

**INSPIRING AND  
SUPPORTING EXCELLENCE**

# **RESEARCH STRATEGY 2020-2025**



**THE COLLEGE OF  
OPTOMETRISTS**

Professional Excellence in Eye Health

# INTRODUCTION

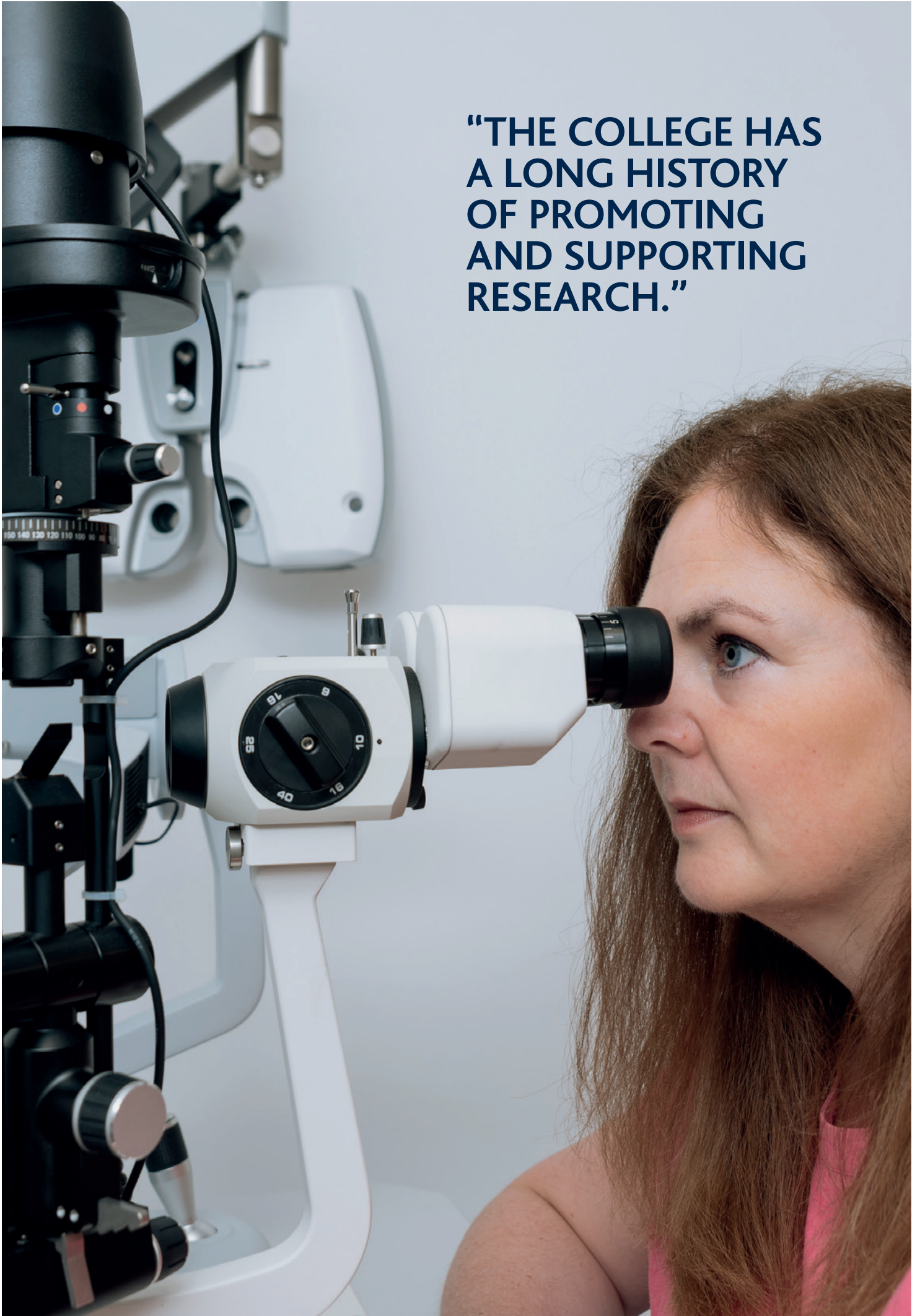
Society grants the members of professions rights and privileges. In return, members of professions agree to ensure that the expert knowledge for their area of specialism is developed and maintained, to ensure that the public continue to have access to high quality services, and that all care is based on the best available evidence. The maintenance and development of the evidence base that forms the knowledge which optometrists rely on to carry out routine care is a core responsibility of The College of Optometrists, the professional body for optometry in the UK.

Research is pivotal to doing this effectively. Research tests historic assumptions, investigates unanswered clinical questions and areas of uncertainty, and drives innovation and new technologies. Research systematically gathers data, structures hypotheses that convert data into information, and translates the information into knowledge that the profession can use for the benefit of their patients.

The College has a long history of promoting and supporting research. From our international research journal, Ophthalmic and Physiological Optics (OPO), which is approaching its 100th birthday, to our funding of Postgraduate Scholarships and Research Fellowships, which have supported the work that has developed academic and clinical leaders for optometry in the UK and internationally. We have commissioned research needed to fill the gaps in the profession's knowledge, and to support the College's policy work.

Our report '40 Years of Research' provides detail of our work in this area since the College was formed, and shows the impact created by this commitment to, and investment in research. Our future research strategy sets out the ways in which research will be used to undertake the work required to meet our strategic objectives, and explains why research remains a key element in the College's work as your professional body.

**“THE COLLEGE HAS  
A LONG HISTORY  
OF PROMOTING  
AND SUPPORTING  
RESEARCH.”**



# COLLEGE STRATEGIC PILLARS

The College's Strategic Plan for 2020-2025 has the following four pillars:



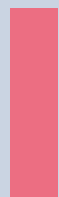
Defining and inspiring excellence in optometry.



Enabling optometrists to maximise their skills and develop their careers.



Representing and amplifying the expert voices of optometrists.

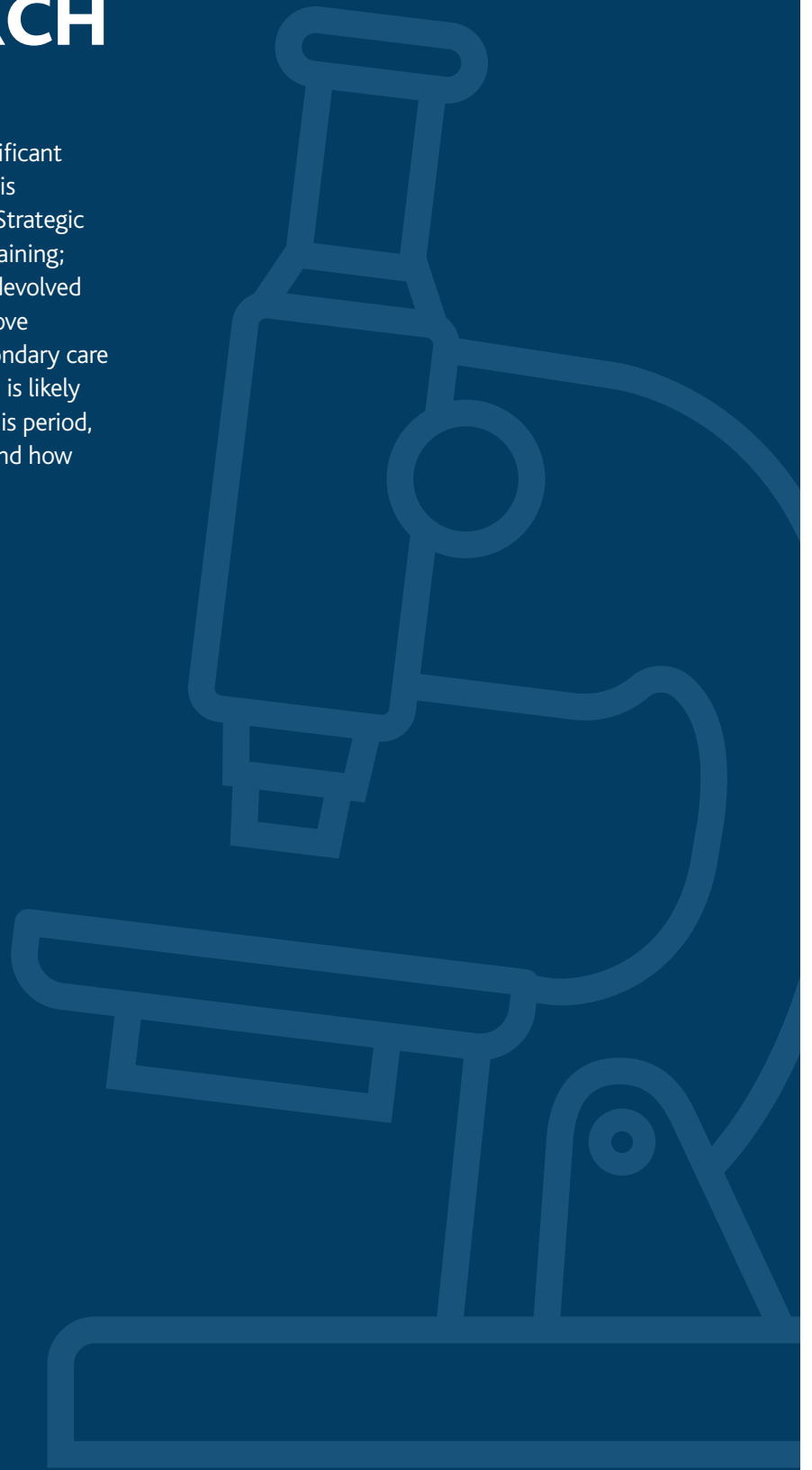


Embedding insight and evidence at the centre of the profession.

This research strategy sets out how the College will approach research over the next five years, in relation to each of these four pillars. In some areas, research activity under the strategy will be designed to support and inform objectives that are not directly research-related; whereas in others, the actions and aims are specifically relevant to supporting and promoting research.

# STRATEGIC AIMS FOR RESEARCH

The next five years are likely to see significant change within the profession. The GOC is continuing its work on the Educational Strategic Review for optometric education and training; the national health services across the devolved nations continue to develop work to move provision and service delivery from secondary care settings to primary care; and COVID-19 is likely to remain a feature for some or all of this period, impacting on how optometrists work, and how patients access services.



**The College will support the profession in meeting these challenges.  
For research, this means:**

## **DELIVERING EVIDENCE**

---

We will lead research aimed at reviewing and collecting evidence, with the goal of making sure that members have access to the data, information and knowledge that they need for their daily practice, and facilitates the development of patient-centred services and engagement with the UK's health services. We will work with members, partners and the public to identify gaps in the evidence base; and to develop research that can help to fill these gaps, thereby strengthening the evidence base for optometric practice in both primary and secondary care.

Priorities for this work currently include:

- **evidence relating to the expanding scope of practice for optometrists**
- **evidence for new models of eye and vision care and optometry**
- **data about the optometric workforce to inform development of and planning for future services**
- **investigating advanced practice and CPD for the profession**
- **gathering evidence to inform the next stages of the Educational Strategic Review.**

## **INCREASING IMPACT**

---

We will work with partners and sector stakeholders to ensure that research by and for optometrists is widely read and easily accessible to clinicians, academics, researchers and the public. Using the College's communications channels we will ensure that research into the eye and visual system reaches the widest possible audience, in the best format, for the greatest impact.

The College will provide leadership by: identifying key research outputs for the profession and ensuring the profession uses these well; providing a hub for resources and information; developing our approach to knowledge management for the profession – proactively curating the evidence base; and by giving academics and clinicians a central community within which to share and organise information.

We will highlight and celebrate the research that optometrists carry out by sharing their output widely and recognising their successes through our Research Excellence Awards. These awards will continue to showcase the most effective and important research for the profession.

In this area our priorities are:

- **promoting optometric research**
- **increasing the awareness of and access to research on the impact of optometry on ocular and visual health**
- **sustaining and promoting OPO's position as the leading optometry research journal in the world**
- **sharing research findings with the public**
- **managing the profession's knowledge effectively.**

## TRANSLATING FOR PRACTICE

---

As well as enabling academics and others to access research into optometry, vision science and related disciplines, we will ensure that relevant research is reviewed, and the implications for clinical practice shared with the profession, the public, other health professions and policy makers. We will work with the College's policy and education teams, our clinical advisers and our partners, to prioritise our work in this area to fit the College's strategic objectives, and to enable evidence from research to inform engagements with decision makers. This will allow us to provide guidance to the profession and to the public.

We will be prioritising the following:

- **developing the College as a hub for researchers and clinicians to share ideas, and ask and answer key questions**
- **creating blogs, podcasts, videos and briefings to give members access to key research findings**
- **highlighting new research published in OPO in plain English summaries for non-research audiences**
- **developing Optometry in Practice as an online resource.**

## BUILDING CAPACITY

---

To lead research, and to be an effective partner in wider projects, is vital for the profession to have the knowledge and skills to be able to understand and take part in research. We will drive this strategy to develop research capacity in optometry, vision science and related areas in the UK through funding research scholarships and fellowships; and supporting undergraduate and postgraduate researchers to develop their careers and skills. We will also act as a partner on key funding applications, and provide support to optometrists developing such proposals. It is critical that all members of the profession feel able to contribute to, take part in, and lead research, and use research findings. In line with the College's commitment to leading the sector in addressing equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) issues, we are determined to identify and remove barriers to developing as a researcher in optometry and related disciplines.

We will work with partners such as the NIHR Ophthalmology Specialty Group, and Cochrane Eyes and Vision, to influence funding bodies to increase the research funding for eye health and vision science. We will continue to provide our members with access to the services of our practice-based research advisors and statistician, with opportunities to develop skills and practical experience of practice-based research via our Small Grant Scheme.

Priorities for this area are:

- **involving members in research**
- **increasing funding for optometric researchers**
- **developing resources to support optometrists' CPD in research skills**
- **leading partnerships that allow optometrists to use and develop research skills**
- **developing future leaders in the profession**
- **increasing equality and accessibility in our research and in research across the sector.**



**THE COLLEGE OF  
OPTOMETRISTS**

Professional Excellence in Eye Health



The College of Optometrists  
42 Craven Street  
London  
WC2N 5NG

020 7839 6000  
[college-optometrists.org](http://college-optometrists.org)

**Connect with us**

 [collegeofoptometrists](https://www.instagram.com/collegeofoptometrists)

 [collegeofoptometrists](https://twitter.com/collegeofoptometrists)

 [CollegeOptomUK](https://www.facebook.com/CollegeOptomUK)

 [college-optometrists.org/linkedin](https://www.linkedin.com/company/college-optometrists.org/)