

Welcome to our annual report, which focuses on our highlights and achievements in 2013.

Over the past year, we have increased our level of support to members, from world-class CET, to clinical advice and sell-out peer review and legal roadshows. Supporting members on the political stage continues to be high on our agenda. As a strong voice within the Optical Confederation, we have worked hard with other optical bodies to lobby for improvements in eye health at a national level. And our core strength and support to members of insurance and legal provision continues to grow.

Understanding the needs of members is vitally important for any membership organisation. You can make assumptions as to what members might want, or need, but working with evidence is

far more valuable. To that end, we undertook a comprehensive membership survey in December. The results will inform our activity going forward, ensuring that not only can we meet members' current needs but that we have the insight to identify and satisfy the future needs of members too. We look forward to using the data to provide a better membership package and service for our members.



Henrietta Alderman
Chief Executive



Lyndon Taylor
Chairman

Promoting the profession, protecting the professional

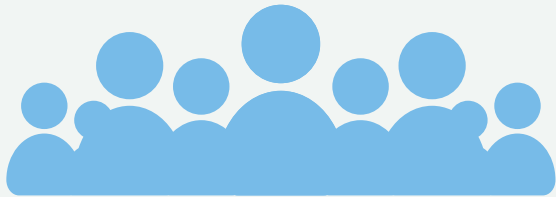


Defending our members

In-house legal support

Our in-house legal team had another busy year advising and supporting members on a range of legal issues.

In 2013, our nine-strong team dealt with 1,846 general legal enquiries, an increase of 32%, compared to 2012



Results at the General Optical Council in 2013

In 2013, we assisted 88 members who were investigated by the General Optical Council's (GOC's) Investigation Committee. The majority of cases were concluded with no further action. 30 investigations are still ongoing.

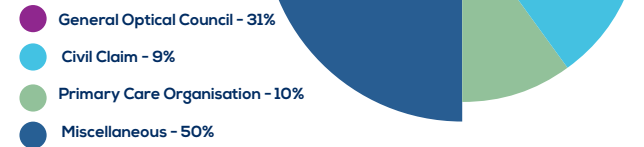
We represented 21 members in front of the GOC's Fitness to Practise Committee.

We also advised a number of members in respect of declarations of criminal offences, including cautions and convictions, for example, to the GOC.

The charts below highlight the outcomes of cases considered by the Investigation Committee and the Fitness to Practise Committee in 2013.

New files during 2013

Of these general legal enquiries, 353 new cases were opened. The chart below shows the opened cases by type.

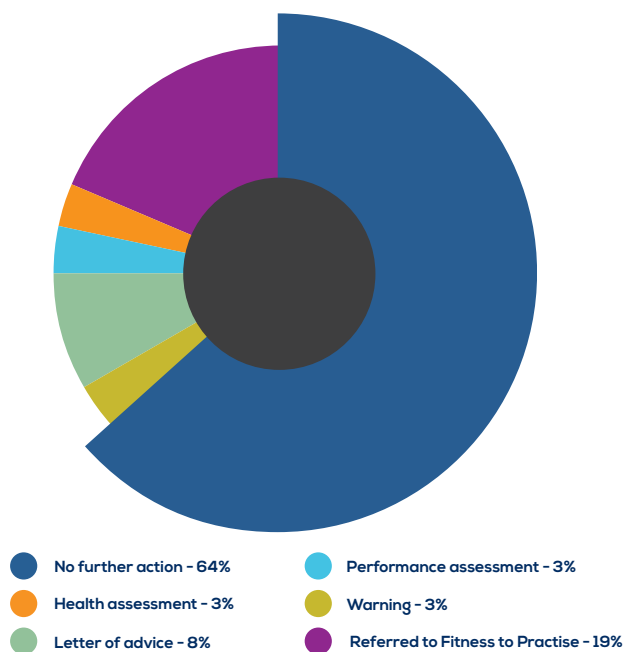


"I just wanted to say a big thank you to your legal team for all the immense support that you all have given me through this process over the last few months"

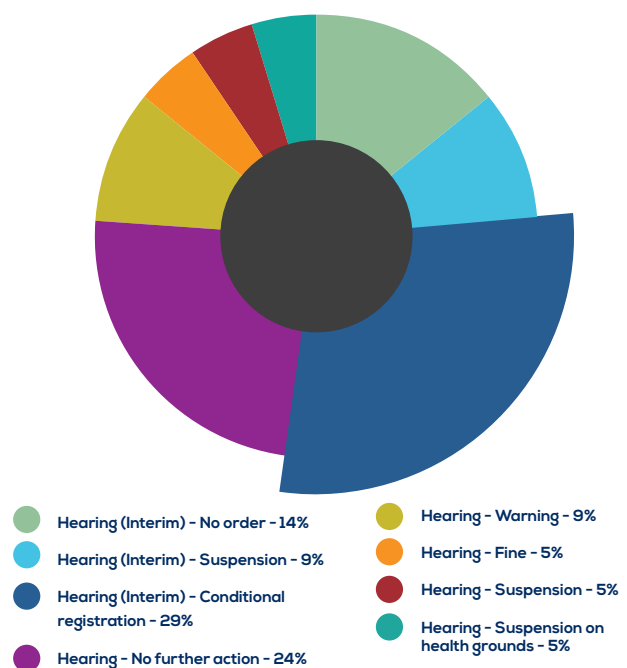
"The efficiency of your team was parallel to none. I'm constantly raving about you all to my optom friends and encouraging them to become members of the AOP if they aren't already"

"Thank you for all of your continued hard work in supporting me and guiding me through this whole investigation process.... I would like to extend my personal gratitude for all of your support through a very difficult time of my life. Your continued hard work has always kept me positive"

Investigation Committee outcomes



Fitness to Practise Committee outcomes





Employment law service

Responding to our members' needs, in January 2013 we launched a new in-house employment law service. Through AOP membership, members can now receive legal advice and support covering the full range of employment law issues facing optical professionals today, such as contracts of employment, maternity cover and more. This service has been particularly well received, with 590 enquiries personally dealt with during the year.

"Thank you for your advice and help. I was really struggling with what I was going to say about the dispensing rate targets"



Regulatory support

The biggest regulatory change in England was the replacement of Primary Care Trusts by NHS England and its Area Teams. As a result of these changes, we dealt with numerous enquiries from members and Local Optical Committees about Area Teams. In addition to this, the legal team offered advice to NHS England during the transitional period.

The payment of the Continuing Education and Training (CET) allowance to practitioners in England continued to cause friction in 2013. Some of our members found that not all General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) contractors were willing to claim the allowance on behalf of their performers and hand over the payment to them.

The division of labour between Area Teams and support agencies resulted in many newly-qualified optometrists seeking to join the Ophthalmic Performers List having to wait excessive lengths of time to be listed. The AOP took the initiative to intervene in many cases to speed up the process.



FIND OUT MORE ▶

www.aop.org.uk/legal



Support to help you practise

Vision standards

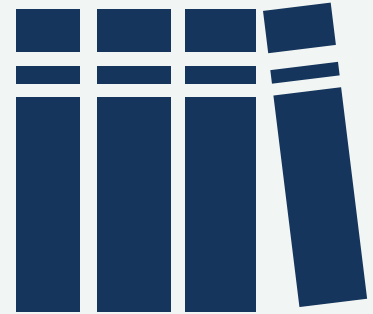
The AOP has long been the reference point for occupational vision standards. Our online guidance is one of the most popular sections of the website and, in 2013, we completely revised and

updated this resource. Occupation groups are listed with vision standard details to ensure that our members have the most up to date information for patients. Members can now access new information, including

links for vision standards for over 20 professions and sports, with more to be added in 2014.

FIND OUT MORE ►

www.aop.org.uk/quicklinks



"Really enjoyed the CET on staying safe in practice. Brilliant"

"A really excellent article, educational and enlightening. This is what CET should be about"

Pioneering professional development

In response to the GOC's new CET system for 2013-15, we ensured that we delivered CET articles to the new requirements from the very first issue of Optometry Today (OT) in 2013.

Throughout the year, OT produced 48 CET accredited articles and 12 VRICS features, authored by industry-renowned clinical experts, which covered every GOC learning objective for optometrists and dispensing opticians.

OT allocated just under 80,000 CET points (CET, VRICS and CET video)

OT's online CET section was viewed by over 8,000 unique users per month

An average of 2,965 unique users took CET per month

FIND OUT MORE ►

www.optometry.co.uk/cet



"Excellent clinical advice delivered with a bit of banter"

"A thought-provoking and interesting evening. Well presented and engaging"

NEW Interactive CET

In response to the new CET system, we also improved and increased our delivery of interactive CET. We considered what our members would need under the new system and launched a series of peer review roadshows around the country.

We introduced a touch of drama to CET through our legal roadshows, including a live performance of a commonplace practice scenario seen through the eyes of the various practice staff and optometrists. In 2014, we will expand these roadshows across the UK.

We developed new 'interactive' CET options for text-led clinical articles in OT, allowing participants to join discussions via LinkedIn

NEW Image Library

In response to requests from members, we launched an exclusive Image Library with a range of high quality optical images for members to use in marketing material or on their websites. The new service has formed part of our support for independent practice and has been extremely popular, with more than 1,200 members signed up.



FIND OUT MORE ► www.aop.org.uk/imagelibrary

"The service you are offering is fantastic and, for us, invaluable. I have been checking almost on a weekly basis for new images to use"

**Drew Thompson
AOP member
and independent
practitioner**

Popular member events

"I feel totally overwhelmed to win this award. To be nominated by my peers and voted for, by both my fellow professionals and my own patients, feels just amazing"

**Polly Dulley,
AOP Optometrist of
the Year 2013**

We organised a wide range of popular events throughout 2013, enabling members to meet their peers, network and share ideas.

From our sell-out peer review and legal roadshows, to the Student Eye Opener Conference and our glittering AOP Awards, which give us the opportunity to recognise some of the greatest achievements of the profession.

The Hospital Optometrists Annual Conference continues to thrive, representing the interests of our members who are employees of the NHS. 180 delegates attended the 2013 conference, with a comprehensive programme that provided 14 CET points.

Telephone support

Practitioner support has always been a key part of our role. In 2013, over 100 optometrists and pre-registration trainees were mentored and supported after a career break, re-location or difficulties in the workplace.

Communication

By using a range of platforms, from electronic to print and social media, we have continued to communicate swiftly and effectively with our members.

Our peer review roadshows attracted over 1,000 registrations and sold out in 48 hours

2013 highlights include:

- Increased social media engagement, with nearly 1,000 followers on AOP Twitter
- Approximately 175,000 visits and over 93,500 unique visitors on the AOP website
- An average open rate of 46% on our member emails – more than double the industry standard

FIND OUT MORE ►

www.aop.org.uk/events



Raising the profile of optometry

Political influence

We play a key role in the Optical Confederation (OC), which provides an excellent platform for the collective voice of the profession. Through the OC we responded to 35 consultations and select committee responses in 2013, on subjects as diverse as exposure to sunlight and the NHS constitution, ensuring the work of the optical sector was constantly being raised with government departments and officials.



OC's increased activity included:

- A strong presence at the three main party conferences, including meetings with Norman Lamb MP, Minister for Care Services and Jamie Reed MP, Shadow Health Minister
- Attending popular fringe events where delegates and MPs alike discussed the role that optometrists can play in delivering healthcare in the community
- 18 practice visits in collaboration with LOCSU - from Devon to Stockton-on-Tees - introducing MPs to Local Optical Committees (LOCs) and leading discussions about how to improve enhanced services locally
- Prominent MP visits included, Andrew Lansley, former Secretary of State for Health; Dan Poulter, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health and Stephen Dorrell, Chair of the Health Select Committee
- 7 meetings with MPs and Peers at Westminster
- Supporting Devon LOC in holding an event at Parliament for the counties' MPs, in conjunction with the Local Pharmaceutical Committee

IT related issues have been a significant work stream for the OC. We have submitted a capital bid to government and are grateful to the Central (Local Optical Committee) Fund for their support of the OC IT specialist.

"A fine example of how, through local opticians, issues can be identified early to address problems quickly and cost-effectively"

**Andrew Lansley MP,
Former Secretary
of State for Health,
following a practice visit**

Tackling the big issues

Through the OC, we have tackled some of the big issues facing the profession, for example the discontinuation of Fluorets.

Early in 2013, Bausch and Lomb announced they were discontinuing the production of Fluorets, the only fluorescein strip licensed as a medicine in the UK. The withdrawal of Fluorets left Minims fluorescein as the only legally available product despite the fact that it is not felt to be as suitable or effective for many clinical applications. Following significant lobbying of the Medicines and Healthcare Regulatory Agency, an undertaking was given that enforcement action would not be taken by them pending the outcome of coincidental discussions about the status of fluorescein at European level. Problems caused by the withdrawal of Fluorets were exacerbated by problems in the supply of 1% Fluorescein Minims.

In 2013, the OC established a clinical consensus panel of leading clinicians and academics to look at the whole issue and provide guidance for our members. We were key players in the publication of a consensus report from the panel. The consensus panel report provided us with the opportunity to confirm that we will insure and support members when using fluorescein in the best interests of their patients. We will continue to work hard with our OC partners to seek a sensible resolution of this issue during 2014.



It is a pleasure to have the opportunity to highlight the AOP's long-standing commitment to working together across optics. This is seen in Optometry Scotland, Optometry Wales, Optometry Northern Ireland and LOCSU and in the AOP's key role in the successful Optical Confederation we have today - speaking with a single powerful voice to improve eye health and eye care. We succeed for all when we act as one"

Don Grocott, Chairman, Optical Confederation

FIND OUT MORE ►

www.opticalconfederation.org.uk



Children's eye health

Our children's eye health campaign helps members promote the importance of regular sight tests for children. The campaign has been very well-received, particularly with those in independent practice. Hundred of members have been involved in the campaign, making use of the range of free resources available on our website, from posters to top tips and presentations for schools. The campaign gained national coverage promoting the importance of children's vision to the public.

In 2013, we had over 3,000 hits on our children's campaign site

"This was a very successful campaign and we estimate that we had gained 50 new patients (all children) from the promotion"

FIND OUT MORE ▶

www.aop.org.uk/childreneyehealth

In the news

We have continued to champion the profession and promote optometry and eye health to the media. We regularly respond to journalists on a range of topics, from the importance of sight tests, to driving and vision and smart phone usage.

Our 2013 media highlights include:

- Coverage in the Guardian and Evening Standard during National Eye Health Week
- BBC Radio interview on the importance of driving with good vision
- Features in consumer magazines, including Health & Fitness and Right Start, promoting the importance of children's eye health
- Case study features, highlighting the importance of eye health and the role of optometry



Recognising your needs



We are the only representative body solely dedicated to your interests as individual practitioners. We provide genuinely independent support to our members, whether an employer, employee or locum, through professional support and legal defence. Working to ensure your welfare is our primary function and daily focus.

Membership of the AOP enables you to practise your profession secure in the knowledge that you will be defended, protected, supported and guided on any issue that affects you in your professional life – all the way from the day you start university right through your retirement.

"We recognise that times are tough for our members and so the membership fee was frozen in 2013 and continues to remain unchanged in 2014"

Henrietta Alderman, Chief Executive



AOP membership

Medical malpractice insurance

covering you for the work you carry out, whatever your mode of practice or career stage

In-house legal support

giving you access to the best possible legal advice and representation

Legal helpline

providing you with free legal advice whenever you need it, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week



Employment law service

supporting your workplace needs

Free cover for tax investigations and VAT disputes

saving you more than £400

Pioneering professional development

providing world-class education to support your career development



Interactive CET

facilitating peer review roadshows around the country

Optometry Today

delivering your print and online platform for professional education and debate



Image Library

helping to promote you and your practice

Campaign resources

supporting the promotion of regular sight tests

Events

enabling you to meet your peers, network and share ideas

Benefits

saving you time and money, professionally and personally

FIND OUT MORE 

www.aop.org.uk/membership

Financial report

Copies of the full annual financial statements, the auditor's report and the directors' report are available for members to download from the AOP's website at www.aop.org.uk