



Association of  
Optometrists

# ANNUAL REPORT 2017



## OUR YEAR IN 2016

Promoting the profession, protecting the professional

# ABOUT US

Set up in 1946, the Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the leading membership organisation for optometrists in the UK.

**We offer protection, support and representation to our 17,000+ members throughout their careers, with a range of valued services and benefits including:**

- Unrivalled legal and clinical expertise from our in-house team
- Comprehensive medical malpractice and product liability insurance
- Extensive CET and networking opportunities at events across the country
- Career support and expert opinion pieces in our award-winning monthly journal *Optometry Today (OT)*
- Daily updates with *OT*'s online news resource, including a dedicated 'In practice' section
- An influential voice on the issues that matter most



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# WELCOME FROM OUR CEO AND CHAIR



“

**A key part of our ethos is to ensure members are supported throughout their career**

**In 2016 we announced a new Parental Leave grade to support members at a time in their life when they might feel more financial pressure. Membership fees across all grades were also frozen for a another year.**

The importance of having the best possible insurance and support for the individual is recognised, as our market share grew to 80.1% of all GOC registered optometrists. Enquiries to our core legal and regulatory service continued to rise and we produced, with grateful thanks to the Central Optical Fund and the original OCCS, our highly regarded legal drama: *On the record: a complaint has been made*, informing members of the legal risks of running and working in a busy optical practice.

Keeping members informed is an important part of our work and we were especially proud that our journal, *Optometry Today*, achieved its award winning status of best in class in the membership space. *OT* is the market leader for CET, legal and regulatory guidance, and sector news.

Our health and wellbeing survey, undertaken with Aston University, was a response to increasing evidence of the pressures members face in practice. New services and guidance are being developed as a result of the survey data, including the launch of the new AOP Peer Support Line in 2017.

Public awareness of the role of the optometrist in the community is essential and the AOP has become a trusted source for media enquiries. Our work promoting public understanding of the value of optometry will increase in 2017 with the Voice of Optometry insight panel.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henrietta Alderman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned above a thin horizontal line.

**Henrietta Alderman**, Chief Executive

“

## Changes and challenges within the sector continued apace last year

**The AOP Council's new structure has enabled it to both react and lead on issues, through the development of policy positions and building strong collaborations.**

Members have had to deal with NHS England's over-claiming challenges in some parts of the country. To assist with this issue, our regulatory team developed an online self-audit tool for members to use, with bespoke follow-up support also available.

Capita, on behalf of NHS England, caused untold financial and administrative problems for members, both contractors and performers. We worked with others in the sector, including LOCSU who has played a vital role in trying to resolve the problem. At the height of the issue we employed additional resources within the AOP to help our members.

The Honey Rose case was tragic for all concerned. It was also the first case of a UK optometrist to be convicted of gross negligence manslaughter. We, along with all our partners within the sector, are now carefully considering the wider impact of this case on our members.

In the year ahead, our Policy Committee and Council will be focused on ensuring that our response to the GOC Education Strategic Review leads clinicians appropriately into the future. Alongside this, we will be pushing for appropriate therapeutic exemptions and an increase in our current formulary for everyone. We will continue to develop our policy positions and represent members to influencers, parliamentarians, the media and other associated healthcare professionals.



**Kevin Thompson**, Chairman of the Board





## PROTECTING OUR MEMBERS

We are the market-leading provider of medical malpractice insurance for optometrists in the UK. Our in-house legal team vigorously defends the reputation and livelihood of our members, and our regulatory team offers invaluable guidance.



**4350**

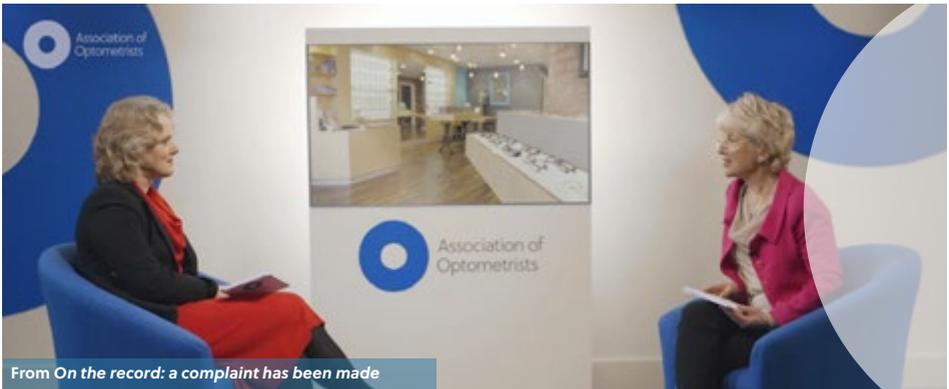
Enquiries in 2016



**13.5%**

Increase in legal enquiries on 2015





**2016 saw a total of 4350 member queries into the legal and regulatory team, representing a 13.5% increase on 2015. Employment enquiries also rose by 15%.**

The clinical and regulatory team continued to receive a high volume of enquiries about the appropriate use of GOS, how to manage patients who do not meet driving standards, and the regulations around sale and supply of optical appliances. We also developed an audit tool to enable members to review their records to ensure their continued accurate claiming for GOS fees.

The employment team launched a bespoke pre-registration contract query service, to link in with the AOP's wider strategic goals of supporting members throughout their careers. We have featured our employment services to members via email, *OT*, the AOP website and social media. The legal team has continued to get positive results for members, including withdrawal of disciplinary action.



**15%**  
Increase in enquiries about  
employment matters



**\*Most common  
miscellaneous enquiries:**

- Opening/closing a practice
- Jury service
- Aggressive patients



# SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS

We continued to grow education and professional development for our members in 2016. Our award-winning monthly journal, national programme of events, and online CET and CPD provide support to members throughout their careers, enabling them to fulfil their professional potential.

## Optometry Today

Our journal OT won the MemCom Award in 2016 for 'Best Professional Association or Royal College Magazine.'



### OT CET in 2016



**48** CET articles and  
**12** VRICS articles



**8** CET videos



**40,889** CET points  
gained by users



**1542** unique website CET  
users per month on average



**3362** CET exams taken  
every month on average

## Events

Our national CET and CPD events programme offered 128 CET points

**68 delegates**  
attended four AOP  
Careers Workshops

**811 students**  
recruited at  
freshers' week

**77 delegates**  
attended Therapeutics  
London

**862 delegates**  
attended 16 peer  
discussions held  
across the UK

**175 delegates**  
attended four legal  
roadshows across the UK

**224 students**  
attended our Student  
Conference

**209 delegates**  
attended the Hospital  
Optometrists Annual  
Conference

**7168 attendees**  
visited 100% Optical  
Conference

**227 delegates**  
attended the National  
Optical Conference



I love these [peer discussion] sessions as we normally work in a solitary way, so it is very inspiring to discuss so many topics with like-minded professionals.

**Angela Fuller**  
AOP MEMBER

I felt the legal roadshow in Brighton framed daily routines into a legal context which makes me more aware of best practice.

**Adam Drake**  
AOP MEMBER





▲ A selection of images our members downloaded from our image library in 2016

## www.aop.org.uk

In 2016 we saw an increase of over 10% unique visitors to our website, with visitors also spending more time on the site, taking advantage of new and improved functionality such as booking events, downloading images from our member image library and using our locum listing.

- **Over 300,000** unique visitors to our website
- We had **almost 187,500** video views
- **Over 900** members registered on our free locum listing service

### New online in 2016

- A suite of seven *OT* video skills guides for use as revision or refresher guides
- An extended *OT* archive of over 925 CET articles
- 105 members participated in our first webinar 'Successfully managing stress'
- Online events booking and CET tracker
- Improved member image library



### Social media in 2016



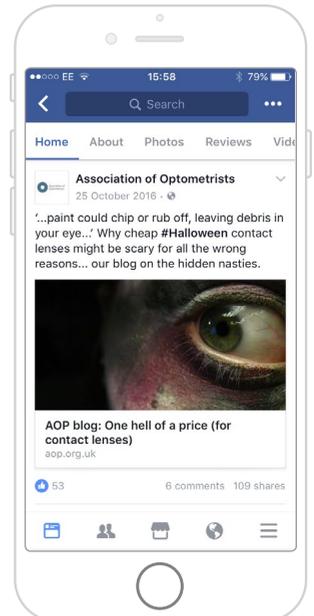
**1283** Tweets   **2341** New followers

@The\_AOP  
@OptometryToday



**1160** Posts   **1965** New likes

/AssociationOfOptometrists  
/OptometryTodayJournal





# REPRESENTING OUR MEMBERS

We work on behalf of our members to promote the role of optometry and eye health, and seek members' views to give them a voice in helping to shape the future of the profession.

## Raising the profile of optometry

National press coverage in 2016 included features with the *Daily Telegraph*, BBC and *Daily Mail*.

Our public-facing work put a spotlight on children's eye health, with campaigns around World Book Day, back to school sight tests and the connection between vision and 3D films.

We also worked with the *Daily Telegraph* on a piece which demonstrated how visual impairment can affect the ability to drive safely. And as part of the Optical Confederation, we led on a campaign for Road Safety Week urging drivers to take a sight test.

The AOP Awards continued to generate local press coverage with the achievements of shortlisted optical practitioners and practices celebrated UK wide.

We worked with our partners in the optical sector to develop content for National Eye Health Week.



### New in 2016

- Four new patient leaflets on children's eye health, and conditions including dry eye, blepharitis and meibomian gland dysfunction (MGD)
- Five new videos, including children's vision, the risks of laser pen misuse and the first of our 60-second advice series
- Eight public facing campaigns, including new patient information, children's eye health, keeping eyes healthy and contact lens care at festivals

## Representing members to government

We have continued to work as part of the Optical Confederation to represent the optical sector to parliament, government, the GOC and other institutions. In 2016 we:

- Responded to 35 consultations, covering a wide range of policy areas including NICE guidance, GOC fitness to practise procedures and their guidance on consent, and the House of Lords Committee on future sustainability of the NHS
- Briefed Peers for a House of Lords debate on over-the-counter sales of adjustable lens spectacles, as well as a debate on the future sustainability of the NHS
- Facilitated 28 practice visits for MPs
- Attended Party Political Conferences



## Policy and public affairs work in 2016

We conducted a major survey of the health and wellbeing of optometrists which has yielded important information on the stresses our members experience in every day practice. We will be using this data to develop new services and support for members in 2017.

We responded, along with colleagues in ABDO, to the GOC consultation on the professional duty of candour. The GOC subsequently clarified that 'saying sorry did not constitute an admission of liability.'

### New in 2016

We produced four new position statements on some of the key issues affecting our members:

- Community eye health services
- Independent prescribing
- Masters in Optometry
- Pre-registration placements

All our position statements can be found on our website [www.aop.org.uk/policy](http://www.aop.org.uk/policy)

# COUNCIL IN 2016

[www.aop.org.uk/council](http://www.aop.org.uk/council)

Our Council and Policy Committee discussed some important issues in 2016, including the threats and opportunities facing the profession, potential reform to the Opticians Act, the regulation of health professions, and preparation for the GOC's Education Strategic Review.

The discussions on future threats and opportunities identified the need to prepare for technological change and evolve the optical business model. Among the future opportunities discussed was the rise of new treatments that may allow some control of myopia progression. Following a call from Council we issued advice on the evidence-based approaches that have been shown to potentially slow juvenile myopia progression.

Council discussed the implications of the Government's plans to reform regulation in the healthcare professions, which may see the number of regulators reduced in number. We have prepared plans to influence changes on behalf of members, including possible future changes to the Opticians Act. It is vital that we see the right type of regulation that allows optical professionals freedom to practise and protects the public.

Our preparation for the GOC's Education Strategic Review has given us an opportunity to ensure that optometrists of the future are ready for change and ensure that there is access to skills development for all.

We asked members to contribute their views ahead of important debates, through the AOP community forums, prompting some lively debate, and ensuring member views were represented at Council discussions.



## HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE AOP COMMUNITY FORUMS

From the 'What does the future hold for our profession?' discussion:

“ Our future lies in our expertise and this means looking at ways we use this technology to bolster and expand our profession. ”

AOP member

Given that we have an ageing population, there will inevitably be an increased prevalence of eye disease. I feel that optometry is well placed to deliver the eyecare services of the future.

Tushar Majithia, Councillor for East Midlands

From the 'GOC Education Strategic Review' discussion:

“ Going forward means embracing the expanding clinical role within an undergraduate training programme. ”

AOP member

More communication skills need to be involved in the undergraduate scheme. ”

Francesca Marchetti, Councillor for West Midlands

Members can contribute to these and other discussions via [community.aop.org.uk](http://community.aop.org.uk)



# MEMBERSHIP IN 2016

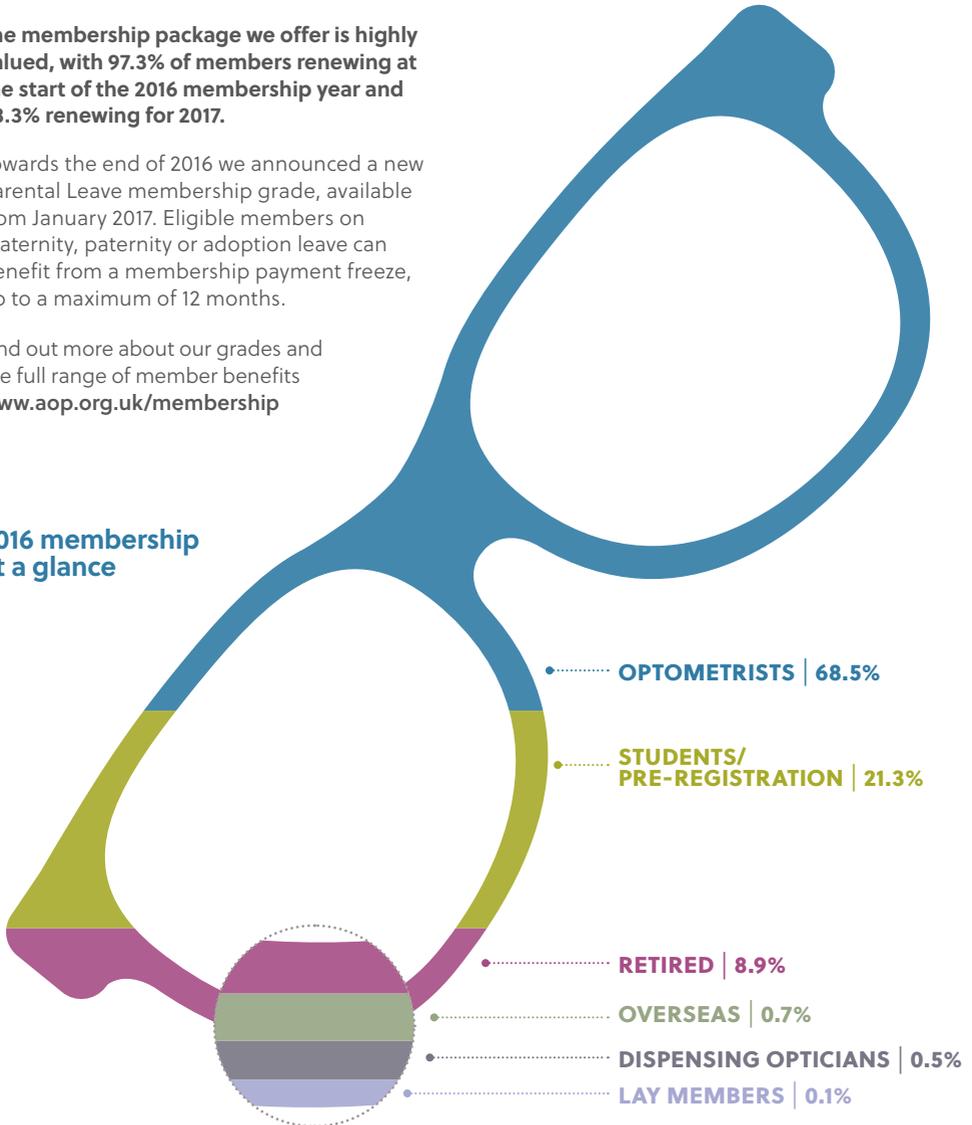
2016 saw another year of continued growth, with paying membership growing by a further 4.1%, taking us up to an 80.1% market share of GOC registered optometrists.

The membership package we offer is highly valued, with 97.3% of members renewing at the start of the 2016 membership year and 98.3% renewing for 2017.

Towards the end of 2016 we announced a new Parental Leave membership grade, available from January 2017. Eligible members on maternity, paternity or adoption leave can benefit from a membership payment freeze, up to a maximum of 12 months.

Find out more about our grades and the full range of member benefits [www.aop.org.uk/membership](http://www.aop.org.uk/membership)

## 2016 membership at a glance





Copies of the full annual financial statements, the auditor's report and the directors' report are available for members to download from our website



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