



ANNUAL
REPORT
2020



Association of
Optometrists

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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.

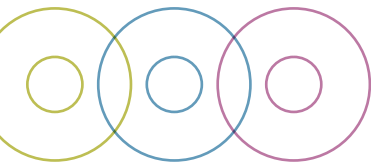


OUR MISSION

- 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



HIGHLIGHTS OF 2019



HENRIETTA ALDERMAN
AOP CHIEF EXECUTIVE

As I write this, and reflect on 2019 activity for this report, we are in the midst of COVID-19 and in very uncertain times. We hope that you and your families stay well and please be assured we are committed to supporting you in all we do.

Influence was our theme for 2019, ensuring our members' concerns were heard by decision makers and the public. Policy positions sit behind campaign materials allowing campaigns such as our smoking cessation campaign, *Stub it out*, to have maximum impact. Members' views through consultation responses, particularly related to the General Optical Council, ensured that their voices, at every stage or mode of practice, were heard.

The AOP is focused on a holistic provision of services surrounding our exceptional insurance and legal defence package. The realigning of the legal team, changing our internal processes so that members

did not have an automated call response and responding to increased numbers of member queries, all assisted in achieving high levels of member satisfaction, retention and a membership market share just shy of 83%.

In continually responding to members' needs we expanded our education offering through face to face meetings, webinars and our journal, *Optometry Today (OT)*, including tailored education to specific segments of the membership. The website provides a huge source of information, with constant new additions, which for 2019 included the revised locum register, revised job board and GOS audit tool.

The AOP is fortunate in having councillors representing members in every mode of practice, assisting in the delivery of excellent service to members.



MICHAEL GEORGE
AOP CHAIRMAN

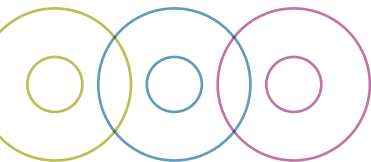
In developing *Influence* as our theme in 2019, the AOP undertook the development of a long-term plan for optometry in order to lead thinking on the future of the profession and the future shape and funding of eye care. Our 2020 theme is *Influence through change* and the long-term plan incorporates the impact of artificial intelligence on optometry, a theme developed with the think-tank Reform. Since COVID-19 has impacted all our lives, this work and the plan will be adjusted accordingly.

During 2019 the AOP continued to develop strategic links with NHS England, and the ongoing discussions on commissioning and the future funding of eye health in England is a key priority in a constantly changing landscape. We maintain good working relationships with colleagues in Optometry Northern

Ireland, Optometry Scotland and Optometry Wales to advise and support our members across the differing devolved NHS systems. UK-wide, there is a recognised overstretch in ophthalmology departments in hospitals, in A&E and in GP practices. Expanding the use by the NHS of optometrists within the primary care setting is critical and the AOP, working with sector colleagues, is determined to influence the change that is needed. COVID-19 has accelerated both the pivotal links and the potential changes within primary care.

2020 will be dominated by COVID-19 and the importance of protecting, supporting and representing the membership of the AOP has never been more critical.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Michael George".



PROTECTING OUR MEMBERS



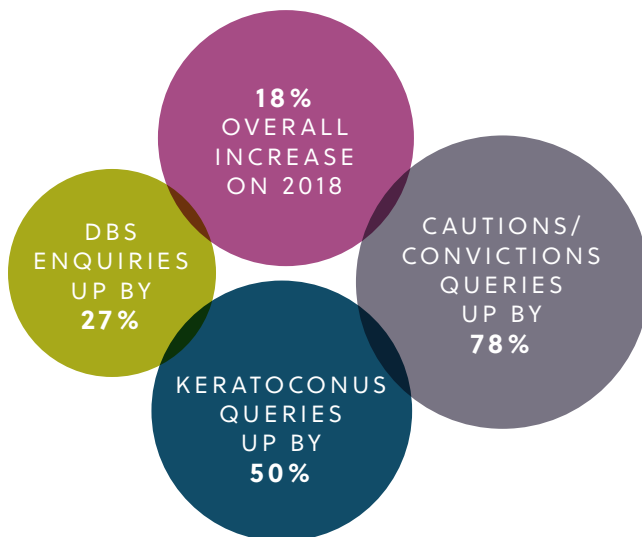
ELLA FRANCI
LEGAL DIRECTOR

In 2019 the legal and regulatory department underwent a change in leadership, when Ella Franci was promoted to Legal Director. This change was accompanied by the introduction of a new streamlined department structure and the addition of even greater legal expertise, with new managers joining each of its key areas of work: professional discipline, employment and clinical negligence.

There continued to be a high volume of enquiries from our members across the department in all areas, as well as an increase in the number of members seeking trade union representation at disciplinary meetings. In addition, the employment team saw an increase in the number of employers who contacted our employment service for legal and HR advice.

The clinical and regulatory team were joined by two new team members, taking the number of optometrist clinical advisers within the team to six. As well as general clinical enquiries, the team also dealt with an increase in DVLA enquiries and queries concerning safeguarding children and vulnerable adults, and many queries concerning opening/closing a practice.

6004 QUERIES TO THE LEGAL AND REGULATORY TEAM



OTHER COMMON QUERIES

1201
EMPLOYMENT
MATTERS
QUERIES

139
PATIENT
RECORDS
(GDPR)
QUERIES

134
PROFESSIONAL
CONDUCT
QUERIES

410
PATIENT
COMPLAINTS
QUERIES

153
DVLA
QUERIES

NEW IN 2019

LEGAL CASE STUDIES

Eight new anonymous member stories were published, offering valuable points of learning on how to avoid legal or regulatory action, including two *Who's got your back?* short films, and six case studies

EMPLOYMENT LAW RESOURCES

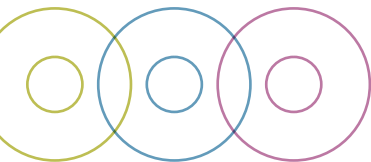
We published online member guidance with editable templates on non-compete clauses, equal pay, employment status, flexible working and sickness absence

CLINICAL AND REGULATORY GUIDANCE

New guidance was published on informed consent, delegation and safe practice, small glasses, and data security and protection

We also produced new online advice on providing primary care services for patients with low vision and sight-impairment

www.aop.org.uk/legal



SUPPORTING OUR MEMBERS

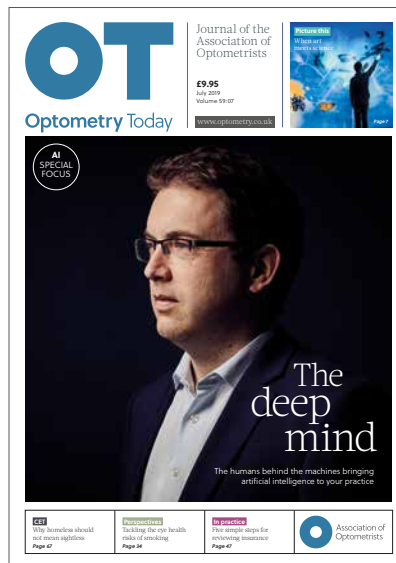
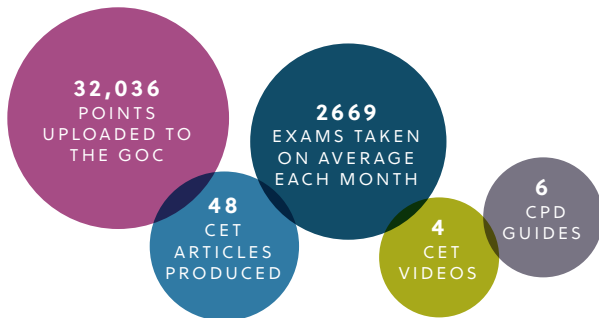
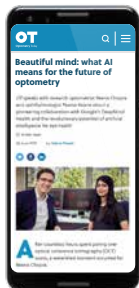
In 2019 we further developed our website to offer new member services and essential guidance for employed, locum and business owner members. We also delivered a new events and webinar programme, meeting the CET and professional development needs of thousands of members across the country.

NEW OPTOMETRY STUDENT GUIDE

Our *Optometry student guide* was free for all optometry students at freshers' fairs in 2019. Bringing together advice, resources and career options, the guide was produced to help students make the most of university and opportunities after qualification.



OT CET



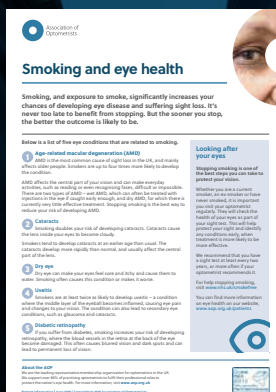
HIGHLIGHTS FROM 2019

NEW LOCUM LISTING

As part of our ongoing investment in online member services, we launched a new, user-friendly and personalised national locum register.

www.aop.org.uk/locum-register

NEW PATIENT RESOURCES



Seven new patient leaflets:
Your prescription explained,
Smoking and eye health,
Myopia management and NHS sight test eligibility for England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

www.aop.org.uk/patients

EVENTS AND EDUCATION

WEBINARS
ATTENDED
BY **1421**
MEMBERS

LOCUM
EVENTS
ATTENDED
BY **484**
MEMBERS

PEER
DISCUSSIONS
ATTENDED
BY **336**
MEMBERS

LEGAL
SEMINARS
ATTENDED
BY **165**
MEMBERS

RETURN
TO WORK
EVENTS
ATTENDED
BY **26**
MEMBERS

100%
OPTICAL
ATTENDED
BY **9115**
VISITORS

HOSPITAL
OPTOMETRISTS
ANNUAL
CONFERENCE
ATTENDED
BY **194**
MEMBERS

“The topics covered were really relevant

VICTORIA GIOVINCHI,
PEER DISCUSSION, NEWCASTLE

“I picked up lots of pointers and liked the small groups per table

LOCUM EVENT

www.aop.org.uk/events-and-education

AOP PEER SUPPORT LINE

AOP Peer Support Line

Free, confidential emotional support for individuals at any stage of their career

0800 870 8401



15%
INCREASE
IN CALLS

#STUDENTAOP

- We met optometry students at 13 universities during freshers' week
- Online joining launched for all new optometry students
- All third-year students had the opportunity to attend a legal lecture with our in-house legal team, as part of their law and ethics module.

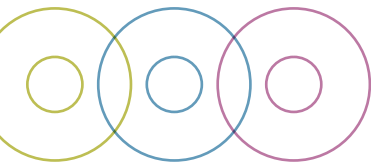
SOCIAL MEDIA

Optometry_today
5979 new followers

/AssociationOfOptometrists /OptometryTodayJournal
2716 new followers

@The_AOP @OptometryToday
2162 new followers

/Association of Optometrists
5081 new followers



REPRESENTING OUR MEMBERS

Manifesto for eye care

Our policy manifesto *Fighting for change* lists our key priorities for the future.

Read our full time spent manifesto to find out more about what we are doing and how you can get involved at www.aop.org.uk/manifesto

WHAT WE ARE CALLING FOR:

- The NHS to commission more general ophthalmology, contact optician practices to the east of London to improve access and pay a fair rate for sight tests
- Better access to eye healthcare for people with learning disabilities and children
- Action against illegal supply of contact lenses and spectacles
- Regular vision checks for all drivers

Association of Optometrists www.aop.org.uk/manifesto

POLICY DEVELOPING OUR POSITIONS

Our staff work with the Council and Policy Committee to set our policy agenda. Key topics in 2019 were the future of the profession — focusing on how the AOP should aim to influence developments — and optometry education.

In 2019 we launched the first AOP policy manifesto, summarising our key priorities. We published position statements on cataract surgery rationing (including information members provided on the forums), business rates, therapeutic prescribing, and CET grants.

We noticed people often misunderstand the reasons for high false positive referral rates from optical practices, and produced a briefing on this, *The truth about false positive referrals*. We also published a joint policy statement on referrals with the Royal College of Ophthalmologists and College of Optometrists.

www.aop.org.uk/policy

PUBLIC AFFAIRS REPRESENTING YOU TO GOVERNMENT

Our role includes promoting the views and interests of our members to Parliament, Government and other bodies. Our Parliamentary work in 2019 included discussions and briefings on issues including children’s sight tests, AMD, and the NHS Long Term Plan.

We developed our links with representative bodies in other parts of primary care to co-ordinate briefings and consultation responses. We influenced Government and other decision-makers through consultations on topics ranging from the Prevention Green Paper, through the HSIB review of glaucoma monitoring, to the GOC’s work on education policy and patient confidentiality.

Association of Optometrists THE TRUTH ABOUT FALSE POSITIVE REFERRALS

High levels of ‘false positive’ referrals from primary care to hospitals can be seen as a sign of poor performance – but is this fair?

DISEASE PREVALENCE
 10 people are affected by the eye condition each year in Gloucestershire (the same 100 – 1000 in population).
 10 people are affected by the eye condition each year in the London area (the same 100 – 1000 in population).
 10 people are affected by the eye condition each year in the London area (the same 100 – 1000 in population).

TESTING IN PRIMARY CARE
 Imagine optometrists can see that accurately identify 90% of those people who have the disease and accurately identify 10% of those who don't.
 This is done in 1000 optometry practices in Gloucestershire and 1000 in London.

NON-REFERRALS
 1000 people are correctly identified as having the disease.
 1000 people are correctly identified as not having the disease.
 1000 people are incorrectly identified as having the disease.
 1000 people are incorrectly identified as not having the disease.

REFERRALS
 1000 people are correctly identified as having the disease.
 1000 people are correctly identified as not having the disease.
 1000 people are incorrectly identified as having the disease.
 1000 people are incorrectly identified as not having the disease.

50% POSITIVE PREDICTIVE VALUE
 In Gloucestershire, the test is so effective and accurate that 50% of people who are referred to hospital are correctly identified as having the disease.
 In London, the test is so effective and accurate that 50% of people who are referred to hospital are correctly identified as having the disease.

Low disease prevalence can give the impression that optometrists over refer. However, out of a sample of 1000 in this illustration, only 10 (1%) were incorrectly identified as testing positive for the disease.




MEDIA REPRESENTING YOU IN THE MEDIA

Using the statistics from our third Voice of Optometry survey, in which over 1000 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 2019.

Highlights included our *Stub it out* campaign, warning smokers that they are putting themselves at increased risk of blindness or sight impairment by continuing with the habit, and our third *Don't swerve a sight test* driving and vision campaign. The campaigns received national TV coverage, including TV segments on BBC News and STV, and reached millions more through over 20 radio interviews including Talk Radio and Sky News Radio. *Stub it out* was supported by outdoor advertising in Glasgow, Manchester and Hackney—areas that have some of the highest levels of smoking in the UK.


www.aop.org.uk/our-voice

OVER 200 PRINT, BROADCAST AND ONLINE NEWS STORIES



Stub out your **cigarette**.
Not your **vision**.

Smokers are twice as likely to lose their sight compared to non-smokers.

#Stubitout www.aop.org.uk/stubitout  Association of Optometrists

**Don't swerve
a sight test**

Poor vision causes an estimated 2900 road casualties every year



www.aop.org.uk/dontswerve  Association of Optometrists



COUNCIL, POLICY COMMITTEE AND MEMBER FORUMS

COUNCIL AND POLICY COMMITTEE

Our Council and Policy Committee have central roles in developing our policy, bringing insights and ideas from all sections of our membership and all parts of the UK.

The Policy Committee engages in depth with new issues and regulatory proposals. For example, in May 2019 the Committee reviewed draft GOC guidance on patient confidentiality, including the key issue of notifying patients to the DVLA. The Committee agreed that guidance was needed, but felt the draft guidance was potentially confusing, and should give registrants a more structured way of deciding whether to notify the DVLA. We made these points in our consultation response, and the GOC made substantial changes to its final guidance to address the Committee's concerns.

The Council includes members who represent every country and region in the UK, and each segment of our membership. During 2019 the Council provided insights and advice on issues including the GOC's new standards for registered optical businesses and the Education Strategic Review. Council meetings also included a series of discussions on the future of the optometry profession and how the AOP could best seek to promote the interests of its members in a fast-changing world. Council members also helped develop a new action plan to boost member engagement with the AOP's policy work.

www.aop.org.uk/council

MEMBER FORUMS

The AOP Community online forums provide a way for all our members to start conversations and contribute to debate on live policy issues. In autumn 2019 a proposal for a degree apprenticeship prompted the largest forum discussion we've ever seen, with over 200 posts commenting on the idea and highlighting the risks it could pose to patient safety and public confidence in the profession. These contributions informed our consultation response, which firmly opposed the proposal and quoted many of the forum posts to illustrate our members' concerns.



QUOTES FROM THE OPTOMETRY APPRENTICESHIP DEVELOPMENT THREAD

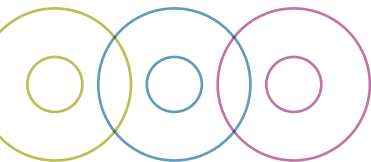


I cannot comprehend how apprentices will be able to achieve the level of knowledge required by training in a commercial environment



Supervising a pre-reg requires a lot of time, it will be impossible to take on an even more demanding role of supervising a lay person into becoming a clinically aware and GOC-safe optometrist

community.aop.org.uk



MEMBERSHIP IN 2019

As the leading representative membership organisation for optometrists in the UK, we are proud to have 83% of practising optometrists as members. Our membership grew in 2019, with a 3.5% increase in qualified optometrist members. Members continue to demonstrate how much they value their membership with our renewal retention rate remaining at 98%.

SUPPORTING MEMBERS AT THE START OF THEIR CAREER

The number of optical students enjoying a free student membership has grown, and we welcomed 605 members onto our Newly-Qualified optometrist grade.

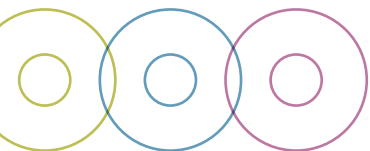
SUPPORTING MEMBERS DURING LIFE MILESTONES

More members took advantage of our Parental Leave grade last year, with 407 members on the grade during 2019.

WHO ARE OUR MEMBERS?



www.aop.org.uk/membership



THE 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



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

