

## **Minutes of the Forty-fifth**

### **Annual General Meeting of The College of Optometrists**

**Tuesday 29 April 2025 at 6.45pm**

**Eastside Rooms, 2 Woodcock Street, Birmingham, West Midlands, B7 4BL and online**

The Chair of the Board of Trustees, Professor Leon Davies, was in the Chair.

Ian Humphreys, Chief Executive; Lizzy Ostler, Director of Education; Bill Scott, Director of Finance; Juliet Leach, Director of Membership, Marketing and Communications were in attendance.

The Chair of the Board of Trustees welcomed Members and Fellows to the 45<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of The College of Optometrists. He explained that while this AGM was being held face to face, Members and Fellows also had the option to join virtually. He advised that questions would be answered at the end of the meeting.

He invited Dr Gillian Rudduck to give the President's address.

#### **1 Presidential welcome and address**

The President welcomed Members and Fellows to the Annual General Meeting, which marked the first year of her term as College President.

The President reflected on the significant changes across the healthcare landscape that have taken place in the last year, as well as the growing pressures on health services, and particularly on eye care.

The President recognised that College members work in multi-disciplinary teams, and therefore collaboration with other eye care organisations had been at the heart of the College's activities, increasing the reach, influence and voice of the College and the profession.

The College led a sector-wide project to develop the UK Eye Care Data Hub, a dashboard to forecast eye care workforce and disease prevalence. This vital tool, published in January, would help to support eye care planning across the UK and support the development of new models of care.

Alongside The Royal College of Ophthalmologists, the College also co-chaired a national working group on imaging standards in eye care. This initiative, working alongside optical manufacturers, had been supported by NHS England, and aimed to establish UK-wide standards that would drive interoperability of digital systems and enhance image sharing across.

The College also joined senior leaders at the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Eye Health and Visual Impairment to unveil the UK-wide Eye Care Support Pathway. An RNIB initiative, developed with support from the College and other organisations across the sector.

Another key collaborative project had been the Joint Vision for Eye Care, which the College and the Royal College of Ophthalmologists have worked to update. This vision provided guidance on

integrating services to ensure patients are prioritised based on clinical need and receive seamless care across multidisciplinary settings.

At the start of last year, the College responded to a Department of Health and Social Care request, endorsing a Standard Clinical Specification for community minor and urgent eye care in England, which the College helped to develop with LOCSU and the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning.

The President went on to highlight the work that the College had undertaken to better serve members and eye care services across the whole of the UK.

The President noted that a particular highlight was getting the opportunity to chair the two-day Optometry Five Nations meeting which was hosted at the College. This was a key occasion to bring together colleagues from across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to share knowledge and learn from each other.

There had also been continued work in partnership with the optometric bodies, and government advisors in the devolved nations to ensure a greater recognition of the optometry profession.

In Wales, The College was delighted to accept the invitation to join the Welsh Optometric Committee, a statutory advisory body to the Welsh Government.

In Northern Ireland the College had campaigned to improve access to eye care services for those on low incomes. And in Scotland the College had supported the National Services Scotland team in updating prescribing guidance for Scottish optometrists. This work would ensure practitioners had access to both the College's CMGs and Scottish-specific prescribing guidance.

The President also observed the challenges that the profession was facing. Uncertainty was acknowledged in England following the recent announcement that NHS England would be abolished. Additionally in the last year, funding had been withdrawn for optometrists working in Scotland to have access to Docet's online CPD resources. While the College's efforts to reverse this decision were unsuccessful, the College continued to offer high-quality College CPD to all Scottish members and would work hard to maintain channels of communication for future developments.

This had also been a year of significant political change, and the President recognised the efforts that the College had made to engage in this area. By working directly with all UK Governments, it had ensured that the voice of the College and the profession was heard at the highest level.

Ahead of the Westminster General Election, the College published its first-ever Manifesto for Change, calling for reforms to tackle the eye care crisis.

The Policy Team represented the College at Party Conferences last year and also built strong links with Shockat Adam, a newly elected MP, optometrist, and College member, as well as with Baroness Hayter, who the College was working with on the headlight glare campaign.

Additionally, the College continued to brief, and work alongside, the Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Eye Health and Visual Impairment, Marsha de Cordova MP.

Looking ahead, the President highlighted three key areas where the College would continue to focus its efforts: increasing the recognition and utilisation of optometrists, better commissioning of services, and addressing the inconsistent IT and digital connectivity challenges which remain a barrier to effective multidisciplinary working.

The President thanked Council members and the Board of Trustees, the Chief Executive, and the College team for their hard work and dedication over the past year. She thanked the members for their support and expressed pride in their commitment to delivering ever better patient care. The President concluded by stating that the College was committed to working for and on behalf of members, to support the advancement of optometry, the profession and patient outcomes.

## **2 Deceased Fellows and Members**

The President announced the names of the 22 Members and Fellows whose deaths had been notified to the College since the previous AGM.

There was special mention for Stephen Clark who was a serving member of the College Council in the Yorkshire and Humber region, and Judy Lea who had served as a College assessor in the North West and West Midlands regions since 2017 and had been a pre-registration scheme examiner since 2020.

There was a one-minute silence in remembrance of colleagues and friends.

## **3 Treasurer's report**

The College Treasurer, Dr Aleksandra Mankowska delivered her report for the 2023-24 financial year.

Education income had continued its recovery from the 2020 Covid dip, benefitting from a 3.7% increase in Scheme for Registration fees, with the increase slightly offset by a very small decline in the number of trainees starting the Scheme in 23-24. During the current year it was expected that over 1,000 trainees would be enrolled.

During the year to September 2024, membership income increased by around £206,000 due to an increased number of members and the first increase in fees in 13 years. The increase was 3.5% and did not affect the recruitment or retention of members.

The Treasurer confirmed that the College expected to continue to raise fees by a small amount annually to cover increasing costs, allow for ongoing investment in College systems, and as part of the plan to rebuild the reserves used to maintain services during the pandemic.

Commenting on the financial outcome for each of the College's core charitable activities, the Treasurer explained that the membership surplus had increased due to the increased number of members, the fee increase and the allocation of event activity costs back to Education. Education was showing a deficit owing to the events re-allocation, and had been allocated a higher rate of overheads costs due to increased operating costs. These costs came from the higher costs incurred in preparing the College for the replacement of the Scheme for Registration with the new Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) programme. The College had to spend nearly £403,000 on the development of the CLiP software alone.

The Policy and Research deficit remained constant reflecting the continued activity to promote the role of optometrists at the forefront of eye care provision in the UK.

The College's investments showed an improved performance, generating an income of £213,000 up from £143,507 last year and an unrealised gain on investments of £673,000, compared to last year's unrealised surplus of £260,000.

For the 2023-24 year, the College had an operating deficit of £154,860, compared to an operating deficit of £619,719 in 2022-23. This showed as an overall surplus, after the investment gains of

£518,448. This improvement was in line with the Trustees' aim to return the College to an operating surplus position by 2025-26, to re-establish the College's reserves.

Reserves as at 30 September 2024 were £7.6 million compared to £7.1 million in the previous year. Of the reserves total, £2 million were free reserves, up from £925,000, following an internal review of the appropriate accounting treatment.

Free reserves were the most usable reserves and would allow the College to invest in the future, such as CLiP, workforce planning, and CPD programmes, and to have the resilience to accommodate unexpected events like the pandemic.

As anticipated in last year's report, the College's Reserves Policy was reviewed by the Board of Trustees during the year and had been moved from a single number to a range, based on the monthly expenditure of the College. The current level of reserves were in compliance with the new policy.

As last year, there was one unusual number in the balance sheet. This was the net current liabilities figure of £2.7 million, as at 30th September 2024. The Treasurer explained that current liabilities can be an indicator of a cash flow issue, however this was not so in the College's case, as the liability reflected the difference between the fees paid by trainees, or their employer, when they enrolled in the Scheme for Registration, and the income earned, which was based on the progression of the individual trainees over the life of the Scheme.

The auditors were content with the accounts and the College had received an unqualified auditor's report.

The Treasurer thanked the College's staff, particularly the Director of Finance, Bill Scott, the Head of Finance, Roger Horton, and the Finance Team, for all their efforts to deliver the College's services during the year. The Treasurer also thanked Andrew Kitchen, Lay Trustee and Chair of the Audit Committee, whose financial expertise and sound judgement had been invaluable.

## **4 Report from the Chief Executive**

Ian Humphreys, Chief Executive began his report by noting some key accomplishments and the progress that had been made in continuing to deliver against the College's five year strategy. The Chief Executive highlighted the work undertaken by the College to ensure that optometrists had the support they needed to achieve their full potential.

The College's relationships with the GOC, universities and employers ensured a place at the centre of educational learning for the profession. Welcoming the new students was an important part of the College calendar and, with support from Council members, the College had met around 90% of the new students either in person or online during the student roadshows.

In addition to qualifying around 1,000 trainees on the Scheme for Registration, the College continued to develop the Clinical Learning in Practice (CLiP) programme which would deliver the majority of the GOC's new requirements for patient-facing experience, integrated into the new master's degrees. The College's custom-built CLiP portal was launched during the year to ensure that all those involved would be able to collaborate online to support and assess student progress.

The Chief Executive added that great supervision was a key part of optometric education and, as well as the introduction of the OptPE affix, the College had also developed and delivered enhanced supervisor training and resources.

In practice, the College's Clinical Management Guidelines had continued to support evidence based clinical decisions for members. Two new conditions had been added and 27 of the existing CMGs were updated. The College's Guidance for Professional Practice continued to be a highly

valued resource with 80% of College members referring to it at least once a week. Additionally, the College's Clinical Advisors remained on hand to answer specific questions from members, responding to 550 enquiries last year. With the new Communities feature on the College App, members also had a safe space for peer to peer support.

Members also relied on the College's highly rated CPD programme, which had seen over 35,000 course completions across the College's CPD platforms, plus an increased number of peer review events to meet demand at the end of the GOC three-year cycle.

The popularity of College-accredited Higher Qualifications continued to grow, and more than 1,000 were awarded to members during the year, with Medical Retina surpassing Glaucoma in popularity for the first time.

The Chief Executive echoed the President in recognising the College's increased work with government, both before and after the Westminster election, raising the issues, and the College's voice, at the highest levels.

The College had established itself as the primary organisation that national media turned to on any eye care stories with College spokespeople representing the College and the profession across broadcast, radio, national and local print, generating 550 items of media coverage and reaching an audience of 20 million. The collaboration with the RAC on headlight glare enabled College spokespeople to raise awareness of driving and vision on national television as well as in national and local press. This culminated in action, with the Department for Transport commissioning an independent study to address the growing concern.

Outcomes from other College media work delivered clear patient information on issues such as children's eye health, and the impact of measles and mpox.

The Chief Executive noted that it was critical for the profession to have the evidence to drive the development of optometry. The UK Eye Care Data Hub was a great example of how College investment in research supported the entire profession.

Additional research projects, in partnership with the College, included the launch of the NIHR eLearning for Clinicians modules which would enable optometrists to integrate clinical research into their practice, research into the relationship between deprivation and access to primary eye health services, and the UK National Eye-health and Hearing Study pilot.

Looking ahead, the College would continue to increase collaboration to ensure that optometrists are at the heart of patient-centred eye care and are seen as a trusted and valued part of the multi-disciplinary workforce.

The Chief Executive concluded by thanking College staff, the Board and Council and members for their inspiration, support, and hard work.

## **5 Election of members to the new council and the board of trustees**

The President announced the results of the Council elections, which had resulted in 9 vacancies being filled over 5 regions, and welcomed the new members to Council.

The results were:

Reena Rani Anand	East Midlands	(new representative)
David Jameson	London	(re-elected)
Madeleine Mould	North East	(re-elected)
Matt Roney	North West	(re-elected)
Kathryn Trimmer	Scotland	(re-elected)

Mike Horler	South East	(re-elected)
Hafsah Raja	South East	(new representative)
Benjamin Harris	South West	(co-opted for one year)
Keval Sejpar	South West	(co-opted for one year)

The President reported that Kathryn Trimmer, Matt Roney and Lewes Hambrey had been elected to the Board of Trustees. It was announced that Council had also agreed to the co-option of Kyla Black and the continued co-option of Andrew Kitchen to the Board of Trustees, both for one year.

Additionally, the President announced Kyla Black as Chair of the Education and Standards Committee.

The President thanked outgoing Council members and Trustees for their contributions.

## **6 Any other business**

The Chair reported that no questions had been received during the AGM.

There was no other business.

## **7 Close of meeting**

The Chair thanked all Members and Fellows for attending the AGM both in person and virtually and formally closed the meeting.

## Attendance List

*\* Members of Council*

### **In person attendees**

Aaima Afzal

Aleksandra Mankowska\*

Amita Matharu

Banu Srikantharajah

Bejal Karavadra

Bhavna Raja

Darragh Harkin

Elan Saparia

Erica Henderson

Fatima Rawji

Gillian Rudduck\*

Hafsah Islam

Halima Khan

Hamza Mussa\*

Haris Iqbal

Hasnain Ramji

Herj Kaur

Irfan Razvi\*

Jay Dermott

Karen Moss

Karishma Tailor

Kashif Hussain

Kelly Swoish

Kofi Sackey

Lauren Vincent

Leon Davies\*

Manvir Rana

Maryam Chohan

Maryam Hussain

Matt Roney\*

May Wong

Mo Arfaan

Parv Kaur

Pooja Bij

Rahul Odedra

Rama Venkatasubramanian

Ranvir Rana

Rhian Price

Rukaiya Anwar

Sadia Raqoob

Sarah Leppard

Shakeel Puri

Shamina Asif

Simon Yoell

Yuan Gao\*

### **Online attendees**

Daroun Baban

Chukwuebuka Offonabo

Hafsah Raja\*

Ruth Bennett

Daniel Hardiman McCartney (Clinical Advisor)

Chinyere Akinniyi

Ranna Rai

Dimple Zala

Kyla Black

Heather Jameson

Michael Bowen (Director of Knowledge and Research)

Sue Haydon (Director of People)

Kris Cottier

Osasere Alasa

Sarah Cant (Director of Policy and Strategy)

Stephen Smith

Lewes James Hambrey\*

Christopher Akamien

Ikechukwu Okafor

Debapriya Mukhopadhyay

Mark Bullimore

Colin Davidson

Nigel St Rose

Stuart McConnachie

Ezinne Atoza-Shitile

Ifeanyichukwu Onuoha