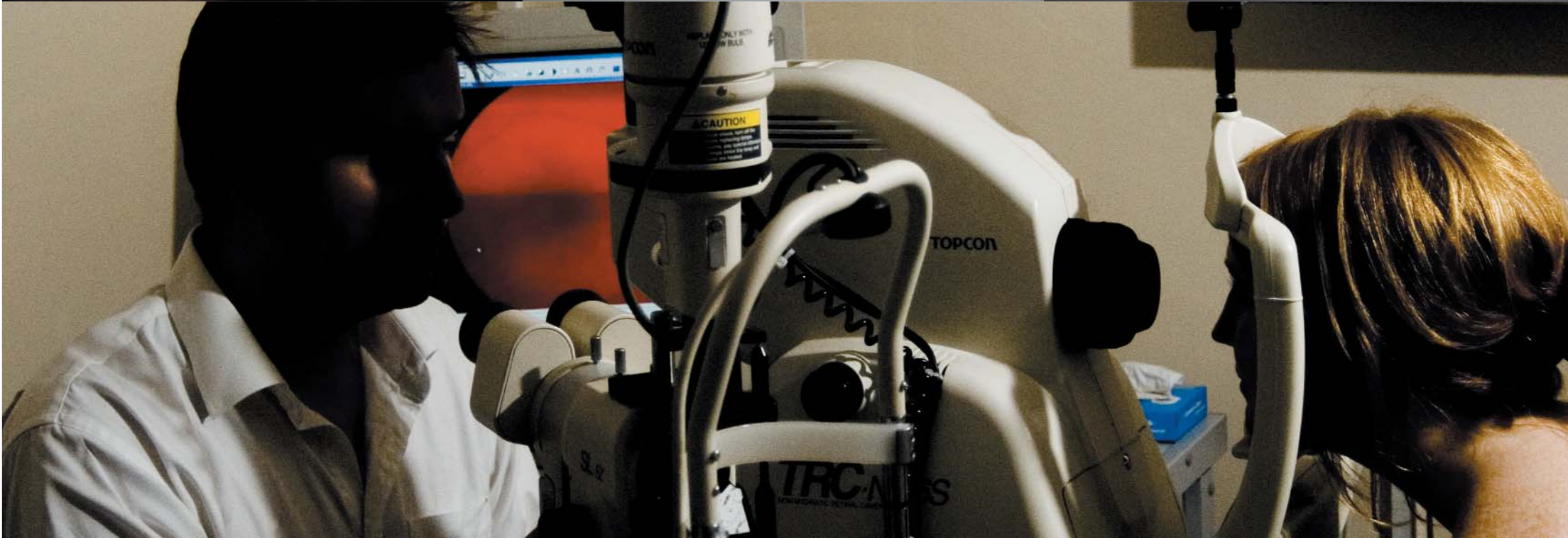
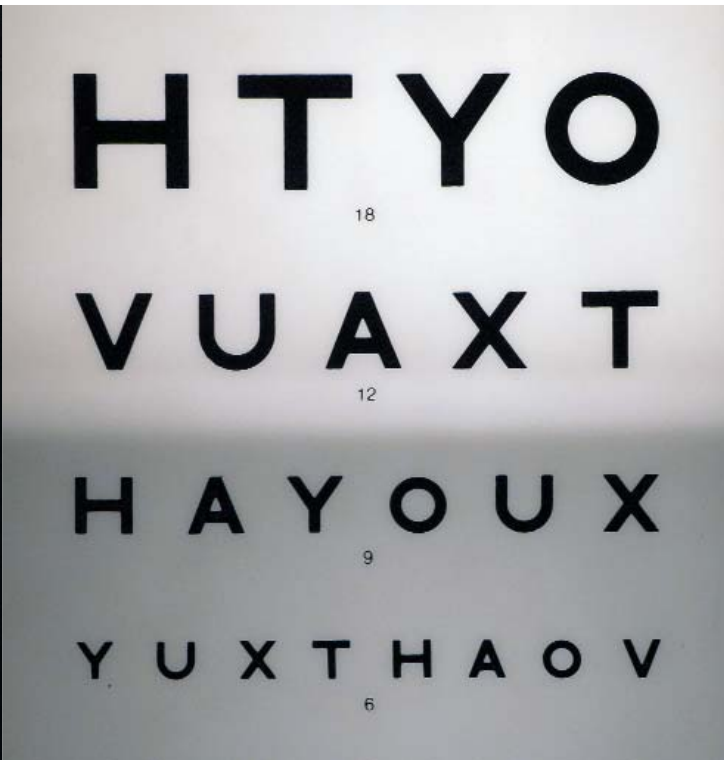


Protecting the public

2008 1958

Celebrating 50 years of optical regulation





I am delighted to contribute to this commemorative publication celebrating the 50th anniversary of the General Optical Council.

Good eye care is essential to promoting the health of the public, and it is a very significant factor in maintaining the independence and well being of older people. The services provided by optometrists and dispensing opticians are now acknowledged to be an integral part of good primary health care. The role of the GOC in setting standards and accrediting education for the optical professions is ever more critical in the protection of the public.

This publication documents the ways in which optical care has developed over the last 50 years and the continual changes that the GOC has made to keep pace. The GOC is to be congratulated for the capacity it has demonstrated to respond to emerging trends in clinical practice, the new environments in which services are provided, and the demands of regulatory reform. This will ensure that patients and consumers benefit from safe, modern and accessible services. Such progress is a credit to the insight and commitment of all those involved with the GOC, and I thank all of them for their work.

I offer the GOC my congratulations on this special anniversary, and wish it continued success as it enters the next phase of its important work.

Ann Keen MP

Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Health Services

Before the GOC...

When the Opticians Act received Royal Assent on 7 July 1958, it signalled the beginning of the General Optical Council and the end of nearly 60 years of debate and dispute for the optical professions.

The first attempt at registration was in Manchester 1904. M S Dunscombe, president of the British Optical Association (BOA), wanted to promote a Bill to 'define and regulate the practice of optology'. This was against the background of the Medical Acts Amendment Bill which, if it had become law, would have restricted supply of spectacles to medical men.

The General Board of Opticians was set up with 70 members from the major bodies in the UK. But they were unable to agree on a draft Bill. The stumbling block was the desire to have one fully registering and certifying body (which was to have been the General Optical Council). Subsequently the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers was named as the one responsible examining and certifying body, so the BOA and the Board's secretary resigned and it all fell apart.

Under the first National Health Insurance Act in 1911, people under a certain income were allowed medical benefits via Approved Societies. After World War One, some of these had surpluses and devised Additional Benefits for contributors. Ophthalmics proved very popular – between 1923 and 1948 15 million insured people had eye tests. However, with no statutory register there was no way an

Approved Society could determine the competence of an individual optician.

In 1923 the BOA, SMC and Institute of Ophthalmic Opticians formed the Joint Council of Qualified Opticians (JCQO). Membership was restricted to BOA and SMC diploma holders which provided a benchmark.

The Optical Practitioners (Registration) Bill 1927 was published by the JCQO in response to Ministry of Health reports considering the causes and prevention of blindness. Biased strongly against opticians, another draft Bill was written. This still proved controversial and it was withdrawn. Another attempt was made in 1936, but a feeling that 'the time was not yet opportune', and a hoax perpetrated by two private opticians, scuppered this one too.

Between 1937 and 1946 the Ophthalmic Benefit Approved Committee set up an approved list of recognised opticians and a disciplinary tribunal for those who failed to comply. It cost 5s for an eye test as a 'service incidental to the supply of an appliance'.

Medical opposition to opticians continued, focusing on the belief that non-medical practitioners were not competent to test eyesight and detect problems, and that it was not 'desirable to combine in one person the

professional function of prescribing, with the commercial one of selling spectacles'.

The National Health Service Act of 1946 allowed everyone a free eye test and free spectacles. Over 80 per cent of eye exams in England and Wales were done by ophthalmic opticians, and 92 per cent in Scotland. The percentage of complaints was the smallest of any section of the NHS.

In 1949, an interdepartmental committee chaired by Lord Crook produced a report recommending the formation of a General Optical Council. This would have powers to set up and maintain opticians' registers, all those recognised by the NHS would be eligible, and subsequent membership would be dependent on examination and experience. This body would have disciplinary and ethical powers over its registrants, it would approve educational providers and allow students to receive appropriate ophthalmic clinical training.

Finally, a Private Members' Bill based on the Crook Report was put forward by Ronald S Russell, MP for Wembley South. Described as the longest and most complicated ever, it nevertheless resulted in the Opticians Act 1958.



1958

7 July: The GOC was formed and a sight test cost 2s.

The Munich air crash killed Manchester United's Busby Babes, and Edmund Hillary reached the South Pole.



1960

The first Opticians Register was published, and Wichterle and Lim experimented making soft contact lenses.

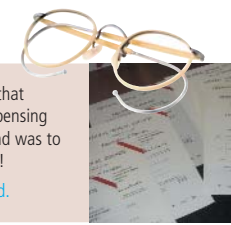
National Service ended, and John F Kennedy became President of the USA.



1967

The GOC published a Ruling about publicity, which said that publishing a name coupled with a title as 'optician', 'dispensing optician' or 'ophthalmic optician' constituted publicity and was to be deprecated, unless the reference was in ordinary type!

The first ATM was introduced, and the Six Day War ended.



1973

First time there was a factory solely manufacturing CR39 plastic lenses which then gained widespread popularity.

The UK joined the EEC, and the first Open University degrees were awarded.



Still going strong: an interview with Montague Levy



Montague Levy is a man who likes people. He continues to practise as an optometrist four days a week in Camden, north London, and says: “The reason I continue working is that I really enjoy meeting patients and talking to them. There are lots of silences when you’re testing eyes, and I love to talk about all sorts of things – not necessarily to do with optics!”

He started his career apprenticed to an optician in 1935 and took evening classes three nights a week to gain his qualification in optometry. After wartime service in the RAF, Montague decided that he didn’t want to spend all his time in a dark testing room, and set up a prescription house. This was a manufacturing business which made up spectacles from opticians’ prescriptions.

Working as an optometrist alongside his manufacturing business gave Montague a wealth of expertise, from the technical to the diagnostic. “I’m able to advise on how to make up prescriptions when there’s something complex required, as I’ve had experience in all parts of the business. That technical knowledge is sometimes lacking, as optometrists and dispensing opticians now do such different jobs”, he says.

So what significant changes has he seen over the years? “There are two areas – pathology and commerce. When I was starting out, there wasn’t as much emphasis on pathology as there is now. Optometrists have an enormous responsibility on them to recognise serious disease or pathology.

“There is a wrong alignment in the way optometrists are rewarded. We only receive fees for testing, and make money in the

sale of appliances. The service we provide is not competitive when you consider the fees consultants in other healthcare specialties receive.

“With the growth of Internet business, patients can take their prescriptions and get the cheapest spectacles they can. When I started, people thought they had to stay with the same optician.

“Internet business hasn’t gained enough momentum yet, but when today’s young people reach their 50s and 60s, they’ll automatically head to their PCs to buy spectacles.

“The growth of the multiples has also had an effect on independents, as there’s less business to go round. Independents rely on their expertise and personality to keep loyal patients, and in my area there’s fierce competition. I wouldn’t like to be starting my career now.”

Finally, Montague reflected on a moment in history which benefits from hindsight. “When I started all lenses were glass. When plastics began to be imported from France, I remember one well-known supplier saying to me: ‘they’ll never catch on!’”

1978

Your Sight and the NHS. The eye test was free but there were charges for frames (£1.44–£6); and lenses (single vision £2.90 per lens).

The first test tube baby was born, and it was the winter of discontent.



1980

In a House of Lords debate on the price of spectacles Lord Rugby said that reading glasses should be put back on the shop counter where they belong, his argument being that people shouldn’t have to have an eye test to buy glasses.

The College of Optometrists formed which led to more regional centres, and, in the 1990s, new course providers.

The SAS ended the Iranian embassy siege, and John Lennon was shot dead.



GOC today...

The General Optical Council today is a proactive and progressive organisation, continually looking to modernise and set the pace for best practice in healthcare regulation.

Independent of outside influences and long before the Shipman Inquiry, the GOC set up the Optical Services Audit Committee in 1989 to carry out a wide-ranging review of its role, functions and responsibilities. It set the agenda for us to reform regulation in the public interest and culminated in extensive changes to the Opticians Act in 2005.

A mandatory Continuing Education and Training (CET) scheme is now in place for qualified practitioners, making full use of web technology to administer and manage it. Registrants are able to keep track of their progress online, and we can verify CET points for every registrant at the end of each three-year cycle – something that would not be possible with a paper-based system.

Optometrists' scope of practice has been extended, giving them the authority to act as supplementary prescribers of medicines, managing and prescribing drugs against an agreed patient management plan in conjunction with an ophthalmologist.

A competency-based system of education and training leading to registration has been introduced providing a benchmark against which skills and knowledge can be judged.

We require all registrants to self-declare on health issues and criminal convictions – an

innovation and something which was ahead of its time. The responsibility for investigating and prosecuting complaints has been split from the hearing of cases. Having an independent Fitness to Practise panel is a modernising initiative which has changed expectations across the whole of the regulatory sector.

Although we are one of the smaller regulators, the GOC is only one of two which registers students. Registration is designed to make students accountable for their conduct and protects the safety of the public by ensuring training and experience is gained under the supervision of a qualified practitioner.

Through the continued registration of dispensing opticians, we recognise the value of the service they provide to the UK public. We believe they deserve this recognition and it is a sign of dispensing opticians' commitment to public service that they maintain their membership of a regulated profession.

Over 20 years, the pace of change and the complexity of the optical market has increased, bringing with it new challenges. Among these are the new services and modes of supply which the Internet offers. Our task is to monitor such developments, ensuring that the public is able to take advantage of these benefits safely.

1981

The GOC amended restricted advertising and removed prohibition of prices in window displays. The British College and the AOP advised their members to show prices 'in a dignified and restrained manner'. One advertisement priced NHS frames £1.84–£9.27; private frames £7.80–£21.52.

Private lenses cost from £12/pair for single vision; £28 for bifocals; £41 tri and multifocals.

Prince Charles married Lady Diana Spencer, and there were race riots in Toxteth and Brixton.



1983

The first PRK or photo-refractive keratectomy laser surgery was conducted.

CDs first became available, proceedings in the House of Lords were televised for the first time, and Margaret Thatcher was returned as Prime Minister.

1984

Under the Health and Social Security Act anyone could now supply spectacles, which broke the monopoly. Only registered opticians could supply to under 16s.

The miners' strike took place, and an American scientist first identified the AIDS virus.



A different way of working: an interview with Dame Mary Perkins



When Dame Mary Perkins started out as an optometrist, she was in a minority. “It was a very male-dominated profession”, she says. “There were one or two women but I was unusual. People used to ask me whether I was the optician.”

Dame Mary took over her father’s practice, and with her husband, who’d she met in her first week at college, grew the business to 23 branches in the South West and south Wales.

“When we sold it in 1980, we took a career break to decide what to do next.” Being with her parents in Guernsey, she and her husband found it too tempting not to start again, especially as the regulations on advertising had been changed by the Thatcher government.

“We adopted a different business model for Specsavers, which focused on telling people what they’d get in the way of services, products and prices. I wanted to remove the barrier and introduce the concept of showrooms, so that people could browse, try on frames and walk around. Before the changes you didn’t know what you were getting or how much it would cost.

“I wanted patients to enjoy wearing glasses and not to consider them a grudge purchase. They weren’t considered a fashion item then – more than 20 per cent of patients kept their frames and got them reglazed.

“Our pricing structure included the cost of single vision lenses, so that patients could buy at a price they could afford. One thing I had noticed previously was that opticians’ wives (and they were mostly wives) had lots of glasses! I wanted everyone to have that option.

So how are things different now? “In terms of business, there are so many rules and regulations, for instance in employment law, and health and safety. The equipment and

products are better, and we can communicate much better with patients – just at the touch of a button.

“The Internet means people can choose their frames online but they have to come into a Specsavers branch to fit them. It’s important to have professional advice and personal attention. I also think people like to have a bricks and mortar place where they can go to comment or complain.

“For the future, I hope optometrists could take over eye health screening, for example for diabetes, for which they’re more than qualified. It could take the pressure off hospital appointments and would be more cost effective. I’d like optometrists’ qualifications to be recognised for what they are, and for them to be paid accordingly.

Dame Mary is well known as a mystery shopper. “I don’t do it to spy on the staff, but to listen to the other customers. I went into our Newcastle store the other week, wearing a tracksuit and carrying a shopping bag. No one recognised me! It’s nice to be at the coalface, working as part of a team.

“Having an eye test and choosing glasses is an intimate experience. Universities should recruit people people, and not just those with the best grades. We need to have the right relationship with our patients. They need to feel good because ultimately we are answerable to them.”

1985



Free NHS spectacles were only available for children and low income groups. The rules on publicity were amended but in line with the ASA, prohibited comparative advertising. The GOC published rules on the fitting of contact lenses.

Word processors were introduced, and Live Aid raised millions of pounds for Africa.

1986



Formation of ABDO, which also provided diploma courses.

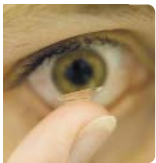
The Greater London Council was abolished, and there was a nuclear accident at Chernobyl in the Soviet Union.

1988



Free eye tests were abolished, and qualifications rules for fitting contact lenses were introduced. Dispensing opticians were required to undertake extra specialist training, whilst optometrists could continue fitting them.

The US space shuttle, Discovery, was launched.



GOC tomorrow...

As a healthcare regulator in the forefront of change, the GOC is consolidating the changes the 2005 legislation brought about, and looking ahead to introducing new proposals which reflect the changing roles of the optical professions and continue to protect the health and safety of the public.

We are expecting to see the introduction of independent prescribing of medicines for optometrists imminently – in fact as this document is published. This will allow optometrists to prescribe drugs for the eye and adnexia, increasing public access to these services and relieving pressure on those provided by hospitals.

Quality assuring education is a critical part of our work, and a wholesale review is underway of the training for optometrists and dispensing opticians. Following extensive work with education partners, new standards will be disseminated to training establishments in support of this initiative.

European and global issues are also becoming increasingly important. The GOC is involved in a number of projects to promote harmonisation of training and practice in optics. Our challenge is to enable free movement of students and practitioners without diminishing UK standards. We are leading on developing a CET scheme and code of conduct for optometrists and dispensing opticians throughout Europe. We are also increasingly being asked to visit and approve European training – the ECOO diploma is already

approved as a partial route to UK registration.

The UK is itself a multi-national entity. Council meetings have now been held in each of the four UK countries, and we will continue to work with Scottish, Welsh, English and Northern Irish bodies to ensure effective regulation across the UK. Our equality and diversity scheme and action plan will help to ensure that our work reflects the needs of a diverse population and registrant base.

The Government White Paper – *Trust, assurance and safety: the regulation of health professionals* sets out a number of measures designed to modernise and enhance health regulation.

Revalidation is an area in which the GOC of tomorrow is already involved at a national level. We are looking at how the mechanism will operate by which all registrants are checked to ensure that they remain competent in the areas in which they practise most. Whatever the outcome, technology will no doubt play a major role in achieving our aims.

At an organisational level, we are concentrating on the constitution and composition of a new Council. This will be smaller, more board-like, and will focus more

strategically on our objectives. We anticipate this transition will be in place by April 2009.

The Acts that gave their respective powers to each of the 13 healthcare regulators reflect the best practice of their time. There are many similarities, but also some differences between the professions. Some of those differences would benefit from harmonisation which would lead to more transparency.

Changes have to take place in order for these initiatives to happen. The current legislative change programme will probably take two or three years more to complete. The GOC will be in a strong position to take a leading role.

1989

The Opticians Act consolidated the 1958 Act. It specified activities that only registered opticians could undertake, for example the duties of the optometrist in sight tests, and that prescriptions would be issued to patients. Unregistered sellers could only make up a prescription if it was less than two years old.

Ready-made reading glasses were introduced, and increased advertising led to spectacles becoming consumables. OSAC (Optical Services Audit Committee) was formed to look at a number of areas relating to the future of regulation.

The Berlin Wall came down after 28 years.



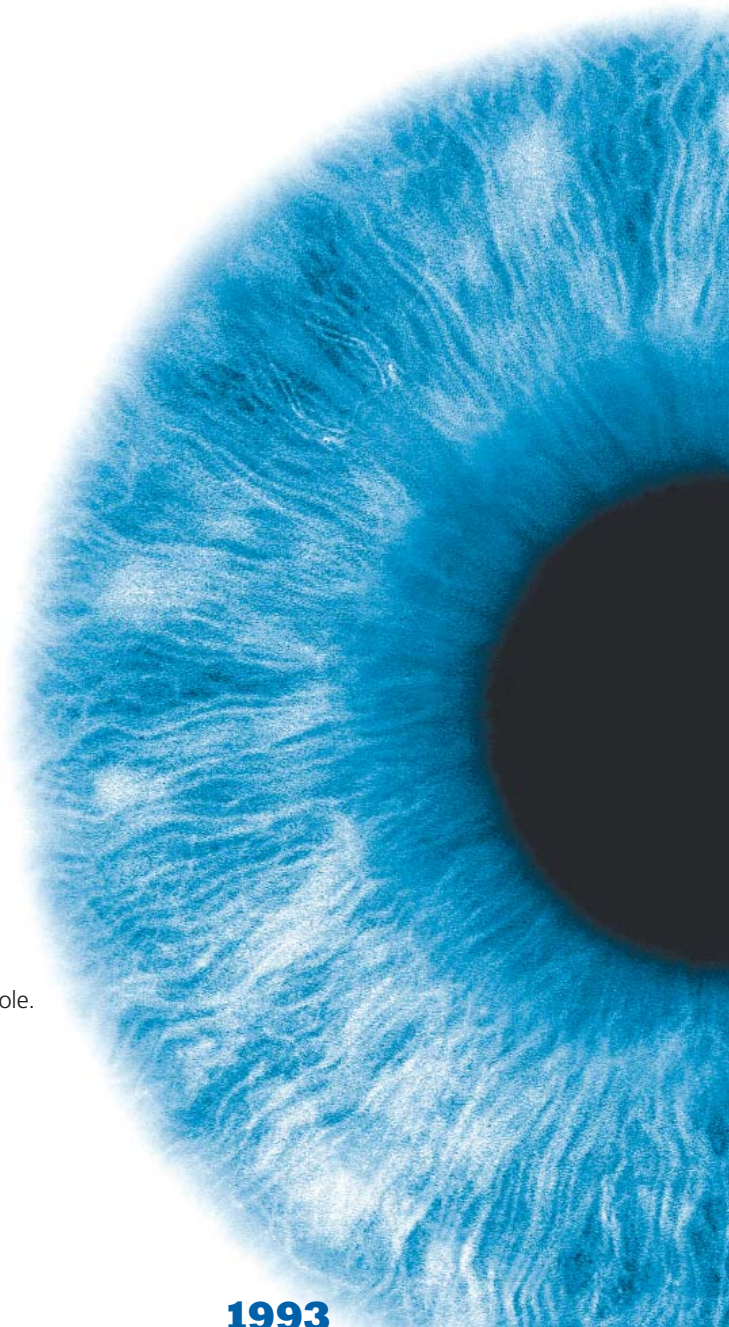
1991

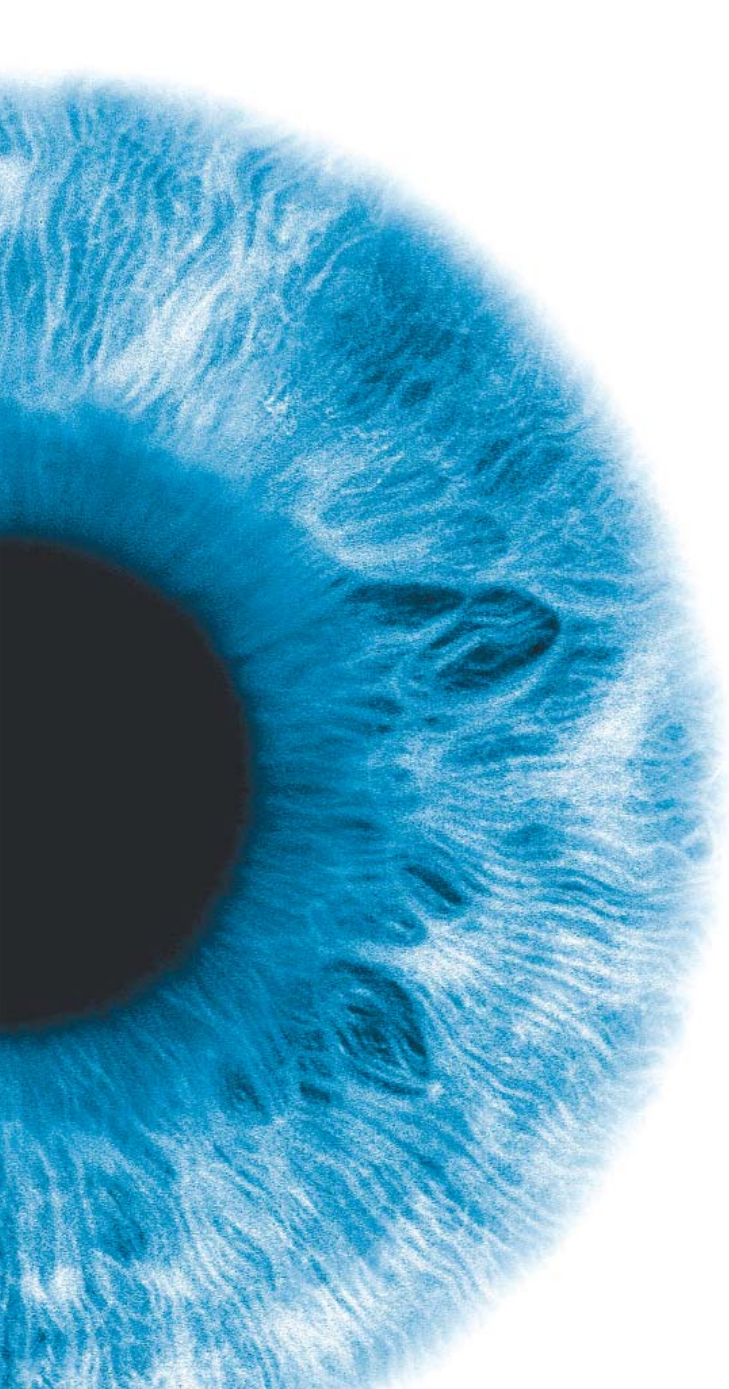
LASIK laser eye surgery was introduced. The Gulf War took place, Terry Waite and John McCarthy were freed, and Gorbachev resigned.



1993

The Optician discussed Sunday trading; GOC insistence that ophthalmic trainees should be under constant supervision; and said that the decision by the College of Optometrists and GOC to work towards a compulsory scheme for continuing education 'will meet with strong resistance from some practitioners'.





See the world more clearly: an interview with Serap Akbulut



At just 16 years of age, Serap Akbulut is the youngest student on the dispensing opticians' register and is coming to the end of her first year at City and Islington College. On Saturdays she works at an independent practice in Southgate, north London.

"I'm really enjoying all aspects of the course", she says. "I'm the youngest in my group at college, although the age range goes up to 40. We cover dispensing, ophthalmics and anatomy, and we're currently studying the anatomy of the eye." She also enjoys putting theory into practice at work. "I mostly do reception and pre-test work, but also do small repairs and adjustments to people's glasses."

Working alongside her sister, who is a qualified dispensing optician, is giving Serap valuable experience for when she qualifies. "Dispensing is the best thing, doing something practical. It's also fun meeting different people, and I'm getting to know patients at the practice."

"I enjoyed science at school, and wanted to do something different. I like the idea of giving people better vision so that they can see the world more clearly", she says.

Serap was born in Turkey, and came to the UK in 1999 with her family to be with her father, who was already here. "There are five of us – three girls and two boys. My father didn't have the opportunity to do things when he was our age, so he and my mum give us lots of encouragement and support."

That support is paying off: in her first assessment, Serap achieved almost perfect marks in the ophthalmics lab.

And what of the future? "My biggest dream is to open my own practice – with my sister working for me!" she laughs.

It also talked about the GOC Education Committee decision to include training in patient communication in optometric training, to improve interpersonal skills and manage consumer expectation.

The Stephen Lawrence murder suspects were freed, and Professor Sir Tim Berners-Lee introduced the World Wide Web.



1995

An NHS sight test cost £13.41.

The US delivered a crew to the Russian space station Mir, and it was the 50th anniversary of the first atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

1999

The referral of patients was strengthened – an optometrist could directly refer to hospital and inform the GP.

A bomb exploded in Soho, Charles Kennedy became leader of the Liberal Democrats, and Vladimir Putin became Russian president.

2005

Registration of students was introduced.

Ellen McArthur sailed round the world single-handed in record time, David Cameron became leader of the Conservatives, and a new Pope was elected.

2008

The GOC reaches its 50th anniversary.

General Optical Council

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Philip Joseph Cox
Mary Green
J Eric Richardson
George Ronald Rougier
Rosie Varley

Registrar/Chief Executive

Peter C Coe
James Daniel Devlin
Arthur Tibbey Gerard
Richard Douglas Wilshin

Council members

Marcus George Aird
Roger Sproule Anderson
Nigel Andrew
Frederick William Robertson
Andrews
Norman Archibold
Rosemary Bailey
John Roy Spencer Baker
Geoffrey Vernon Ball
Reginald Frederick Banks
Derek Alfred Barnes
John Percival Barrand
Hugh Champion Bateman
Doreen Bellerby
Moirra Black
Douglas Turner Boyd
Peter Joseph Brogan
Richard HR Broughton
Jennifer Sally Brower
John Graham Sharp Brown
Roger John Buckley
William Burton
Robert William Butler
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David Cecil Cartwright
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Alexander Galbraith Cross
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Terence Anthony Doyle
Gerald Maurice Dunn
James Dunne
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Robert Mark Esbester
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Michael John Gilkes
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Norman Wallace Gunn
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David Vernon Ingram
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Kevin W Keohane
Thomas Ivo Klima
Lionel Kopelowitz

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Frank William Law
Colin Lee
Geoffrey Leigh
Kevin P Lewis
Alban Dewi Lewis
David Herbert Lewis
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Felix Aloysius Mackle
John Marshall
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John Murray Rusk
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Ronald Stanley Russell
S Ahmed Sadiq
Michael John Salmon
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George Ian Scott
Patrick John Holmes Sellors
A C Arnold Silk
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Arthur Sydney Sowden
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Elizabeth M Stanton
John Hunter Strathie
Alan Tomlinson
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