

**Association of
Optometrists**
Annual Report 2013





Introduction from the Chairman and Interim Chief Executive

It is in the nature of an Annual Report to pick the highlights of the year, in an effort to give readers a flavour of the year under review. This Association of Optometrists (AOP) Annual Report certainly does that, but it is important to remember that highlights are by definition not the full reality.

Members who do not come into frequent contact with the Association may not realise how much work the AOP does on their behalf both as individuals and as a profession. Optometrists have their own professional lives to lead and are not inclined to worry too much about what goes on at 2 Woodbridge Street, London EC1, so long as they feel that they are getting value for money.

Conscious of the difficult and deteriorating conditions faced by many of our members in 2012 and 2013, we continued to freeze our subscription rates. At the same time, we undertook a root and branch assessment of our services to members. This assessment took the form of the development of the Association's business plan for implementation from 2013 onwards.

The thrust of the plan is to improve our services to members, employed and self-employed, part-time and full time, locums and those who have their own practices. This reflects the pressures bearing down on both employers and employees: in the case of employees, the issues of restricted sight test times and so-called conversion rates, as well as the downward pressure on salaries; in the case of practice-owners, an often over-zealous regulatory burden and the ferocious competitive environment in which they find themselves.

The defence of our members will always be the heart of what the Association does. Elsewhere in this report you will read of the activities of our legal department. As the demand for legal defence has increased over the years, so the in-house team has grown. This year we have welcomed both employment and clinical negligence specialists into the team. You will also read of the work the Association does in the fields of clinical and regulatory advice, again often much appreciated by our members. With the arrival of the new Managing Editor of Optometry Today (OT), John White, we received an effective boost to our communications in 2012.

It is a cliché to say that members' expectations of the Association have mushroomed – hence how busy the office is. (Clichés are often true.) The challenge is to meet our members' various and changing needs. Meanwhile the challenge facing many General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) contractors in England in 2013 is to adapt successfully to the abolition of Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) and the introduction of the NHS Commissioning Board (NCB). The first quarter of 2013 has produced a few signs that the transition will not be smooth. At the time of writing, we are not holding our breath.

We should not leave our review of 2012 without mentioning some of the highlights: an excellent National Optical Conference (NOC) organised in conjunction with the Local Optical Committee Support Unit (LOCSU) and a second, glittering, AOP Awards ceremony. Congratulations and bouquets to all concerned. Ditto the AOP Student Eye Opener Conference, which proved to be another major success for the Association in 2012. This year we are delighted to have hosted the Fresh Eyes Conference with the College of Optometrists, the first-ever event targeted at newly-qualified optometrists.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank all our colleagues in the other optical bodies, the Optical Confederation, our members, Councillors, Board members, the Executive Team and the rest of the Association's staff for their support and contributions. As we wrote last year, we are confident that the Association will go from strength to strength.



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Defending our members

The defence of members is our core business.

The AOP's in-house legal team (six lawyers, one clinical adviser, one solicitor and two paralegals) work exclusively with our members and their experience in defending claims in the optical sector is unparalleled. The AOP professional defence and medical malpractice insurance is tailor-made for optometrists and dispensing opticians as an integral part of their AOP membership. Our cover is focused on protecting members and their reputation and right to practise.

AOP members have access to the best possible legal advice and representation given by experienced staff whose sole function is to assist and advise practitioners. Our legal team understand exactly what members are going through, whatever the circumstances of the complaint. One of our lawyers actually qualified and practised as an optometrist before she qualified as a solicitor.

Legal defence



Our in-house legal team has had another very active and successful year providing unrivalled advice, defence and representation to our membership.

In 2012, we dealt with more than 1,700 cases and the legal helpline took more than 1,200 calls from AOP members.

Some of the highlights of the team's year included:

- Representing a student who was brought before the Fitness to Practise Committee of the General Optical Council (GOC) on grounds of deficient professional performance. We successfully argued that a student is by definition under supervision and, under current legislation, the charges against this student were misconceived
- We successfully appealed a decision by the GOC's Registrar to refuse to allow another of our younger members on to the full register pending the outcome of an investigation by the Investigation Committee
- We defended a clinical negligence claim brought against one of our members who had not done anything wrong. The case was initially listed for trial but, before the case went to court, the claimant withdrew her case in the face of the strength of the defence we mounted.

Throughout the year, the team met with representatives of the Law Commission, attended meetings in Scotland and England and responded in detail to the Law Commission consultation.

During the course of a very busy year we added to the legal team by taking on a paralegal. Two new solicitors joined the team in January 2013, one specialising in employment issues and the other in clinical issues. They will focus on helping the growing number of members who encounter clinical and employment issues, including disciplinary, grievances and redundancies.

The team will continue to lecture around the country in 2013, to promote best practice and answer legal questions. This includes involvement with the newly-launched, regional Peer Review Roadshows, lectures at optometry universities and advice sessions at Optrafair and the annual AOP Student Eye Opener Conference.

Our two new solicitors bring with them a wealth of experience and members can rest assured that the AOP will continue to offer the best possible legal advice and representation

Gerda Goldinger, AOP Director of Legal Services

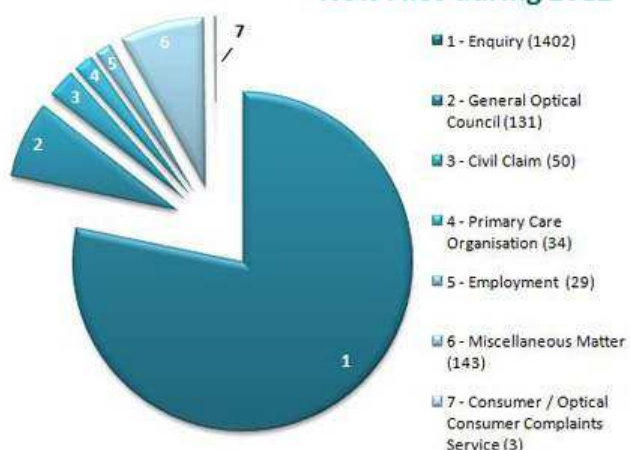
2012 overview

Work undertaken by our in-house legal team in 2012

The number of enquires received by our legal team increased in 2012. Of those enquires, 390 new cases were opened. The chart below shows the number of each type of case opened.

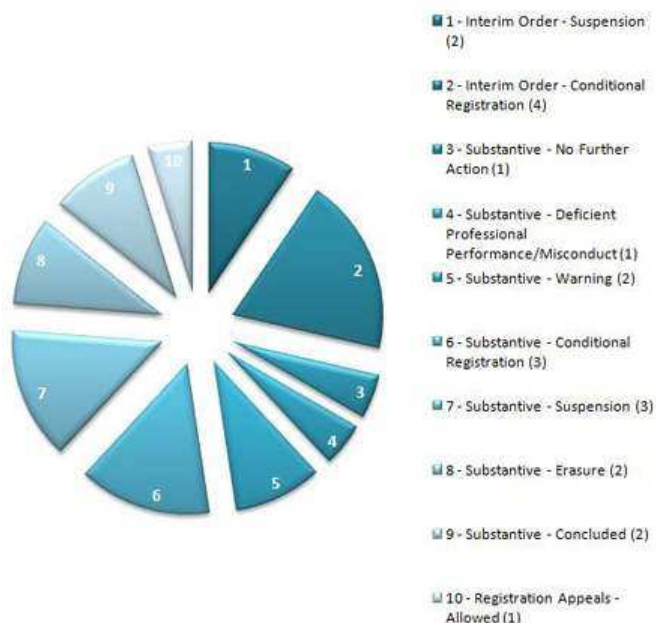


New Files during 2012



Results at the General Optical Council in 2012

The AOP represented 21 members in front of the GOC's Fitness to Practise and Registration Committee in 2012. The chart below highlights the outcomes of the 21 cases.





Support to help you practise

We provide support and advice to our members to help them to deliver a high level of patient care and to practise safely within the legal framework that regulates the optical profession.

We offer all members the expert help that they need in complying with their professional and regulatory obligations, whatever their mode of practice.

Advice and support

In 2012, the primary focus of our clinical and regulatory affairs team was to assist members, collectively and individually, in their dealings with the NHS and regulatory authorities in all four countries of the UK.



Part of this collective effort is to respond to consultations by government departments and agencies, often done under the umbrella of the Optical Confederation or similar bodies in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

In addition, much time was taken in 2012 to monitor the evolution of the new NHS landscape in England; to try and understand how the proposed changes will affect our members; and, where possible, to minimise any adverse impact that these changes might have. In particular we have, with our Optical Confederation colleagues, worked hard to ensure that primary care optics is kept out of the clutches of Monitor, the body set up by the Government to ensure cost (as opposed to clinical) effectiveness in the NHS. A requirement to register with Monitor would have added a very significant extra and unsustainable burden on all optical providers. In this regard we are cautiously optimistic that our lobbying and consultation submissions have been successful. We have also been successful in avoiding the clutches of the Care Quality Commission.

We have worked hard to ensure that a single model for the operation of General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) will apply across the whole of England. We hope that, by the time this Annual Report is published, we will have agreed the final version of the 'standard operating model' - as it has become known - with the NHS Commissioning Board (NCB). Our aim is to eliminate a variety of local interpretations of the GOS regulations and the GOS contract that have caused us problems in the past.

We have also been pressuring the Government to introduce a single performers list for optometrists in England, pointing out that such a list already exists in the form of the General Optical Council (GOC) register. Whilst we do not believe the Commissioning Board will adopt the GOC register because it would set us apart from the other primary care professions, we are confident that the single performers list model will be adopted.

During 2012 we saw NHS Primary Care Trusts (PCTs) mutate into clusters in anticipation of the Commissioning Board being 'supported' by Local Area Teams. Rather than going out with a whimper (as we might have hoped), many PCTs seemed to be intent on making life as difficult as possible for contractors and performers under the guise of regularising their lists, contracts and information prior to a transfer to the NCB or Clinical Commissioning Groups. Throughout the year, we were busy assisting members who found themselves in difficulties. The quirks of 'Post Payment Verification' continued to plague some of our members.

At the time of writing in 2013, a major preoccupation facing the Association and our members is the apparent lack of preparedness of the Commissioning Board. With our colleagues in the Optical Confederation, we are pressing the Board and other authorities to ensure that there is no interruption in GOS payments to contractors after 1 April. This is a worrying situation. Hopefully, by the time this Annual Report is published, disaster will have been averted.

AOP membership



We continue to protect practitioners without passing on higher membership costs. For the third year running, we have kept membership fees at the same level having undertaken a restructuring which focused on providing greater value for members.

Over the past three years, the number of members paying their subscriptions online has tripled. This has helped us to keep our administration costs down and deliver a better service to our members. Payments by Direct Debit continue to rise, with three quarters of our members currently paying by instalments, either quarterly or monthly, to spread the cost over the year.

Different AOP membership categories are available to suit the varying circumstances of practitioners. Part-time practitioners can take advantage of the concessionary grade - provided they work for fewer than 100 days per year. The 100-day allowance includes work in all modes of practice, including Optometric Adviser.

Newly-qualified practitioners are offered a substantial discount on membership for the year in which they qualify.

For more information about AOP membership and how to join, please contact our membership team.

Most students enter their working life carrying significant debt and often have new expenses to cover. The AOP is doing what it can to help make life easier for those who are the future of the profession. All optometry students and pre-registration students are entitled to free AOP membership and professional support

David Craig, AOP Director of Marketing and Business Development



Member services

AOP membership gives all members automatic cover through Abbey Tax Protection in respect of tax investigations and VAT disputes.

Average settlements made by taxpayers with HM Revenue and Customs following a business tax investigation often run into several thousand pounds, including tax, interest and penalties. In addition, considerable professional fees are often incurred.

This free membership cover can dramatically reduce the potential duties without any professional charges. The AOP receives many calls from members who are offered this cover by their accountants (for a fee) and they are always delighted when they find that their AOP membership includes this benefit which is worth, on its own, more than £400.

We also offer a huge range of **member benefits**, from the obvious - but essential - medical malpractice insurance, through to a range of services provided by third party suppliers. Our recommended personal and business services have been negotiated by the AOP on our members' behalf and are regularly reviewed for quality and value for money.

An AOP-approved supplier provides a service that has been vetted by the AOP to ensure that members get high quality, delivered at a fair price. Should anything go wrong, the AOP is on hand to ensure that members get the best possible deal and that any problems are ironed out.

Throughout 2012 we continued to offer our members a range of benefits. Business benefits include credit card clearance, practice management consultancy, practice valuation and asset finance. Personal benefits include mortgages, travel insurance, financial planning, medical insurance, vehicle purchasing schemes and vehicle breakdown assistance.

The Association of Optometrists is authorised and regulated by the Financial Conduct Authority, reference number 313444. In some instances, the AOP does receive fees for the successful referral of members to these firms. Members should be assured that any remuneration received assists the AOP in maintaining its current level of membership subscription.

More information about the level of remuneration received is detailed on our website.

AOP membership includes free cover for tax investigations and VAT disputes - saving our members more than £400

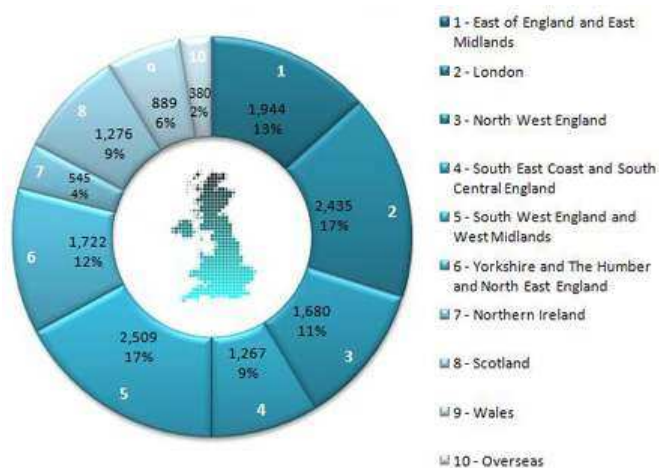
Who are our members?

At the end of 2012, we had more than 14,500 members, including students and pre-registration students.

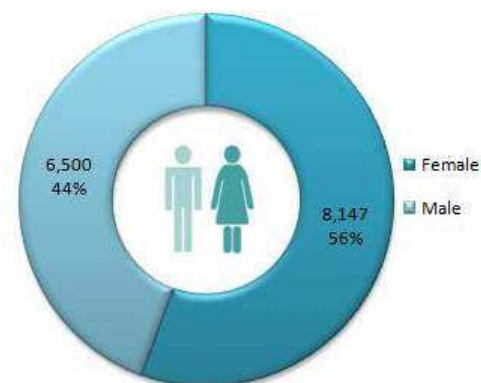
Our current membership demographics by gender, age and locality are summarised below.



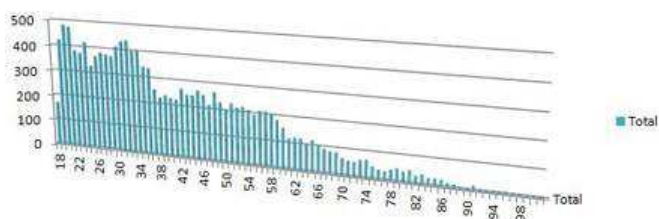
Members by locality



Members by gender



Members by age





Professional development

Our professional development team has had a very busy year, helping with member queries related to continuing education and training (CET) and providing unrivalled student support. We will continue to refine our CET delivery and are currently supporting some members in CET shortfall for the previous cycle.

Optical careers and schools

We continue to promote eye care and optics as a career.

We are a key stakeholder in the development of the 'Optometry and Optics Careers' programme, alongside universities, employers and professional bodies. This **workshop-based programme** is now being rolled out nationally to promote eye care careers amongst 14-18 year olds.

The programme has recruited 'regional ambassadors' to increase its impact locally and raise awareness with local schools.

Image courtesy of the Careers in Optics Working Group.





Optical Confederation Education Committee

We continue to build relationships with optical bodies across the profession. The Optical Confederation Education Committee focuses on promoting the profession at all levels in the areas of education, standards and workforce needs and requirements.

SECO



The new London 2012 Education Destination event enabled more than 50 therapeutics-qualified optometrists to gain specialist CET points

We continue to build on our longstanding relationship with SECO International, a US-based optometry organisation specialising in continuing education.

In partnership with SECO, we hosted our first major continuing education and training (CET) event in London in April 2012. The **London 2012 Education Destination** event provided two days of CET focusing on optometry as a specialist area with sessions targeted at therapeutics, prescribing rights and the contrasts between UK and US patient care pathways. The event attracted delegates from the USA, UK, Europe and Russia. Plans are well underway for the London 2013 Education Destination event in October 2013.

Working with SECO, we were once again able to extend the opportunity for UK optometrists to attend SECO2012, a 9,000 delegate optometry CET conference in Atlanta, USA, in March.

Students



We were instrumental, alongside a cross-profession group, in finding a way forward for international students in light of Government changes to student visas affecting pre-registration placement work permits.

This resulted in the College of Optometrists becoming 'Tier 5 sponsors' for the profession, enabling international optometry students during their pre-registration period to complete their studies in the UK. Increased one-to-one support has been given to students and pre-registration optometrists this year with visa changes, practice closures and redundancies affecting pre-registration placement availability.

The national AOP Student Eye Opener Conference is now in its sixth year. Careers and pre-registration advice, alongside a fun social programme, proved to be a hit with undergraduate optometry students with another sell-out success. This year's event at Center Parcs, Longleat, promises to be sold out once again and is on target to attract nearly 300 undergraduate optometrists.

The AOP provides guest speakers in law, record-keeping and occupational vision standards to the nine optometry universities around the UK. The lecturers' and students' forums continue to improve our student contact, support and communication. Our in-house mentoring and student advice is ongoing and valued by individual students in difficult situations.

Social media continues to be a focus for student interaction with **StudentAOP** attracting more than 1,500 'likes' on Facebook. Our Twitter account - **@StudentAOP** - has more than 500 followers, with numbers growing daily.

Student AOP was proud once again to support 'Optoms Cycling for Sight', an intrepid band of students cycling the length of Britain, via all the mainland optometry departments, to raise money for Optometry Giving Sight.

In 2012, we helped more than 60 international students with pre-registration placements following visa changes

Nearly 300 students attended the AOP Student Eye Opener Conference in 2012

New enhanced CET



On 1 January 2013, the General Optical Council (GOC) introduced a new enhanced CET scheme for the new CET cycle.

The professional development team, alongside Optometry Today, coordinated a complete re-launch of our CET delivery, redesigning the look, layout and website to meet the new requirements and modes of delivery. This was created and delivered in three weeks over the Christmas and New Year period ready to go live for the start of the new CET cycle in January.

In 2013, we launched our series of new regional Peer Review Roadshows. We received an unprecedented level of demand for places, with all locations selling out within 48 hours. Delivered in March, all venues were heavily oversubscribed and so we increased capacity and additional dates were added to allow more members to attend this new CET format. As we go to press, there are still more than 300 people on a waiting list and we are looking at putting on more events to meet the demand.

The new AOP Peer Review Roadshows sold out in 48 hours and attracted more than 1,000 registrations

Karen Sparrow, AOP Head of Professional Development

Newly-qualified optometrists



In partnership with the College of Optometrists, we launched a new initiative for optometrists at the very start of their career.

Aimed at newly-qualified optometrists, the Fresh Eyes Conference supports newly-qualified optometrists with a unique programme of entertaining and expert presentations and hands-on, interactive learning sessions.

Held in March 2013, the conference enabled newly-qualified optometrists to learn more about the business of optometry and how to cope with day-to-day dilemmas.

Image courtesy of the College of Optometrists.

**The Fresh Eyes
Conference attracted
more than 60 newly-
qualified optometrists**



Practitioner support

Practitioner support has always been a key part of our role.

In 2012, more than 100 optometrists and pre-registration trainees were mentored and supported back to work after a career break, re-location or difficulties in the workplace

Hospital optometry

The state of the NHS is once again in the headlines.

The care provided by hospitals is now under intense scrutiny and some of the reports appear to be quite shocking.

It is quite correct that this should be the focus of attention but it does mean that areas of good care and practice go unrecognised. We are pleased to report that, once again, hospital optometrists have shown their skills and initiative during the past 12 months and have made significant contributions to high quality eye care with increasing numbers involved in glaucoma and macular degeneration services.

There is no room for complacency and the Hospital Optometrist Committee continues to offer advice to colleagues whose positions are threatened.

The regional groups continue to meet regularly, to share ideas and to advise and support other colleagues.

As we look to meet our obligations in the new continuing education and training (CET) cycle, the programme will take these into account to help members meet their CET requirements.



Another hugely successful Hospital Optometrist Conference was held in September at the Crown Plaza Hotel, Chester, and planning for 2013 is in progress



Raising the profile of optometry

The AOP has a dedicated communications and public affairs team which promotes optometry and eye health both professionally and publicly.

Our campaigns ensure eye health is well placed on the political agenda and we work with other optical bodies to talk to the public about eye health and raise the profile of optometry.





Communications

Communications continues to be a priority for us.

We now regularly use a range of platforms, including electronic, print and social media to communicate swiftly and effectively with our members.

We strive to ensure that our communications are modern, topical and relevant. In 2012, we created a new **Annual Report micro site** to replace the traditional hard copy publication. We will continue to embrace new ways of communicating with our members to facilitate two-way, cost effective communication.

Member communications activity has increased to take account of our different audiences. We now produce four different editions of **Blink** – the monthly electronic newsletter - targeted at members, students, pre-registration students and AOP Councillors. Ad hoc editions are produced throughout the year, timed around key activity and updates. AOP Councillors are getting more involved by updating on regional news and activity in their regions.

Our social media presence is growing and we currently have nearly 200 'followers' on **Twitter** and 100 'likes' on our **Facebook page**, with numbers growing daily. These platforms provide a new means of two-way communication with our members and help to build our online presence.

The student **Facebook** and **Twitter** sites have developed well, with more than 1,500 'likes' and more than 500 'followers' respectively. We will continue to build our online presence and use social media to market events, member offers and develop a sense of community amongst the membership.

Campaigns

We have continued to produce free campaign materials to help our members to raise awareness of eye health and promote themselves in their local communities.

In 2012, our children's eye health campaign had an aspirational theme, focusing on careers with vision standards. We produced a wide range of free materials for members to use, including posters, leaflets, press release templates and media tips, plus a range of new resources to be used in schools.

We also produced free materials to raise awareness of other issues, including the importance of driving with good vision. In collaboration with colleagues in the Optical Confederation, we created a new patient leaflet to raise awareness of this issue with the public.

We have had good feedback from these awareness campaigns, including a response from one AOP member who described the children's campaign as, "a great success bringing in more than 50 new patients".



Image Library

Our communications team regularly responds to member enquiries on a range of topics.

Where possible we actively respond to member feedback and requests, which led us to create a new AOP members' Image Library.

We received numerous requests for images over the past year and launched this new members' service in 2013.

AOP members now have the opportunity to use a range of high quality optical images for use in practices, in leaflets and on websites, free of charge.



The new range of images includes close-ups of eyes and equipment shots which can be used within practices, as well as on leaflets, posters and websites

Research



In April 2012, we published a new report which revealed that Scotland's policy of free eye care is benefiting the country by £440 million per annum.

The Economic Impact of Free Eye Examinations in Scotland report, carried out by 4-consulting and commissioned by the AOP, revealed that the introduction of the improved Scottish NHS-funded, universal eye examination in 2006 has led to an increase in the number of people having eye examinations, with a consequent uplift in the numbers of eye problems detected and treated.

There are around 155,000 people in Scotland with low vision and the total costs associated with blindness and partial sight were just over £2 billion in 2010. In the long-term, there is likely to be a significant reduction in these costs as a result of the introduction of the new examination. According to the report, an additional 285,000 people per annum have had their eyes examined since the new eye examination was introduced.

I knew that the eye examination was valuable, but to see that its benefit to patients is so great makes me feel very proud of my profession and of Scotland's government for having the courage, forethought and faith to invest in patient care

*Kevin Wallace, AOP Scotland
Chairman*



Website

The AOP website provides the profession with an invaluable range of resources, from advice and guidance on topical issues, to support materials for those involved in advancing the profession.

In 2012, our website attracted nearly 137,000 visits and 75,000 unique visitors. The 'GOS regulation' section of the website proved to be the most popular area, closely followed by 'Vision Standards', 'Member Services' and 'CET Funding'.

We will be reviewing our website in 2013. Our aim is for it to be as user-friendly as possible, taking account of its origins as an information resource which now needs to address multiple audiences with varying needs.



Children's eye health

Our children's eye health campaign aims to encourage parents to include a sight test in their 'back to school' routine to ensure that their child's vision is not forgotten about.

We supported our members by producing a wide range of free campaign materials, including posters, leaflets and new resources to be used in schools.

We visited two schools to promote the importance of children's eye health and showcase our new campaign materials. Headteachers we spoke to were shocked by the lack of awareness of this issue and helped to promote our campaign to pupils and parents.

The children's campaign generated a lot of external interest and we responded to nearly 200 enquiries and requests for resources. We were featured in the national press, with articles about children's eye health appearing in supplements in *The Times* and *The Guardian*.



This was a very successful campaign and we estimate that we had gained 50 new patients (all children) from the promotion. This was very good value, as we didn't have to pay for the artwork or for postage

AOP member Bob Thomas-Carter, practice owner of Thomas Carter Opticians

I feel passionately about early detection of eye conditions. Young children are such visual learners and the thought that they could be missing out on embedding the foundation of their learning through an unidentified eye condition that could be easily detected is simply wrong

Sue Maran (pictured above), Headteacher of Rokesly Infant School, London



Optometry Today

Optometry Today (OT) is a multimedia platform offering optical practitioners a range of features providing a forum for professional education and debate.

In print: OT is a fortnightly magazine providing an incisive overview of the optical profession. As the journal of the Association, OT is the leading UK supplier of continuing education and training (CET) to optometrists and dispensing opticians. The magazine is received by more than 20,000 people, including all optometrists and dispensing opticians registered with the General Optical Council (GOC).

Online: optometry.co.uk provides visitors with up-to-the-minute news and features, plus access to two CET-accredited articles every fortnight. In addition, the website delivers a wide range of video content including CET videos along with interviews with opinion leaders from across the optical sector.



**Optometry Today:
communicating with
the optical community**



optometry.co.uk

In 2012, optometry.co.uk engaged its audience with wide-ranging digital content, keeping users in touch with the news as it happens, along with video interviews bringing opinion, insight and analysis to optical professionals.

Average monthly figures for unique users on optometry.co.uk stood at 16,762 in 2012. Ranking as the most popular section, the 'CET' area enjoyed more than 46,000 unique page views on average per month. The 'news and features' and 'clinical' sections of the website also proved popular – with more than 13,000 and 7,600 unique monthly visitors on average, respectively.

The 'news and features' section included up-to-the-minute news on stories as they broke, updated daily. This is coupled with opinion and advice features from AOP commentators and fellow industry leaders.

As part of the 'multimedia' offering, six CET videos were produced in 2012, alongside interviews from practitioners, professional body advisers and expert service providers.

optometry.co.uk continued to work with Foyles bookshop to provide optometry and ophthalmology titles to the OT bookshop's audience.

In 2013, as part of the updated CET offering reflecting the enhancements requested by the GOC, each CET article features randomised multiple choice questions, ensuring the testing process remains robust and secure. In the year ahead, optometry.co.uk will be placing more emphasis on 'interactive' opportunities for optometrists, dispensing opticians and therapeutic optometrists to engage in.

Following demand from practitioners looking for a new role, and from recruiters keen to tap into optometry.co.uk's rich pool of optical professionals, 2013 will see the launch of an updated 'Jobs' offering. Social media tools will be used to share information and generate more conversation in the sector, keeping optical practitioners in touch with latest news, updates and events.



**optometry.co.uk:
news, videos and CET
- only a click away**

**In 2012, unique visitors
to optometry.co.uk
rose by 9.5% from 2011
figures. The average
duration a visitor spent
on optometry.co.uk
was 5.16 minutes**

OT e-newsletter



In 2012, OT's weekly e-newsletter continued to establish a reputation as a go-to guide in optics for the week's latest news in digest.

With a readership of more than 6,750 - a rise of 600 readers from 2011- the e-newsletter has played a key role acting as a launch-pad directing optical practitioners to the latest content on optometry.co.uk. Every week, news, multimedia, upcoming events and CET articles have been promoted - along with a comment feature from OT offering an often sideways glance at the profession.

In 2013, OT's weekly e-newsletter will be re-launched, with a new title and design - ready for its 21st century audience. Providing the latest news updates and events, the e-newsletter will also be tuned in to the social media generation, creating a platform for the optical community to keep in the know, trade experiences and share knowledge.

OT e-newsletter: the latest weekly news digested

OT's e-newsletter is received by more than 6,750 subscribers. In 2012, the readership increased by 9.5%

OT journal

In 2012, OT continued to offer the highest circulation of any optical title in the UK, with an average net circulation of more than 20,000 copies.

The journal is delivered to all registered optometrists and dispensing opticians on the GOC's registers, along with almost 1,000 overseas subscribers.

OT continued to demonstrate that it is a leading provider of CET to optometrists and dispensing opticians, producing 46 CET-accredited articles and 12 Visual Recognition and Identification of Clinical Signs (VRICS) features, authored by industry-renowned clinical experts.

The journal provided its readers with the latest news, product features, book and instrument reviews. Business advice articles and clinical and legal audits also featured strongly, ranging from 'GOC rules on referrals', to 'Repeat pressures enhanced services schemes' and 'Optometrist-led diabetic maculopathy clinics'. The journal followed the key events in the optical calendar, from the British Contact Lens Association's (BCLA's) annual clinical conference and exhibition in Birmingham, to Silmo in Paris and to the National Optical Conference (NOC) in Birmingham.

October saw the culmination of months of work promoting the second AOP Awards. Held at the NEC Birmingham, the journal charted the build up to nominations, calling for candidates to put themselves forward in 16 categories, presenting the shortlist of candidates and producing 'The Book of the Night' - a pullout keepsake guide to the AOP Awards winners.

In 2013, OT launched an updated CET offering, reflecting the enhancements requested by the GOC. Each CET and VRICS article has been redesigned, placing a strong emphasis on the learning objectives for optometrists, dispensing opticians and therapeutic optometrists. Focusing on 'interactive enhancements', OT will be publishing a series looking at the new Peer Review Roadshows in action.

In the year ahead, OT will look to widen its reach with a range of business-centric articles helping practitioners to ensure their business is following best practice, covering topics including finance, social media marketing and recruitment.



OT journal: bringing news and analysis every fortnight to 20,000 professionals

In 2012, OT continued to demonstrate that it is a leading provider of CET to optometrists and dispensing opticians, producing 46 CET accredited articles and 12 VRICS features, authored by industry-renowned clinical experts

OT Student and Pre-Reg

Student news is published monthly and highlights timely issues affecting undergraduates, as well as the work they are doing to promote the optical sector.

In 2012, features included university-related updates affecting students, such as the international student visa issue and fee rises, alongside detailed coverage of the annual AOP Student Eye Opener Conference and news of fundraising and social events.

The 'Pre-Reg Focus' section brings together guest authors who offer relevant advice on the pre-registration period in relation to the assessments which pre-registration optometrists will be experiencing at the time of publication.



I have to say, the AOP did a brilliant job bringing everyone under the same umbrella. The awareness and learning that went on throughout the conference is truly an eye opener. This is one event I would recommend to each and every optometry student

Gaumaya Gurung, student in attendance at the AOP Student Eye Opener Conference (2012)



Public affairs

Under the banner of the Optical Confederation, the AOP works collaboratively with the Association of British Dispensing Opticians (ABDO), the Federation of (Ophthalmic and Dispensing) Opticians (FODO), the Association of Contact Lens Manufacturers (ACLM) and the Federation of Manufacturing Opticians (FMO) to represent the industry's views to Parliament, Government, key policy makers and other stakeholders.

As part of its campaign to reduce avoidable sight loss, the Optical Confederation organised **25 MP visits** to local optical practices with the respective Local Optical Committees (LOCs) in 2012. These included visits from the then Minister of State for Care Services, Paul Burstow MP; Liberal Democrat MP and former optician, David Health, who was shown the Acute Community Eyecare Service (ACES) scheme in Somerset; the Shadow Minister of State for Health (with responsibility for optics), Jamie Reed MP; and the former Secretary of State for Health, Rt Hon Andrew Lansley MP. In many areas these visits resulted in the MP helping the LOC gain meetings with local commissioners.

The Optical Confederation's public affairs team has had a busy start to 2013 with ten MP visits to local optical practices currently scheduled. In January, the former Secretary of State for Health, Rt Hon Andrew Lansley MP, visited an optical practice in his constituency of South Cambridgeshire describing it as, "a fine example of how, through local opticians, issues can be identified early to address problems quickly and cost-effectively." Planning is well underway for this autumn's party political conferences.

Consultations



In 2012, the Optical Confederation responded to 43 consultations issued by Government Departments, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE), Monitor, the Law Commission and other agencies.

A number of these responses were sector-wide with bodies such as the College of Optometrists and the Royal College of Ophthalmologists. In addition to this, the Optical Confederation submitted written evidence to the House of Commons Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry on the Government's progress towards implementation of the Universal Credit making the case against any reduction in those eligible for NHS eye care passported benefits - a retrograde step in public health terms.

Party political conferences



In 2012, the Optical Confederation was well represented at the three main party conferences holding events and meetings, as well as running an informative exhibition stand.

The highlight of the year has to be the party conference season which saw the Prime Minister David Cameron paying a visit to the Optical Confederation exhibition stand during the Conservative Party conference. Whilst at the stand, Mr Cameron heard about the key role opticians can play in preventing avoidable blindness.

The party conference season was a great success resulting in meetings with key politicians, including the current Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt MP, and the Minister for Care Services, Norman Lamb MP.

The public affairs team worked with the Royal Pharmaceutical Society and the British Society of Gastroenterology to put on well-attended fringe events at each conference which highlighted the role that opticians can play in delivering public health.

Joint working with other organisations continued in 2012 with a successful Parliamentary reception held in June with the International Glaucoma Association. The event had a good turnout of both politicians and glaucoma experts.

Work on the driving and vision campaign has continued, with close relationships being formed with Brake, the road safety charity, and RSA, the insurer. This resulted in a poster being produced to mark November's National Road Safety Week that was subsequently sent out to all practices for them to display. The Optical Confederation is now a member of Age Action Alliance - a network of organisations and individuals committed to improving older people's lives - and has been able to use this network to promote the importance of regular eye tests for older people.

Image courtesy of Ben Page.

AOP Awards



Now in its third year, the annual AOP Awards celebrates the achievements of those within the optical profession, with winners nominated and voted for by the profession itself.

Launched in 2011, the AOP Awards has quickly become a highlight of the optical calendar.

In 2012, there were 16 AOP Awards categories in total, including 'Optometrist of the Year', 'Company of the Year', 'Best Educational Video' and the 'Community Achievement Award'.

Following the nominations, optometry.co.uk/awards received nearly 4,000 unique page views during the June to September voting period, with more than 11,000 votes counted across the 16 AOP Awards categories.

The winners of the AOP Awards 2012 were revealed at a special ceremony during the National Optical Conference (NOC) and plans are well under way for the AOP Awards 2013.

Sponsored by CooperVision, the AOP Awards 2013 will see the return of popular accolades, alongside a new trophy which aims to recognise an exceptional marketing initiative. The new 'Marketing Innovation of the Year' Award provides the opportunity to recognise a person or company that has led a memorable and successful campaign which proved to have a positive impact of the business.

The winners of the AOP Awards 2013 will be revealed at a black-tie gala dinner of more than 500 guests on 7 November, during the NOC in Birmingham.

It was an honour to be voted for by my peers and to actually receive a trophy that you can show off to patients. It was a fab night and one that's not to be missed

Brian Tompkins, Contact Lens Practitioner of the Year (2012)

The night of the AOP Awards was really exciting. It was great to have the opportunity to get all dressed up to enjoy a delicious meal and the band was fantastic

Cheryl McDermott, Eglinton Eyecare, Optical Assistant of the Year (2012)



More about the AOP



The AOP promotes the profession and development of high professional and clinical standards, as well as representing the needs and interests of individual optometrists and dispensing opticians.

The Association is governed by its Council, which is made up of 45 members elected by the membership. The Council meets twice a year (May and November) to discuss issues and advise the Board of Directors.

The Board of Directors is elected by the Council and meets approximately every six weeks. The Board decides on policy for the Association and ensures that progress is being made towards the AOP's strategic goals.

The 39 employed staff at the AOP work under the Chief Executive to implement the strategies and policies set by the Council and the Board of Directors.



Financial information

In this section you will find the following information:

- Directors' statement and independent auditor's statement
 - Summary financial statement
 - Full annual financial statements
-



Directors' statement and independent auditor's statement

Directors' statement

The summary financial statement, comprising the group income and expenditure account and group balance sheet is only a summary of information derived from the full financial statements of the Association of Optometrists for the year ended 31 December 2012 which were approved by the directors at their meeting on 27 March 2013. The summary financial statement does not include information from the directors' report. The auditor has issued an unqualified report on the full annual financial statements and on the consistency of the directors' report with those financial statements. The auditor's report on the full annual financial statements contained no statement under sections 498(2)(a), 498(2)(b) or 498(3) of the Companies Act 2006.

Copies of the full annual financial statements, the auditor's report and the directors' report are available for members to download from the Association's website www.aop.org.uk free of charge. Members can elect to receive the full financial statements and reports instead of the Annual Report.

Independent auditor's statement to the members of the Association of Optometrists

We have examined the summary financial statement of the Association of Optometrists for the year ended 31 December 2012 comprising the group income and expenditure account and group balance sheet.

Respective responsibilities of the directors and the auditor

The directors are responsible for preparing the Annual Report in accordance with applicable United Kingdom law.

Our responsibility is to report to you our opinion on the consistency of the summary financial statement within the Annual Report with the full annual financial statements and its compliance with the relevant requirements of section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder.

We also read the other information contained in the Annual Report and consider the implications for our report if we become aware of any apparent misstatements or material inconsistencies with the summary financial statement.

This statement, including the opinion, has been prepared for, and only for, the Association's members as a body in accordance with section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and for no other purpose. We do not, in giving this opinion, accept or assume responsibility for any other purpose or to any other person to whom this statement is shown or into whose hands it may come save where expressly agreed by our prior consent in writing.

We conducted our work in accordance with Bulletin 2008/3 issued by the Auditing Practices Board. Our report on the company's full annual financial statements describes the basis of our opinions on those financial statements.

Opinion

In our opinion, the summary financial statement is consistent with the full annual financial statements of the Association of Optometrists for the year ended 31 December 2012 and complies with the applicable requirements of section 427 of the Companies Act 2006 and the regulations made thereunder.

We have not considered the effects of any events between the date on which we signed our report on the full annual financial statements (27 March 2013) and the date of this statement.

Buzzacott LLP
Statutory Auditor
130 Wood Street
London EC2V 6DL

8 April 2013

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Summary financial statement

Group income and expenditure account for the year ended 31 December 2012

	2012 £	2011 £
Income		
Members' subscriptions	5,674,830	5,467,665
Other income	1,220,517	1,458,097
	6,895,347	6,925,762
Expenditure		
Direct professional services	(2,953,407)	(2,978,530)
Operating charges	(3,876,925)	(4,281,580)
Operating surplus (deficit)	65,015	(334,348)
Profit on sale of listed investments	5,683	4,919
Surrender of short leasehold property	-	(224,713)
Other investment income	13,544	7,032
Interest payable and other charges	(54,815)	(41,236)
Surplus (deficit) before taxation	29,427	(588,346)
Taxation	-	-
Surplus (deficit) for the financial year	29,427	(588,346)

Group balance sheet as at 31 December 2012

	2012 £	2011 £
Fixed assets		
Tangible assets	4,731,799	4,976,322
Investments	153,823	156,031
	4,885,622	5,132,353
Current assets	1,889,279	1,558,705
Current liabilities	(1,723,986)	(1,727,513)
Total assets less current liabilities	5,050,915	4,963,545
Creditors falling due after more than 1 year	(1,797,895)	(2,051,946)
Provisions	(1,403,495)	(1,091,501)
Total net assets	1,849,525	1,820,098
Reserves	1,849,525	1,820,098



Staff members

We have a fantastic and diverse mix of skills and people within the AOP. Click on the departments on the left for an introduction to our team members.



Chief Executive's Office

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Interim Chief Executive

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Janice Phillips

PA to Interim Chief Executive and HR Manager

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Communications and Events

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Finance

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Legal protection / Civil litigation / Employment

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Responsibilities GOS / NHS regulations / Optical Voucher Consultative Committee / Department of Health / Parliament / Government

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Board members

In 2012 our Board members were as follows:

David Shannon
Chairman

Jane Bell

Ed Bickerstaffe

Vivian Bush

Michael Charlton

Mike George

Alison McClune

Vicky O'Connor

Lyndon Taylor

Kevin Thompson

Trevor Warburton