

Re:View

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Maintaining the gold standard

Editorial comment from Colin Lee

Optical career progression pathway

A graphical outline of the role played by ABDO College

Godmersham Park

A brief history of the home of ABDO College

Maintaining the gold standard

I think many people both within and outside optics often wonder about the success of our profession, which has continued to grow steadily in recent years. It is obvious our function is often misunderstood and consequently viewed in quite a derogatory way, which is totally against the facts! Unfortunately, based on my personal experience, this view is also held by many in optometry and even some of our fellow colleagues who have failed to see the value of their own qualification! We are sometimes perceived as 'frame stylists', just a body to help the patient choose a frame and maybe 'sell' them an expensive pair of lenses, whether or not they are appropriate to their needs.

I have always believed in the value to the patient of a properly dispensed and fitted pair of spectacles. The way this is appreciated by the patient is obvious by the success of practices that utilise the skills of properly trained and qualified dispensing opticians, DOs who believe in their worth, do the job in the way it should be done and

ensure the whole process is followed up to ensure the patient is satisfied and pleased with the result.

There are many individuals amongst the ABDO membership who believe that practice support staff, who have been trained to assist the DO, will eventually take their place and thereby do the DO out of a job! I have seen some of the large multiples, trying to save money, cut down on the number of student/trainee dispensing opticians they employ, only to find a few years down the line they are not achieving the turnover they once were and they are short of qualified DOs, some also find it difficult to attract qualified dispensing opticians to work for them. These employers then start shouting that we are not training enough students and try to find methods of training which circumvent ABDO College and the gold standard methods we promote.

I have to say, from my own point of view, I am not sure I want them to realise where they are going wrong! Our own business has built from nothing

in 33 years, to a fairly successful small group that is holding its own in spite of the current economic climate. We have always employed qualified dispensing opticians; we have trained many newly qualified DOs over the years and will continue to do so. We have always encouraged all of our staff to improve their knowledge, to get onto the career ladder and to use their skills to give the patient an ever better service. I know this is not the only method to a successful business, but I do believe it goes a long way to helping to ensure you are successful in a world where competition seems to be the only byword to choice.

ABDO College will continue to maintain the gold standard by ensuring we train and educate dispensing opticians in the best possible way to provide employers with the quality staff they need and the general public with the professional ophthalmic dispensing services that they truly require.

**Colin Lee FBDO, Chairman,
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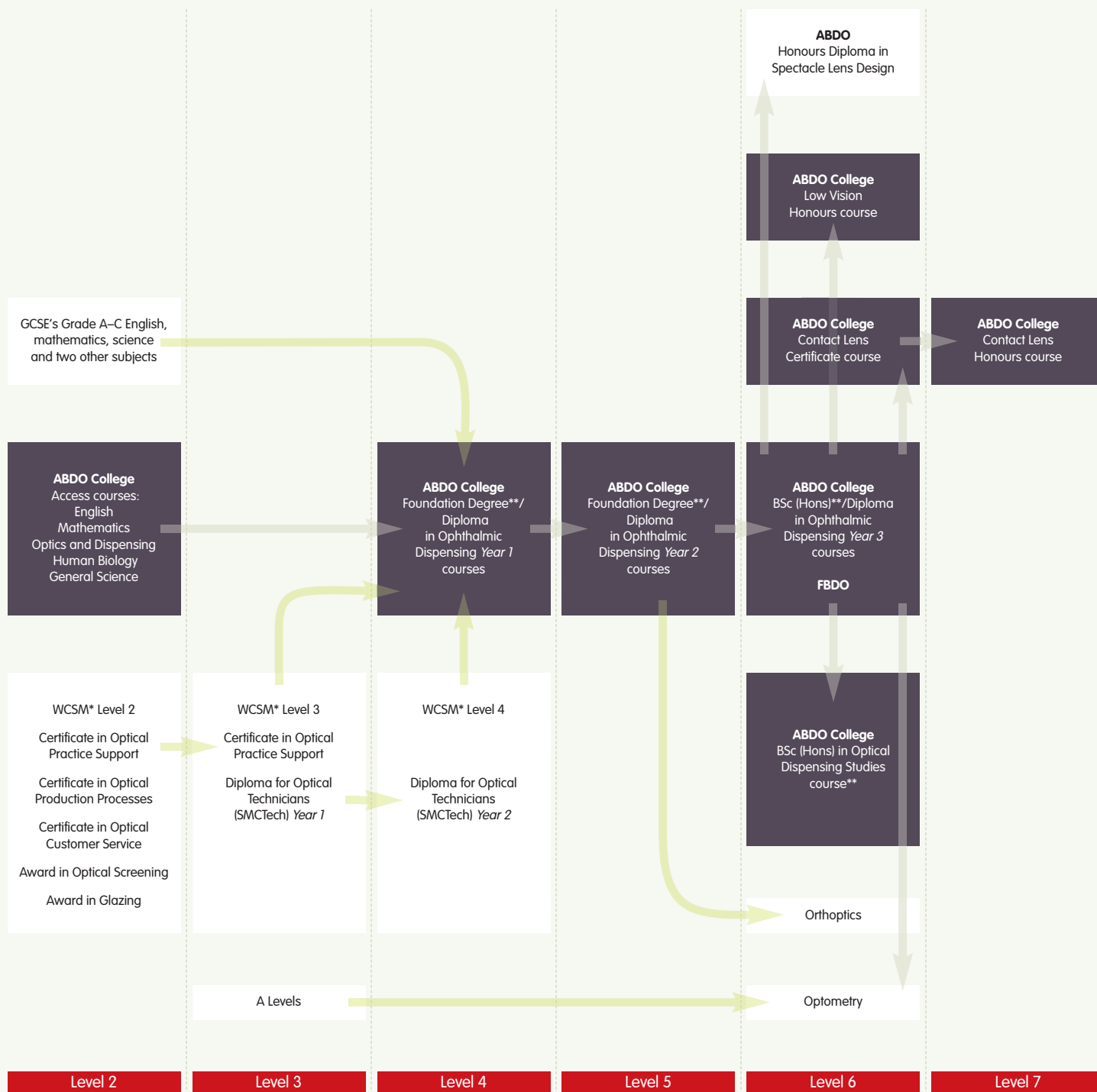


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Optical career progression pathway

This optical career progression pathway chart outlines the central role played by ABDO College and how its courses link with other optical training and professions.



*The Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers

**In conjunction with Canterbury Christ Church University (CCCU)

Godmersham Park

A brief history of the home of ABDO College

The earliest part of the building that houses ABDO College was built in 1732 by Thomas May Knight, a descendant of the Brodnax family who had owned the manor since 1590. He built the house on the site of an earlier Elizabethan building and turned the 600 acres surrounding the new building into parkland. The middle part of the house is still the original construction and the flanking pavilions were added around 1780.

When Thomas May Knight died in 1781 his son, also named Thomas, inherited the estate. He and his wife, having no children, made a cousin Edward Austin the heir to Godmersham and to the Chawton estates in Hampshire. A few years after Thomas May Knight II's death, his widow retired to Canterbury and in 1797 Edward Austin came to live in Godmersham. Fifteen years later, on Mrs Knight's death, Edward changed his name to Knight as a fond tribute to his benefactors.

Edward's younger sister, Jane Austin, was a frequent visitor to Godmersham,

often spending weeks at a time with her brother Edward, his wife Elizabeth and their children, for whom she was a much loved aunt. Godmersham is believed by many to be the inspiration for her novel *Mansfield Park* (1814). In 1813 Jane, referring to the house, wrote: "In this house there is a constant succession of small events, somebody is always going or coming..." – those who have visited ABDO College will know that it's still like that today!

Edward (Austin) Knight outlived his sister Jane (who died 18 July 1817) and his son duly succeeded him in 1852. Edward the younger had established his home at Chawton House and had no wish to move his family to Kent. He made considerable additions to Godmersham, before putting the whole estate up for sale in 1874.

John Cunliffe Lister Kay bought Godmersham and was eventually succeeded by his brother Eliis, who became the 1st Lord Masham. In 1921 the 3rd Lord Masham sold the estate to

the Earl of Dartmouth. For a time Lord Dartmouth, his brother and their respective families, occupied Godmersham until, in the mid 1930's, it was purchased by Mr and Mrs Robert Tritton.

Godmersham had suffered during so many changes of ownership but, under Mr and Mrs Tritton's direction, the house enjoyed a renaissance. Elsie Tritton was the widow of Sir Louis Baron, of Black Cat cigarette fame, and Robert Tritton a respected art dealer. Their joint fortunes enabled them to re-model the House. Mrs Tritton survived her husband by 26 years and after her death in 1983 the estate was bought by the Sunley family, who undertook a major repair programme.

On 26 March 2001 the historic house opened its doors to the first group of ABDO College students. In addition to ABDO College students the house is frequently visited by interested groups, including The Jane Austin Society and continues to attract visitors both locally and from all over the world.



Communicating with confidence

by Sally Bates BSc (Hons) FBDO Cert Ed, ABDO College Lecturer

This is the second of three articles focusing on communication skills which are designed to help improve your customer service expertise in the optical environment. Good communication skills are vital in order to convey the correct information and interact with patients and fellow employees.

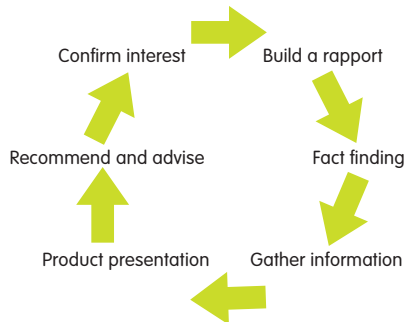
Communication skills are currently a core competency of the ABDO FQE (Final Qualification Examination) syllabus. Students are now examined on their communication skills, both in the written theoretical examination and Section D of the practical examinations.

As dispensing opticians we need to be able to:

- Identify and satisfy patient's visual needs
- Make recommendations that are personalised to the patient
- Offer value for money – the most suitable frames and lenses for the patient

The patient's perception of good customer service is based upon two factors – the product that they have purchased and the way in which it is dispensed. In order to provide an outstanding service we need to develop our communication skills to a higher level. Good communicators can talk to people on different levels, from children, to OAPs, from a variety of social and ethnic backgrounds. Have you wondered how they manage to develop these skills? The answer is simple, people like people who are like themselves, or 'on the same wavelength'.

To develop our skills we can follow the communication cycle:



Step 1: Build a rapport

Rapport is something more than words

Figure 1: Meeting and greeting people is a crucial part of our work.

Don't ignore people even if you are really busy; make eye contact, smile and nod in their direction. Thus the patient will know they have been seen and acknowledged.



Make general conversation. Use phrases such as "How may I help you?", if the patient is pushing a baby in a pram, comment on how lovely the baby is, if an old lady is carrying shopping bags then offer to help her. If all else fails, talk about the weather!

Ask general questions. For example "How are you today?"

Everyone's favourite topic is themselves; so find out about the person, their needs, desires, and requirements by asking 'open' questions.

The need to match information given to the patient is such that they can fully understand our recommendations. Always try to match the volume of your voice to that of the patient. For example, if the patient is quiet, talk quietly etc. Mirror the patient's personality by assessing the patient's body language.

All these points help to build your rapport with the patient

Step 2: Fact finding

Figure 2: Use 'open' questions to establish the patient's needs, wants and requirements – Who, What, When, Where, Why, Which, How:

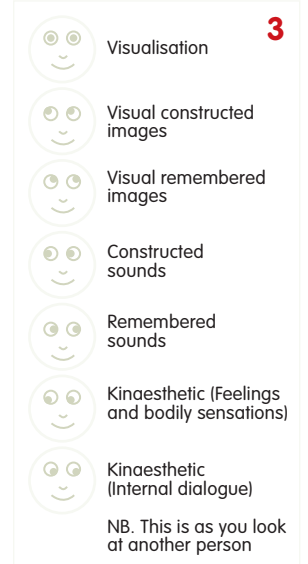
- **How** may I help you?
- **When** were you last tested?
- **Where** were you tested?
- **Which** lenses do you wear?
- **What** type of frames did you have in mind?
- **Which** colours do you like?
- **What** about having thin lenses?
- **What** type of sports do you play?
- **What** do you like about your current specs?



R.E.M. – Rapid Eye Movement

We need to communicate with patients on a level that they are comfortable with.

Figure 3: When we communicate and access information there is usually an associated physical movement of the eyes at the same time. Generally, recalling a visual memory will cause us to look upwards. When recalling sounds, we usually look to the side, and when remembering feelings, the movement is down and to the side. The majority of right handed people recall a visual memory by looking up



and to the left, whereas a visual memory which is created in the imagination is constructed up and to the right. When recalling an auditory memory, such as a conversation, causes us to look to the left; whereas we look to the left when constructed in the imagination. This is an element of NLP – Neuro Linguistic Programming.

NLP can be attributed to four major topics:

- Visual
- Auditory
- Kinaesthetic (feeling)
- Audio digital

It is often easy to get the patient's attention and communicate on their level by asking "What did you like about your previous specs?"

Figure 4: "I like the way they **looked**..."

- **Visual** descriptions turn this patient on!
- Tell the patient that they **look** good in the different frame styles

Visual people use phrases such as:

- It looks good to me
- I see what you are saying
- I see eye to eye
- I see what you mean
- Show me what you mean
- Looking at it from this perspective

Figure 5: "I **hear** what you're saying – I like the way they were **rimless**..."

- **Auditory** descriptions turn this patient on!
- Explain the details and benefits of the various frame styles

Auditory people use phrases such as:

- It sounds good to me
- I hear what you are saying
- We are on the same wavelength
- I cannot hear myself think
- That rings bells
- Turn a deaf ear

Figure 6: "I like the way they **felt** comfy on my nose..."

- **Feeling** descriptions turn this patient on!
- Explain the lightweight **feeling** of titanium frames and hi-index lenses



4



5



6

Kinaesthetic people use phrases such as:

- Feels good to me
- Heated debate
- Feels solid
- Wet blanket
- Smooth operator
- Common ground



7

Figure 7: "I like the way the sides have a **tiny spring**, and I can take them on and off without them snapping..."

- **Detailed** descriptions turn this patient on!
- This patient wants to know the **details** of the various frame styles

Audio digital people use phrases such as:

- Considering the options
- The principles of the matter
- Organically created

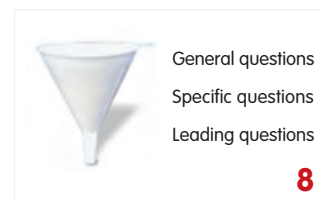
Step 3: Gather information

Talk in a way that patients understand. It is easy to be too basic or use too much technical jargon, therefore try to listen and gauge an understanding of the patient's knowledge. You can then make recommendations accordingly to match the patient's level of understanding.

We need to gather information about the purpose of the spectacles that we are dispensing by asking a variety of three types of questions:

- General questions – open questions to put the patient at ease
- Specific questions – open and closed questions to find out the purpose of the patient's spectacles
- Leading questions – closed questions to confirm objectives

Figure 8: This is known as the 'funnel technique' of questioning as it provides plenty of information from the patient as to their needs, wants and requirements. It enables you to recommend and advise the correct frames and lenses to suit the patient's visual requirements.



8

General questions provide a range of information about your patient's lifestyle. They are a mixture of open and closed questions:

- When do you wear your spectacles?
- Do you wear them for driving, reading, playing sports, working at your computer?
- How long do you work at your computer?
- How often do you drive?

Sally Bates BSc (Hons) FBDO Cert Ed

Sally Bates is the proprietor of Identity Optical Training, specialising in training courses for practical examination revision and optical assistants Level 2 and 3 training. She is also an ABDO examiner and part-time lecturer at the ABDO College, where she is responsible for teaching all aspects of ophthalmic dispensing.



- Do you wear spectacles for your work?
- Are you concerned about safety and protecting your eyes at work?
- Do you travel often?
- Does your job require you to be outside during the day?

Specific questions narrow down the information so that you can find out your patient's objectives:

Always endorse your questions with an explanation of why the patient should accept your suggestions and select your recommendations.

For example:

Would you like to try the rimless frames?

They are light, comfy and without rims that would block your vision

Do you find your current specs are heavy?

We recommend thin lenses or Trivex lenses which are lightweight

Have you thought about having thin lenses?

They look so much better cosmetically

Have you considered progressive lenses?

They are the lenses without lines for distance, computer vision and reading

Do you drive at night?

We recommend an anti-reflection coating

Leading questions use closed questions that give a 'yes' or 'no' answer in order to attain confirmation of the patient's likes and dislikes. At this stage you can summarise the patient's needs and be prepared to make appropriate recommendations.

For example:

- We recommend Transitions lenses for your lifestyle, would you like the brown or grey?
- We recommend lenses for computer vision, would you like to be able to see your computer and use the specs for near vision?
- Would you like to have the new smudge resistant anti reflection coating?

Step 4: Product presentation

Figure 9: Now that you have discovered the patient's needs, wants and requirements, this demonstrates your interest in the patient and enables them envisage their ideas by reminding the patient of their motivation to purchase new spectacles.



Figure 10: Props are ideal for individuals who are visual, kinaesthetic and audio digital.

- Visual people like to look at the props
- Kinaesthetic people like to handle, touch and feel the props
- Audio digital people like to inspect the props



F.A.B. – Features, Advantages and Benefits

- Features – what the frame/lenses do
- Advantage – how it's useful to the patient
- Benefit – why the patient should have it

Always try to personalise the benefits to meet the patient's needs, you can bring your recommendations to life – drop props! By using sample lenses you can demonstrate and explain the benefits of thin lenses, aspheric lenses, MAR coatings, tinted lenses, polarised lenses, Transitions lenses, sports spectacles, sports filters, etc. The patient is subsequently able to touch, feel and visualise what their new spectacles will look like.

For example:

F: Hi index aspheric lenses are flatter, thinner and lighter

A: Your eyes won't look as magnified/minified

B: Your lenses will look cosmetically better

F: Progressive lenses give you vision at all distances

A: You can see TV, your computer screen and near vision

B: They are line free – no one knows you are wearing them

F: Occupational lenses are ideal for computer vision

A: You can see your computer at arm's length and reading at near vision

B: You only need one pair of specs in your office for computer vision

F: We recommend an anti-reflection coating for computer vision

A: Improved cosmetic appearance and reduces glare

B: Your computer screen will be clearer

F: Transitions lenses go dark in the sunshine

A: They are a comfort tint which automatically adapt in UV light

B: They will give you 100% UV protection when you are sitting in the garden

F: Polarised lenses are ideal for driving

A: They eliminate glare off the road surface

B: The road will not look shiny and your vision will be more comfortable

F: These frames have sprung joints

A: The frame stays in shape and they're stronger

B: The frame will last longer if you take them off with one hand

F: Titanium frames are strong

A: They are lightweight, flexible and non-corrosive

B: They are comfortable to wear and will not lose their colour

Step 5: Recommend and advise

Figure 11: 'We recommend' is an ideal phrase to use when dispensing. You have the endorsement and approval of the business and the Optometrist behind this statement. Once again, make your recommendations personalised to the patient.



Top tips

- Never pre-judge people – it is often the most unlikely people who spend the most money on marvellous spectacles to suit their needs and noticed by friends and colleagues
- Never judge a book by the cover – remember only millionaires and tramps can afford to dress like tramps!
- Rephrase the patient's needs and present the appropriate lenses and frames as a solution
- Advise various frame and lens options – patients do like to have a choice, otherwise they feel as though they are being 'sold to'
- Always offer the 'best' product solution first
- Remember 'Top Down' selling – it is better to give people three options of products and prices, then the patient is able to decide without embarrassment, which option best suits their budget
- Be positive and tell the patient they have selected the right product to suit their needs

Step 6: Confirm interest

Figure 12: Give your endorsement and support to the dispensing as some patients seek your professional opinion and approval. It is easy to re-enforce with positive statements such as:

- "You've chosen the right lenses; I think they are going to be great for you"
- For older people you might say "My mum/dad wears these lenses, they're very pleased with them"
- "This is what I wear and I'm really happy with mine"



With some patients you will need to confirm their interest in the frame and lens products. Ask questions such as:

- What do you think?
- How do you like the shape?
- What do you think about the colour?
- Is this what you're looking for?
- What do you think of the frame?
- How do they feel?
- How do you like the shape?
- What do you think about the colour?
- How do you like the way the look?
- Is this what you're looking for?
- Shall we go ahead with the order?
- If I go ahead with the order today, they'll be ready for you in four days

Verbal patient confirmation

Figure 13: Verbal patient confirmation

- "What's the total cost?"
- "How long will they take?"
- "I like the look of these"
- "These are loose – can you adjust them?"
- "That seems to be what I need"
- "Do you take credit cards?"



Non-verbal buying signals

Figure 14: Non-verbal buying signals

- Patient nods their head
- Patient smiles
- Patient looks at companions for feedback
- Patient carefully examines the frames
- Patient keeps looking in the mirror



References

www.optical.org

Thanks to Gray Mallam and Tony Nutley, NLP practitioners

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Younger Optics

For further information on ABDO College sponsorship opportunities contact Michael R Potter FBDO on 01227 733 913 or email at mpotter@abdo.org.uk.

Younger Optics celebrate sponsorship anniversary



Julian Wiles and Sue Rose

To mark the first anniversary of Younger Optics' sponsorship support for ABDO College, their territory sales manager for UK & Ireland, Julian Wiles, took the opportunity to visit Godmersham to provide an update on their products and merchandising materials.

The company has recently introduced a new sales brochure '*More choices, more customers, more business, more satisfaction*' featuring Transitions VI, Transitions XRTRActive, DriveWear and NuPolar; this new publication clearly outlines who these products are designed for and why they can benefit.

Commenting on Julian's visit college technician Sue Rose said "We really appreciate the support Younger Optics has provided over the past 12 months. Julian has supplied the College with useful demonstration items, POS material and technical literature which assists our students in developing their skills and approach to dispensing new technologies".

Industry standard presents golden opportunity

Answering a job advertisement at ABDO College turned out to be a real career chance for Emma Pynn.



Emma Pynn

ABDO College highly values its staff and implements a policy of encouraging people to progress their career pathways within the College. One of the latest people to benefit from this policy is Emma Pynn who joined the reception team in October 2010. A year on, she has embarked on an exciting career development – undertaking the Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians, which is run by the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers. This qualification has long been regarded by many within optics as the ‘industry gold standard’.

Before joining the College, Emma worked in a livery yard looking after horses. She says: “This had been my dream since I was a child in primary school but unfortunately there isn’t really a career path for that type of job.

“I had gained communication skills from my work with the general public and also time management skills from working at various equine yards. I was also pretty competent with working on computers. So I decided to take bar work as an easy exit from the horses, until I could decide what to do for a

career.” Emma spotted the job as a receptionist at ABDO College in her local paper and “...had a gut feeling it would be a really good thing to do.” It clearly offered the potential for Emma to expand her work experience as well as offering the bonus of being located near to Emma’s home.

Emma says: “Working at Godmersham involves being flexible as the days present a range of different tasks – such as dealing with ABDO College students, ABDO members and also staff queries. The thing I like best about my job are my colleagues. Everyone that works here is a real pleasure to be with each day.

“ABDO College employs staff with a great deal of academic knowledge and experience and, from working here this past year, I have found it to be a highly professional environment with everyone doing their best to help. ABDO College is supportive to its staff, which is very motivating, as well as supporting ABDO members and the students.”

It was College Technician Sue Rose who suggested that Emma consider

taking the Optical Technicians Diploma course. Emma explains: “I really admire my boss Sue Rose and when she mentioned this course to me I was really excited. I was also thrilled that someone had thought about me and had taken an interest in my career.”

To prepare for the course, Emma set about getting experience working in an optical practice. She sent a CV and covering letter to some local practices and found a part-time job helping two days each week as a lab technician in the workshop at Specsavers in Canterbury. She explains: “I have already gained loads of experience in glazing different types of frames with an array of lens types. Work in practice provides me with the knowledge and experience to understand the optical world and how ABDO College plays its part within it.

“Through the optical technicians diploma course I will also gain an understanding of the challenges that distance learning students experience, whilst also working full time. It means I will be able to communicate with students about their studies. In addition, further career opportunities may present themselves due to the qualification gained through the SMC. Who knows – I may even train to be a DO after I qualify as a lab technician.”

Emma has been able to keep her outside interest in horses and regularly competes her horse in events such as cross country and working hunter classes on weekends off. She also enjoys agility events with her Dalmatian Alfie.

More versatile, more involved

ABDO College Technician Sue Rose comments on the value of the WCSM Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians:

“The SMC Diploma course for optical technicians that Emma has enrolled on is considered the gold standard for technicians. Having this qualification myself, I am aware of its importance within the industry and also how much of the work involved is consistent with the ABDO College’s ophthalmic dispensing courses. Achievement of the SMC(Tech) qualification will allow Emma to become more involved with the work of the College, making her a more versatile member of staff. She will also be able to engage at a different level with the students.

Having given thought to how Emma could progress within ABDO College I felt that the sensible route would be within

the optical field. We are fortunate to have a library and fully equipped glazing lab at Godmersham and a plethora of relevantly knowledgeable staff who are on hand to help Emma with any coursework queries.

In addition to the experience Emma can gain at the College she has been sensible in sourcing work at a local opticians for two days work each week within their glazing lab. This will give her both valuable glazing experience and an insight into optics on the high street.

I am very excited for Emma as she is a valuable, eager and enthusiastic member of staff and this opportunity will enable her to progress as a professional.”

WCSM Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians

The WCSM Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians course is run by the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers, the origins of the course go back to the 1960s (since when it has been constantly updated) and that those who achieve the qualification are entitled to put ‘SMC(Tech)’ after their names.

The Diploma is a two-year correspondence course and students, who are assigned a personal tutor, work through a series of papers at their own pace. It is estimated that at least six to eight hours each week is required. One-day revision courses are available for groups of students.

In the first year, students work through a range of units studying: mathematics for optical manufacturing, the eye and the principles of optics, properties of ophthalmic lenses, theory of lens surfacing, spectacle lens materials and the properties of spectacle frames and glazing, spectacle lens treatments and the spectacle industry and standards. For the second year, students select either a surfacing or glazing ‘pathway’ to focus on.

For further information visit www.spectaclemakers.com or contact Tony Parker by email at administrator@spectaclemakers.com or by telephone on 0207 236 8645.

A guide to plan your career pathway



ABDO College specialises in distance and blended learning education for the optical profession. It is the only college in the UK devoted solely to the teaching of the theoretical and practical aspects of ophthalmic dispensing and its related specialist areas.

Offering range of courses through access, foundation degree, diploma, degree, advanced and honours, ABDO College provides quality programmes leading to ABDO examinations and qualifications; thereby offering the opportunity to enhance knowledge and career progression and enabling development for optical practice staff at many levels.

The 2011/12 ABDO College prospectus can be used as a guide to plan your personal career pathway as it contains details of the full range of courses currently available from the College, to obtain a copy of the prospectus please contact DLI at ABDO College on 01227 733 901 or email info@abdocollege.org.uk.

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