

A Career in Vision Care



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Sight is one of the most precious of our five senses. It is vital to everything we do: at work, at home, driving, for sports, at leisure. In today's fast-moving world, good vision is of paramount importance. Caring for people's sight is vital.

Vision care is a field which demands the ability to communicate with people and to work with precision and professionalism. As a qualified optometrist or dispensing optician you would be responsible for the visual health of your patients, working to maintain or improve the quality of their lives. This is obviously demanding, but it is also rewarding and stimulating as technological and clinical advances continually take place.

You can look forward to a fulfilling career in providing the nation's vision care. The earning potential is excellent, depending on hard work, enthusiasm, expertise and good business sense.



Eye Care Professionals

Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians

Optometrist (see page two)

Historically known as ophthalmic opticians, optometrists are trained professionals who examine eyes, give advice on visual problems, prescribe and fit spectacles or contact lenses. They refer patients with eye disease to medical colleagues. Some choose to specialise in a particular aspect of eye care such as the co-management of pathology, contact lenses, low vision or paediatrics. They also recommend other treatments or visual aids where appropriate and recognise eye disease, referring such cases as necessary.

Dispensing Optician (see page four)

A dispensing optician advises on, fits and supplies the most appropriate spectacles after taking account of each patient's lifestyle and vocational needs. Dispensing opticians are also able to fit contact lenses after undergoing further specialist training.

Other Eye Care Professionals

Ophthalmic Medical Practitioners

Ophthalmic medical practitioners are medical doctors specialising in eye care. Like optometrists, they examine eyes, diagnose abnormalities and prescribe suitable corrective lenses.

To become an ophthalmic medical practitioner you must first qualify as a medical doctor.

Ophthalmologists

Ophthalmologists specialise in eye conditions and their treatment. Medically qualified, they mainly work in eye hospitals and hospital eye departments.

To become an ophthalmologist you must first qualify as a medical doctor.

Orthoptists

Orthoptists are allied health professionals who work mainly in hospitals alongside ophthalmologists in the assessment and treatment of squints, double vision and other abnormalities of binocular vision.

*For further information please contact:
British Orthoptic Society, Tavistock House North,
Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HX.*





The Work of an Optometrist

Optometrists are health specialists trained to examine the eyes to detect signs of injury, disease, abnormality and defects in vision. In addition, some general health conditions (for example diabetes) show themselves in the eye and an optometrist is also trained to detect these. A career as an optometrist will put you at the front line of vision care and every day will bring fresh challenges and new opportunities to care for your patients' eyesight.

Your patients will range from young children to elderly pensioners and each will have his or her own individual needs. Excellent communication skills are vital to enable you to give them the information and reassurance they need and to listen to what they have to say.

Optometrists can choose to practise in a number of ways and in a number of environments. You may work in a practice that is part of a chain or one that is independent, or in a hospital eye department. Optometry provides an opportunity for you to run your own practice (either wholly owned or a franchise) – an attractive option for someone with an entrepreneurial spirit – or you may elect for the security of an employed post.

An optometrist may choose which aspects of practice he or she wishes to pursue; either practising across the broad range of optometry or specialising in a particular area of clinical practice such as children's vision, low vision or contact lenses.

There are plenty of options for optometrists who wish to work part-time, either working a limited number of days or hours per week in a practice, or as a locum – often in a number of different practices.

The route

To enter a profession which demands such highly developed and responsible skills, you will need to undergo a broadly based and intensive training accredited by the General Optical Council (GOC). This consists of the following steps:

- a) Gain a degree in optometry from a university approved by the GOC (see Useful Addresses).
- b) Pass Part I of the Professional Qualifying Examination – if you gain an appropriate class of degree approved by the GOC, you will be exempt from this examination.
- c) Complete a pre-registration year – this involves full-time clinical experience as a trainee under the supervision of a registered optometrist.
- d) Pass Part II of the Professional Qualifying Examination – this combines practical, oral and written assessment of your ability to manage patients and to practise safely as an independent optometrist.

The Professional Qualifying Examinations (PQEs) and the pre-registration year are administered by the College of Optometrists to standards approved by the General Optical Council.

Holders of non-UK optometric qualifications should seek information on registration requirements from the GOC.

Registration in the UK

Once qualified as an optometrist you must register with the General Optical Council to practise in the United Kingdom. This registration must be renewed annually.

Entry standards

You will usually need three A2 levels. Universities will specify at least two Science subjects at A2 level, normally in a biological science and mathematics or a mathematical science (general studies is not counted for this purpose). Some universities specify biology at A2 level. Typical conditional offers are around ABB however there may be some flexibility in the actual grades accepted for entry.

Students are also admitted with other qualifications including Scottish or Irish Highers – typical entrance requirement are five subjects for Scottish and six subjects for Irish; all at A or B levels.

Mature applicants or those offering other qualifications should contact the relevant university Admissions Tutor for further advice on eligibility for entry to the undergraduate course in optometry.

Before selecting A2 level or equivalent options, prospective applicants should confirm that their intended subjects are acceptable to the university of their choice by checking either the university undergraduate prospectus or the appropriate optometry website.





The Work of a Dispensing Optician

Following an eye examination by an optometrist or ophthalmic medical practitioner, a prescription may be issued stating the degree of the error in the patient's sight.

The work of a dispensing optician involves advice on lens type, advice on styling of frames, and taking frame and facial measurements in relation to lenses. Before any finished spectacles are deemed acceptable for a patient, they must be checked to ensure they correspond to the prescription and final ordered specifications and are suitable for the conditions in which they will be used. Once the patient has received the new spectacles and been instructed on how to get the best results from them, the dispensing optician is always available to offer advice and effect adjustments and repairs if necessary.

The supply and fitting of contact lenses involves different processes to fitting spectacles and, on completion of the standard dispensing course, courses are available for those wishing to specialise in this area.

Dispensing optics offers immense job satisfaction to those who enjoy dealing with the public, and like optometry, provides an opportunity to run your own practice.

Qualifications required

A minimum of five GCSE passes grades A*, to C or an acceptable equivalent which must include English Literature or English Language, Mathematics and a science based subject. For applicants who can provide evidence that they have a minimum of ten years' optical experience, the entry standard may be waived.

Whilst the above information may be used as a guide to entry standards you are strongly advised to contact the college or university of your choice to establish their entry qualifications (see page six).

Types of training

There are currently five ways to train as a dispensing optician:

1. To take a three-year distance learning course run by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians, the student being employed by a qualified optician for the duration of the course. Practical experience is gained from the employment, whilst theoretical knowledge is acquired through the distance learning course, which includes compulsory block release attendance. The third year of the course is the student's pre-registration year.
2. To attend a two-year full time course at one of the training institutions. This is followed by one year's work, the pre-registration year, under the supervision of a qualified optician.
3. A three-year full time course in optical management leading to the Association's Fellowship Diploma and a BSc Hons degree in Optical Management, which is currently only available via Anglia Polytechnic University (A levels or equivalent are required).
4. Degree courses with Management are run by Bradford College and Glasgow Caledonian University (A levels or equivalent are required).
5. Three-year day-release courses which are available at Bradford College, City & Islington College and Anglia Polytechnic University. These courses are linked to employment with a qualified optician and incorporate the pre-registration year.

Completion of the appropriate course, pre-registration year and successful results in the qualifying examinations, administered and audited by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians, leads to registration with the General Optical Council. This registration must be renewed annually by you for as long as you practise in the UK.



Useful Addresses

The General Optical Council

41 Harley Street, London W1N 2DJ
Tel: 020 7580 3898. Fax: 020 7436 3525
<http://www.optical.org>

Regulatory body for optometrists and dispensing opticians set up by statute

The College of Optometrists

42 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG
Tel: 020 7839 6000. Fax: 020 7839 6800
Email: careers@college-optometrists.org
<http://www.college-optometrists.org>

Professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the UK

Association of British Dispensing Opticians

Godmersham Park Mansion,
Godmersham, Kent CT4 7DT
Tel: 01227 738829. Fax: 01227 733900
Email: education@abdo.org.uk
<http://www.abdo.org.uk>

Professional body which also provides distance learning courses for dispensing opticians

The Association of Optometrists

61 Southwark Street, London SE1 0HL
Tel: 020 7261 9661. Fax: 020 7261 0228
<http://www.assooptom.co.uk>

Provides services and representation to promote and protect its members

The Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians

113 Eastbourne Mews, London W2 6LQ
Tel: 020 7258 0240. Fax: 020 7724 1175
<http://www.fodo.com>

Represents the business interests of registered opticians

Universities providing degree courses in optometry

Anglia Polytechnic University
School of Applied Sciences
Department of Optometry and Ophthalmic Dispensing
East Road, Cambridge CB1 1PT
Tel: 01223 352979. Fax: 01223 417712
<http://www.anglia.ac.uk/optometry/>

Aston University

Optometry and Vision Sciences
School of Life and Health Sciences
Aston Triangle, Birmingham B4 7ET
Tel: 0121 359 3611. Fax: 0121 333 4220
<http://www.vs.aston.ac.uk>

Bradford University

Department of Optometry
Richmond Road, Bradford,
West Yorkshire BD7 1DP
Tel: 01274 234 640. Fax: 01274 305340
http://www.brad.ac.uk/acad/optom/Dept_of_Optometry_Home.html

The City University

Department of Optometry & Visual Science
City University, Northampton Square,
London EC1V 0HB
Tel: 020 7477 8000. Fax: 020 7477 8560
<http://www.city.ac.uk/optometry/>

Glasgow Caledonian University

Department of Vision Sciences
Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow G4 0BA
Tel: 0141 331 3000. Fax: 0141 331 3005
<http://fhis.gcal.ac.uk/VS/index.html>

University of Manchester Institute of Science & Technology

Department of Optometry & Neuroscience
Sackville Street, Manchester M60 1QD
Tel: 0161 236 3311. Fax: 0161 228 7040
http://www.umist.ac.uk/UMIST_OVS/welcome.html

University of Ulster

School of Biomedical Sciences
University House, Cromore Road,
Coleraine, Co. Londonderry BT52 1SA
Tel: 028 7034 4141
<http://www.ulst.ac.uk/faculty/science/biomed/optf.html>

University of Wales College of Cardiff

Department of Optometry & Vision Sciences

PO Box 905 Redwood Building
King Edward VI Avenue, Cardiff CF1 3YJ
Tel: 029 2087 4000. Fax: 029 2087 4859
<http://www.cf.ac.uk/uwcc/optom>

The application procedure

All applications for optometry degree courses must be made through:

Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS)

Fulton House, Jessop Avenue
Cheltenham, Gloucestershire GL50 3SH
Applicant enquiries: 01242 227788
<http://www.ucas.ac.uk>

Details of student grants and loans are available from your careers adviser

Institutions providing courses for Dispensing Opticians

Anglia Polytechnic University

School of Applied Sciences
Department of Optometry and Ophthalmic Dispensing

East Road, Cambridge CB1 1PT
Tel: 01223 352979. Fax: 01223 417712
<http://www.anglia.ac.uk/optometry/>

Association of British Dispensing Opticians

Godmersham Park Mansion,
Godmersham, Kent CT4 7DT
Tel: 01227 738829. Fax: 01227 733900
Email: education@abdo.org.uk
<http://www.abdo.org.uk>

Bradford College

Department of Science
Great Horton Road, Bradford,
West Yorkshire BD7 1AY
Tel: 01274 753111
<http://www.bilk.ac.uk>

City & Islington College

Department of Applied Optics
Dame Alice Owen Building,
311-321 Goswell Road, London EC1V 2DD
Tel: 020 7700 9333
<http://www.candi.ac.uk>

Glasgow Caledonian University

Department of Vision Sciences
Cowcaddens Road, Glasgow G4 0BA
Tel: 0141 331 3000. Fax: 0141 331 3005
<http://fhis.gcal.ac.uk/VS/index.html>



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THE COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS

