



Association of  
Optometrists



# ANNUAL REPORT 2015

## 2014 WAS A YEAR OF REFLECTION, IMPROVEMENT AND GROWTH

**T**he UK optical profession is changing rapidly and our members require the Association of Optometrists (AOP) to help shape the sector and positively affect their working lives. The commitment to protect, support and represent our individual members has always been at the heart of everything we do and 2014 was no exception.

2014 was one of the busiest years on record for our in-house legal team who dealt with more than 3,000 member enquiries on a wide range of topics. The expansion of our employment team catered for more than 630 queries and is a highly-valued service.

Representing members continues to be high on our agenda. As one of the founding members of the Optical Confederation – the body that speaks to government – we work with stakeholders to ensure our members' voices are heard at a national level.

A large number of members already benefit from our continuing education and training (CET) but commented that they would like more choice and regional meetings. In response to this, we developed our sell-out programme of regional peer review and legal roadshows around the

UK in 2014. As a result of feedback we also reviewed our membership package, introducing financial advice and preferential rates on essential insurance services, delivered through our new affinity partner, Lloyd & Whyte.

The AOP is fortunate to have members on committees, Council and the Board who give their time and expertise to help the association deliver effectively for members. We are grateful for their support.

We ended the year with a 5% increase across our paid membership grades with a total of nearly 16,000 members, adding to our collective strength. We look forward to developing our membership community to ensure that we meet our members' current and future needs.



**Henrietta Alderman**  
Chief Executive



**Lyndon Taylor**  
Chairman

---

## Promoting the profession, protecting the professional

THE DEFENCE AND PROTECTION OF OUR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS IS AT THE HEART OF EVERYTHING WE DO



Our in-house legal team

## 🎯 In-house legal support

2014 was one of the busiest years on record for our eleven-strong team of in-house legal experts. We saw an increase in clinical negligence claims, which mirrors reported increases across the health sector. On a daily basis, our team of expert lawyers continued to assist members who were contacted by the General Optical Council (GOC), as well as representation at GOC hearings.



**I would like to convey my sincerest appreciation to you and the AOP for the professional, legal and clinical advice and support received over the past two years.**

**I would urge all professional colleagues to seriously consider joining the AOP.**

–P.E. Waite, AOP member

We continued to support our members on a wide range of issues in all four nations, from negotiating the interpretation of the 2013 NHS Regulations, to advising members applying for a new contract, as well as supporting those retiring from optics.

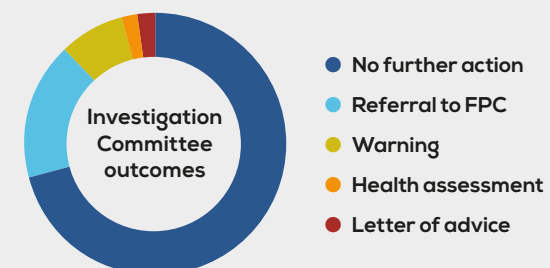
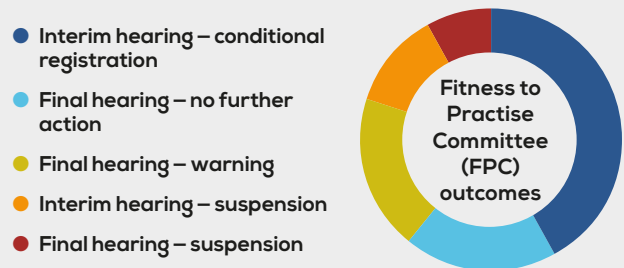
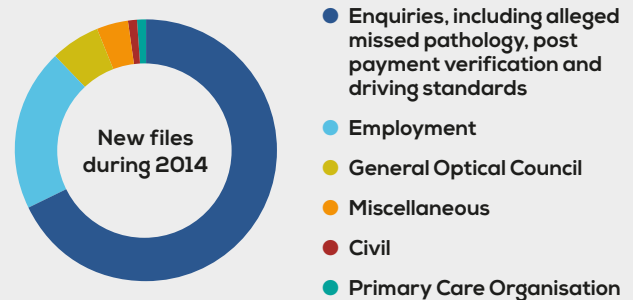
## 🎯 Employment law service

We expanded our in-house employment team in 2014, in response to increased demand for this service from members. Our employment advice covered a wide range of topics, from helping to resolve flexible working issues, to advising on investigatory, disciplinary and redundancy processes. We have received overwhelmingly positive feedback on our employment service, reinforcing members' appreciation for this highly-valued advice and our trade union support gives us the ability to provide enhanced assistance where needed.

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

## New legal files during 2014

In 2014 we opened a total of 3,150 new files, an increase of more than 40% from 2013.





## 🗨️ Clinical and regulatory support

2014 in England was again dominated by the after effects of the abolition of Primary Care Trusts and their replacement by NHS England and their Area Teams. Our regulatory team spent a considerable amount of time dealing with member enquiries about Area Teams' lack of understanding of the regulations.

Problems arose with applications to join the performers list, where unreasonable and onerous demands were made, for example in relation to occupational health checks and immunisations, and for General Ophthalmic Services (GOS) contract applications. Area Team and support agency staffing shortages, together with a lack of expertise in these matters or lack of awareness of NHS England's Standard Operating Model for the GOS, added significantly to the time taken to process applications. In many cases, this required significant intervention by our team on behalf of members.



In 2014, we produced *Making Accurate Claims in England* on behalf of the Optical Confederation (OC). The user-friendly guide outlines the procedure for making NHS claims and is an essential reference source for all NHS contractors and performers.

*It has always been a comfort to have the AOP beside me. I have only asked a very few times for help with dealing with tricky situations and I have been fortunate that they have been easily resolved. It's a lonely job as a sole independent and being able to talk to someone is so very helpful.*

*—Suzanne Floyd, AOP member*

In the rest of the UK, less controversial evolution of the GOS and community eye care services continued with unique national characteristics. The only regulatory change of particular significance was in Scotland where regulations required charging customers a minimum of 5p for each single-use carrier bag supplied to take goods away. The partial exemption of prescribed spectacles and contact lenses caused some confusion, to which we responded with joint guidance developed with our OC partners.

[aop.org.uk/regulation](https://aop.org.uk/regulation)



WE SUPPORT OUR MEMBERS WITH A COMPREHENSIVE CET PACKAGE, HIGHLY VALUED MEMBERSHIP JOURNAL, GUIDANCE AND BENEFITS

## 📍 CET events across the UK

In 2014 we developed our extensive programme of popular events around the country, enabling members to meet their peers, network and share ideas. From our sell-out peer review and legal roadshows, to the National Optical Conference and Hospital Optometrists Annual Conference, our events were at the heart of the optical calendar.



**Enjoyable, informative and educational.**

– Ted Morton, 2014 peer review attendee



**Definitely NOT one to miss.**

– Helen Jenkyn, 2014 legal roadshow attendee

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



**Romesh Angunawela, Consultant Eye Surgeon, Moorfields Eye Hospital**

## 100% Optical launch



As the official UK partner for the sector's new event, 100% Optical, our events programme got off to a flying start with more than 5,480 visitors attending this innovative debut show. Our education team brought together internationally-renowned speakers to deliver over 100 CET points for optometrist, therapeutics, dispensing optician and contact lens optician competencies.

## Improved communications



We continued to develop our communications in 2014, with new email software to deliver personal, relevant and targeted information to members. We had a great response to this investment, with average email open rates at 48% – more than double the industry standard.

Our website attracted over 100,000 users, an increase of 15% on 2013, and 2014 saw the start of a large scale project to develop our online presence – due for launch late 2015.





## Optometry Today

The journal of the Association of Optometrists

In 2014, as part of our education offering, *Optometry Today (OT)* produced 48 CET accredited articles, 12 VRICS features and six CET videos which covered every GOC learning objective for optometrists and dispensing opticians. *OT's* wide-ranging content included the launch of new clinical and business sections, featuring real life stories and expert advice from practitioners.

**54,650**

**CET points allocated**  
(CET articles, VRICS and CET video)

**13,350**

**unique website users per month**

**2,635**

**unique website CET users per month**

**53%**

**more Twitter followers in 2014**



“” Congratulations on a great article describing attempts to raise the profile of the devastating eye disease *Acanthamoeba* amongst patients. Great stuff.

– Nicholas Rumney, AOP member

“” A very useful CET video with lots of great advice on nutrition and what to look out for when purchasing vitamin supplements. I now feel I better understand the AREDS2 trial results and feel more confident about recommending specific formulations appropriate to the patient.

– Stephen Poundall, AOP member

[optometry.co.uk](http://optometry.co.uk)

### Independent support



In 2014, we set up a new Independent Practitioners Committee to look at the challenges facing the independent sector.

This group works collaboratively with our commercial partners, Essilor, Johnson & Johnson Vision Care and Luxottica, to best support the independent sector in today's competitive market.

### Membership benefits review

Alongside essential medical professional liability insurance and expert advice from our in-house legal team, AOP membership offers a number of useful benefits tailored to help members professionally and personally. In response to our member research, we fully reviewed our membership package to ensure that it meets members' needs at every stage in their career and began implementation of new benefits in 2014.

I contacted the AOP as I was struggling with a tax issue. I was delighted to receive an immediate response from one of their team. He had an excellent understanding of my business so the advice was far less generic than I had anticipated. The advice was a great help in deciding what to do. I will not hesitate to contact the AOP in future.

– Marc Drake, AOP member



Members told us in the 2013 survey that they did not value the lifestyle benefits and so we removed these and introduced new, more relevant benefits as a direct result of the feedback. New for 2014, we introduced financial advice and preferential rates on essential insurance services delivered through our new affinity partner, Lloyd & Whyte.

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



WE PROMOTE OUR MEMBERS' INTERESTS AND THE PROFESSION TO GOVERNMENT, THE MEDIA AND THE GENERAL PUBLIC

## Optical Confederation – stronger together

2014 represented another busy year for the Optical Confederation (OC), the body through which we speak to government. As one of the founding members of the OC, we continued to work collaboratively with our optical partners to ensure eye health was well placed on the political agenda.

Earl Howe, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Quality, addressed delegates at the OC conference in May on the challenges which lie ahead for optics. The conference enabled practitioners, educators, policy-makers and industry heads from across the profession to discuss the financial, clinical and regulatory challenges in the changing optical landscape.

Through the OC we contributed to 33 consultation responses, ensuring that the views of the sector were known on issues such as the NHS Standard Contract, NICE Falls Guidance and Public Expenditure on Health and Social Care.

Towards the end of the year, we welcomed Chris Hunt as the new OC Chairman. Mr Hunt succeeded the former Chairman, Don Grocott, who has successfully led the OC since 2012.

## Call to Action

We played a key role in the sector's response to NHS England's Call to Action on Improving Eye Health and Reducing Sight Loss. The Call to Action was a major opportunity for the providers of primary eye care to define what changes need to be made in order to create an effective way of delivering a high quality, needs-driven service for patients. We contributed to the OC's response as well as the responses of other bodies within the sector, including the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning – the national clinical voice for eye health in England.

[opticalconfederation.org.uk](http://opticalconfederation.org.uk)



## Policy in action

Our joint stand with Pharmacy Voice and the National Community Hearing Association saw visits from many Cabinet and shadow Cabinet members at the Conservative and Labour party conferences. Visitors included Secretary of State for Health, Jeremy Hunt, and Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, Iain Duncan Smith, plus the whole shadow Health Team, including Shadow Secretary of State, Andy Burnham.

In 2014, 20 practice visits took place around the country, including a visit with the Minister for Care Services, Norman Lamb MP, resulting in many MPs taking up issues on behalf of local optical committees with local commissioners.



**It's great to see a locally owned business thriving on the high street and providing footfall for the whole town centre. This is a substantial business employing 30 people working on the front-line of primary health care.**

– Adrian Sanders MP (Torbay)



**Jenny Gowen, OC Head of Public Affairs, and the Rt Hon Andy Burnham MP, Shadow Secretary of State for Health**



**The issue of eye health is very important to me as I know that regular eye checks not only save sight but can also lead to diagnosis of life-threatening conditions. As such opticians play an important role within the health service and my visit enabled me to understand better the value of community optometrists and opticians.**

– Matthew Offord MP (Hendon)



Image courtesy of Lunettes Opticiens

### 🕒 Enabling members to claim CET grants

In 2014 we enabled many members in England, Scotland and Wales to claim their CET grants who would otherwise have been unable to find a contractor willing to sign their claim forms. We acted as a match-maker, putting willing contractors in touch with would-be claimants to provide a much-appreciated service.

### 🕒 Career and schools promotion

Through our ongoing support in 2014 of the *Optometry and Optics Careers* campaign, we worked alongside industry members, universities, employers and professional bodies to promote optics as a career. This workshop-based programme has been rolled out nationally to promote eye care careers amongst 14-18 year olds.

## Raising the profile of optometry

Our ongoing work with the media to promote optometry and eye health resulted in national press coverage, including features in the *Mail on Sunday*, *Guardian* and *Daily Express*, as well as widespread local coverage of AOP Awards' nominees and winners.

As an established highlight in the optical calendar, the AOP Awards has grown in popularity, with nearly 26,000 votes cast for the AOP Awards 2014 from both members of the public and the profession.

[aop.org.uk/aop-awards](http://aop.org.uk/aop-awards)

In 2014, we helped members raise their profile locally, with campaign material promoting the importance of children's eye health.

Through our support of National Eye Health Week, we have continued to raise awareness of the importance of regular sight tests.

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



**Just to say thanks for your help and guidance to help me with my pre-school talk. The resources on the AOP site were very useful, and I hadn't realised just how much there was.**

– Derek Clare,  
AOP member



# AOP DEVELOPMENT

AS THE LARGEST OPTOMETRY MEMBERSHIP ORGANISATION FOR INDIVIDUAL MEMBERS IN THE UK, WE PROVIDE HIGH-QUALITY SERVICES AND BENEFITS TO ENABLE OUR 16,000 MEMBERS TO FULFIL THEIR PROFESSIONAL ROLES



Image courtesy of Linklater & Warren Opticians

## Membership growth

In 2014, we continued to increase the level of member support and protection without passing on higher membership costs. For the fifth consecutive year, our membership fees were frozen, whilst our package was extended, providing greater value to our members.

2014 has been about growth and improvement, with members in paid membership grades increasing by 5.3% over the year and an average annual retention rate of over 99%. As a representative membership organisation our strength is in our numbers, and membership growth enables us to speak with a strong, collective voice and provide members with enhanced benefits and services.

## Governance review



In 2014, we reviewed our Board to ensure we have a robust structure and appropriate skills to take the organisation forward. New for 2014, we welcomed Mike Fegan BA (Hons) FCA, our first non-optometrist Board member, who brought with him a wealth of commercial and financial expertise.

## Future investment

We began planning for significant future projects, including the development of our online presence, and look forward to working with all our Board and Council members to ensure better engagement with members in 2015.

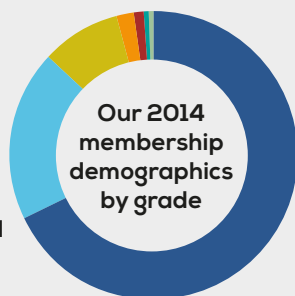
## Financial report

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

## Who are our members?

At the end of 2014, we had nearly 16,000 members, including students and pre-registration students.

- Full UK, concessionary and newly-qualified
- Student
- Retired
- Pre-registration student
- Other, including run off and vicarious liability cover, honorary and overseas
- Career break
- Dispensing optician, including concessionary and newly-qualified



### The Association of Optometrists

2 Woodbridge Street, London EC1R 0DG

☎ 020 7549 2000

✉ [postbox@aop.org.uk](mailto:postbox@aop.org.uk)

🌐 [aop.org.uk](http://aop.org.uk) • [optometry.co.uk](http://optometry.co.uk)

🐦 @The\_AOP • @OptometryToday

Company registered in England and Wales – number 404790. Published April 2015  
© 2015 Association of Optometrists