

SAVE SIGHT

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 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

OPTOMETRIST

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

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, WC1H9HX

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:

1. Gain a degree in optometry from a university approved by the GOC (see Useful Addresses).
2. 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.
3. Complete a pre-registration year - this involves full-time clinical experience as a trainee under the supervision of a registered optometrist.
4. 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 requirements 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.

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. You must renew this registration annually as long as you practise in the UK.

USEFUL ADDRESSES

The General Optical Council

Regulatory body for optometrists and dispensing opticians set up by statute

The General Optical Council
41 Harley Street
London, WIN 2DJ

Tel: 020 7580 3898
Fax: 020 7436 3525
Web: www.optical.org

The College of Optometrists

Professional, scientific and examining body for optometry in the UK

The College of Optometrists
42 Craven Street
London, WC2N 5NG

Tel: 020 7839 6000
Fax: 020 7839 6800
Email: careers@college-optometrists.org
Web: www.college-optometrists.org

Association of British Dispensing Opticians

Professional body which also provides distance learning courses for dispensing opticians

Association of British Dispensing Opticians
Godmersham Park Mansion
Godmersham
Kent
CT4 7DT

Tel: 01227 738829
Fax: 01227 733900
Email: education@abdo.org.uk
Web: www.abdo.org.uk

The Association of Optometrists

Provides services and representation to promote and protect its members

The Association of Optometrists
61 Southwark Street
London
SE1 OHL

Tel: 020 7261 9661
Fax: 020 7261 0228

The Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians

Represents the business interests of registered opticians

The Federation of Ophthalmic and Dispensing Opticians
113 Eastbourne Mews
London
W2 6LQ

Tel: 020 7258 0240
Fax: 020 7724 1175
Web: www.fodo.com

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

Web: 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

Web: www.vs.aston.ac.uk

Bradford University
Department of Optometry
Richmond Road
Bradford
West Yorkshire, BD7 1DP

Tel: 01274 234 640

Fax: 01274 305340

Web: www.brad.ac.uk/acad/lifesci/optometry

The City University
Department of Optometry & Visual Science
Northampton Square
London, EC1V 0HB

Tel: 020 7477 8000

Fax: 020 7477 8560

Web: www.city.ac.uk/optometry

Glasgow Caledonian University
Department of Vision Sciences
Cowcaddens Road
Glasgow
G4 0RA

Tel: 0141 331 3000
Fax: 0141 331 3005
Web: www.gcal.ac.uk/sls/Vision/study

University of Manchester
Institute of Science & Technology
Department of Optometry & Neuroscience
Sackville Street
Manchester
M60 1QD

Tel: 0161 236 3311
Fax: 0161 228 7040

University of Ulster
School of Biomedical Sciences
University House
Cromore Road
Coleraine
Co. Londonderry
BT52 1SA

Tel: 028 7034 4141
Web: <http://prospectus.ulster.ac.uk/modules/topics/topic-OPT.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
Web: www.cf.ac.uk/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:
Tel: 01242 227788
Web: www.ucas.ac.uk

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

UNIVERSITIES 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
Web: 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
Web: www.abdo.org.uk

Bradford College
Department of Science
Great Horton Road
Bradford
West Yorkshire
BD7 1AY

Tel: 01274 753111
Web: 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
Web: www.candi.ac.uk