the practical application of their knowledge and clinical competencies.

WHY THIS MATTERS BEYOND SWITZERLAND

Many ECOO member countries face similar pressure to introduce shorter or lower-level pathways to qualification in refraction and contact lens fitting. Such initiatives may be driven by workforce shortages or commercial interests. The Swiss case offers three important lessons for the wider European optometry profession:

- **Scope of practice must be matched by competence.**
Refraction and contact lens fitting are clinical activities with direct implications for eye health. They require appropriate education, clinical training and demonstrated competence. This principle underpins ECOO's European Diploma in Optometry and its educational standards.

- **Due process and professional representation matter.**
The Swiss court's decision highlights the importance of proper procedures and the involvement of the relevant professional organisations when new qualifications are developed. National associations should consider how their own legal and regulatory frameworks ensure that stakeholder consultation and representation are respected and that professional standards are fully considered before new qualifications are approved.
- **A united profession is stronger.**
In Switzerland, OPTIKSCHWIEZ and the Organisation for Swiss Optometry (OSO) challenged the proposed qualification together. Their coordinated action was instrumental in the legal outcome. The case demonstrates how cooperation between professional organisations can strengthen the profession's ability to defend educational standards and safeguard patient care.