



Association of  
Optometrists



# 2019 Annual report

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# About the AOP

The Association of Optometrists (AOP) is the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the UK. We protect, support and represent our members throughout their careers.

## Our mission

Is to protect the individual professional, promote optometry and the interests of optometrists and provide unrivalled support to all members.

## What we do



Assist our members to prosper wherever they work.



Promote eye health and the work of our members so they are recognised by the public.



Provide unrivalled support for eye health practitioners.



Defend, represent and protect our individual members.

# 2018 highlights

**E**ducation was our theme during 2018, shaping our work in three strands. Firstly, ensuring that our members could access education in all required competencies through events and online solutions. The second strand was in educating the public and decision makers. Our increased media presence, backed with solid policy positions, delivered successful campaigns such as *Don't swerve a sight test* and the *A B See* children's campaign. Members who have been involved in our Voice of Optometry survey have been instrumental in the direction we have taken in these campaigns. We also used 2018 to refresh our own knowledge of the membership through our Member Benefits and Optometrists' Futures surveys.

One of our key interactions during 2018 was with our regulator, the GOC, both in terms of fitness to practise and the significant consultations on education, CET and business standards.

We are fortunate to have members who give their spare time to complete surveys, state their views on our community forums, and apply for Council and Board positions, helping us to represent the membership fully. Our 82% market share, our ongoing investment in our legal team and our tailoring of services to specific membership categories enables us to stay relevant and mindful of the future needs of members.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Henrietta Alderman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined.

**Henrietta Alderman**  
AOP Chief Executive

**The political landscape and the optometry landscape were equally uncertain during 2018.**

Brexit coloured the Government's timetable of activity, the commissioning of optometry services continued to change, technology continued to become ever more present in practice and the GOC had uncertain plans for the 2019 CET cycle. All of these required the AOP to be agile and responsive and to help members identify opportunities.

During 2018 we renewed our strategic plan and confirmed our three pillars of policy and promotion, membership services and sustainability. Our insurance offering together with the in-house legal team — covering civil, regulatory, employment and clinical issues — remained the core provision for our members. Our Board has an overarching governance responsibility and the Insurance Oversight Group was reconfigured to increase its knowledge and expertise.

Influence is our theme for 2019 and it is particularly relevant with the ongoing consultations on changes to graduate and post graduate education. During 2019 our Policy Committee and Council will help develop our work on the future of the profession and the future shape and funding of eye care. We will also be raising awareness of the findings of our 2018 Optometrists' Futures survey and what they mean for individuals and business.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "Michael George". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Michael George**  
AOP Chairman

# Protecting our members

The legal and regulatory team's caseload continued to grow in 2018, with an overall increase of 18% in the number of enquiries coming into the team.

We restructured and expanded the department, increasing our clinical negligence and employment resources, allowing us to grow the expert legal services already available to individual members. We also initiated a move towards ensuring the learning from cases we work on is disseminated to our members through our CET and professional development opportunities.

These changes will equip the AOP to be ever more responsive to change, as we anticipate an increase in our legal and regulatory caseload in 2019.



The AOP legal and regulatory team

**5074**

**Legal and regulatory enquiries**

**EMPLOYMENT**

**Queries up by 24%**

**LEGAL**

**Queries up by 17%**

**REGULATORY**

**Queries up by 15%**

**FITNESS TO PRACTISE**

**Days spent at substantive hearings up by 36%**

**STUDENTS AND PRE-REGISTRATION OPTOMETRISTS**

**150 supported**

# NEW IN 2018

## GDPR

We took a significant number of enquiries about GDPR, published online guidance and delivered a legal webinar on the practical implications.

## LOCUMS

Locum queries to our employment team continued to rise, and we updated our template locum contracts to include cancellation costs and fees.

## DVLA

Member enquiries relating to driving and vision continued to rise. We worked with the DVLA to update its guidance on cataracts and driving.

## CAREER BREAKS

We published online guidance for members returning to work after parental leave or a career break.



# Supporting our members

Over 2000 members took part in our Member Benefits survey, with the results indicating good levels of satisfaction with AOP membership. A few areas were identified where members want us to develop our service, and these will be a focus in 2019 and beyond.



We ran our first-ever national TV advertising campaign, *Celebrate your sight*. Partnering with eye research charity Fight for Sight, the campaign promoted the importance of regular sight tests to the public.

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

We launched our *Creating healthy, low-stress optical practices* advice and workbook, produced in collaboration with several employers to help create workplace environments where optometrists can thrive.

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

We published online Brexit FAQs to help members understand how it could affect them.

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



## Optometry Today (OT)

OT produced a 20-page children's eye health supplement which was sent to all members for use in practice.

## OT online

**40,860**  
online CET  
exams taken  
in 2018

**34,277**  
online CET  
points were  
uploaded to  
the GOC

**Three**  
new skills  
guide videos,  
focusing on  
peer review



## EVENTS AND WEBINARS

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

**Locum-focused webinars and events**  
attended by 885 members

**Our first-ever return to work event**  
attended by 23 members

**GDPR webinar**  
attended by 484 people

“**Excellent presentation!  
Easy to follow.  
Thank you!”**

GDPR webinar attendee

**Our Hospital Optometrists  
Annual Conference**  
attended by 169 members

**Peer discussion events**  
attended by 470 members

## STUDENTS

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

**We visited 12 universities across the UK**  
and met hundreds of new optometry  
students during freshers' week

## PEER SUPPORT LINE

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

**129% increase in calls**  
to the Peer Support Line



## PATIENT RESOURCES

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

**Six blogs published on various topics**  
from prescription sunglasses to driving  
and vision

**Four new patient leaflets**, including *Tinted and coloured filters for visual discomfort*, *Scratched Cornea* and *Amsler chart*

## SOCIAL MEDIA IN 2018



Optometry\_today

OT launched its Instagram page in January and has since gained **over 6000 followers**



/AssociationOfOptometrists  
/OptometryTodayJournal

**3179 new followers**



@The\_AOP  
@OptometryToday

**1565 new followers**



/Association of Optometrists

**3970 followers**

# Representing our members

## Policy — deciding and explaining our positions

Our policy team works closely with the Policy Committee and Council to agree our positions on new issues and set out our views for our members and the public.

Our policy work in 2018 covered topics including the GOC's education review and new standards for optical businesses, NHS England's long-term plan, and the review of gross negligence manslaughter in healthcare.

We published new position statements on contact lens substitution and eye care for people with learning disabilities. We also ran and published our major Optometrists' Futures survey looking at optometrists' careers and aspirations, which received 2347 responses.

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

## Public affairs — representing members to government

We continue to promote the interests of our members to Parliament, Government and other institutions. In 2018 we:

- Met many Parliamentarians and attended the two main party conferences
- Worked with other primary care bodies to influence new legislation
- Published a new *Guide to lobbying MPs*
- Held a drop-in event in Parliament to educate MPs about the importance of sight tests and the greater role optometrists can play in the delivery of eye care services
- Responded to 10 consultations, and contributed to 11 more joint responses with other optical bodies

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



# MEDIA COVERAGE IN 2018

**700**  
online and  
print news  
stories

**24%**  
growth in  
media  
coverage

**HOW DOES YOUR CHILD KNOW THIS ISN'T NORMAL?**

A sight test helps your child achieve their best

Book an appointment today

Association of Optometrists [www.aop.org.uk/absee](http://www.aop.org.uk/absee)

**Driving with poor vision is illegal and dangerous**

**Have a sight test at least every two years**

## Representing the profession in the media

Using the statistics from our second Voice of Optometry survey, in which over 1200 members shared their views, we put optometry in the headlines. Our media campaigns promoted eye health and the role of optometrists and were seen or heard by millions of members of the public in 2018.

Highlights included our inaugural *AB See* campaign, promoting the importance of sight tests for children, and our second *Don't swerve a sight test* driving and vision campaign. Both campaigns received national TV coverage, including segments on BBC Breakfast and Sky News, and reached millions more through over 130 radio interviews. Further campaigns included UV protection for children's eyes, glaucoma awareness and contact lens hygiene.

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



# Council and forums

Our Council and Policy Committee play key roles in developing our policy, bringing insights and ideas from all parts of our membership across the UK.



In March, Council considered our response to the second GOC consultation on optical education. It agreed the AOP should support a move to more high-level learning outcomes, but noted that future optometrists must have the intellectual skills needed to meet the demands of evolving practice. Council also contributed to the planning of our workforce survey, *Optometrists' Futures*.

In June, Council reviewed the survey's initial findings and suggested topics to explore further when analysing the survey data. Council approved a new position statement on sight test fees, and explored options for future GOS fee negotiations. Council also gave feedback on the GOC's draft standards for optical businesses to inform our consultation response. Councillors discussed the need to challenge the thinking behind new burdens on optical practices, and to ensure the GOC would use the standards to protect individual practitioners from undue pressures in the workplace.

In October, Council heard the findings of our Member Benefits survey and debated the lessons for the support we offer to members. Councillors also discussed what we should do in response to the findings of the workforce survey, on issues including pay, recruitment and retention, and support for locums. Other agenda items included planning for 100% Optical in 2020, and a discussion on the state of play with the GOC's reviews of education and CET.

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



## OUR FORUMS IN 2018



One of the major issues for me is that the scheme is predicated around 'maintaining entry level standards' ...The BIG issue with this is that it stops the profession developing... Peer review/discussion is a great learning tool when done properly."



I wish we were given the option of choosing what we find most useful to our individual needs, and collect points according to our interests and opportunities."



My main gripe is access to peer review or other interactive meetings for those of us living in remote areas."



Let's vote for another normal three-year cycle while the GOC deliberates, formulates and informs of its intentions with a reasonable level of advance warning."

All quotes from the 'CET scheme is changing' discussion thread, which asked members to contribute to our response to the GOC's consultation on the future of CET.

 [community.aop.org.uk](http://community.aop.org.uk)

# Membership

We saw another year of membership growth in 2018, with qualified optometrist membership increasing by just under 3%. Membership continues to be highly valued, with 98% choosing to renew at the end of 2018.



## Supporting members at the start of their careers

We welcomed over 700 new student optometrist members and nearly 300 newly-qualified optometrist members.



## Supporting members through life milestones

We supported an average of just under 200 members per month on maternity, paternity or adoption leave with our Parental Leave grade and over 150 optometrists moved onto our Newly-retired grade.

### WHO ARE OUR MEMBERS?



# Board

Our Board sets the strategic direction of the AOP, overseeing the running of the organisation and responding to challenges faced by our members.



**Michael George**

Chairman, elected by AOP Council



**Kevin Thompson**

Past Chairman



**Julie-Anne Little**

Deputy Chairman



**Michael Fegan**

Chairman of Finance



**Gordon Ilett**

Elected by AOP Council



**Emma Spofforth**

Elected by AOP Council



**Tushar Majithia**

Elected by AOP Council



**Vivian Bush**

Appointed Director



**Jeremy Holmes**

Lay member

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

Promoting the profession,  
protecting the professional