

Re:View

Keeping excellence in your sights | June 2023 | Issue 45

A young girl with red hair is peeking over a large, plain brown cardboard box. She is looking directly at the camera with a curious expression. She is wearing a blue denim jacket. The background is a bright yellow surface, possibly a couch or blanket, against a white brick wall.

Dual focus contact lenses
in myopia management

Focus on mental health

Funding the degree dream

Consider a degree to open the doors to a better career



The partnership between ABDO College and Canterbury Christ Church University began in 2007 and this ongoing relationship enables students to study towards a Degree in Ophthalmic Dispensing BSc Hons. However, the majority of ABDO College students continue to choose the Fellowship Diploma pathway.

As many of us are sponsored by our employer, I suspect this is the reason some don't opt for a degree. Our employers spend a large amount of money educating dispensing opticians, which we are very grateful for, but the additional expense of the degree course can seem like we're asking for too much, particularly in today's economic climate when we want to be educated, but also expect pay rises in line with inflation.

However, there are great benefits in obtaining a degree. On the financial side, it can unlock the doors to wider career options and a greater earning potential but, on the personal side, it can improve discipline and build character, increasing your self-satisfaction.

So why not explore the options of funding the additional cost of the degree? Firstly, why not discuss this with your employer? Many may well find the boss is willing to support you as it's not as much as you may think, with the current costs being £2,500 extra over the three years.

ABDO College is also happy for your invoice payment to be split between your employer and yourself for the top up. Depending on circumstances, you can use a variety of payment methods, from Student Finance and PayPal Credit, to BACS transfers or card transactions.

Some students may choose to self-fund and student finance is available to cover the total cost of the degree course fees, which is not an option when studying for the Fellowship Diploma.

With so much to gain, including the personal satisfaction of obtaining a degree in ophthalmic dispensing, it's always worth considering this pathway.

Clive Marchant FBDO

Chair, ABDO College Board of Trustees

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Deanne Gray

It is with sadness that *Re:View* reports the death of Deanne Gray who acted as a receptionist at ABDO College for a number of years. Deanne was the longest serving member of staff at ABDO at the time of her death on 26 January.

Former general secretary of ABDO, Tony Garrett, said: "The sad news about the death of Deanne Gray will be keenly felt throughout the ABDO family. Over the years, Deanne was involved with a number of ABDO activities. She served as a key member of the team producing the ABDO graduation and prizewinning ceremony over the past 14 years and provided administrative support across the Association, attending events such as Optrafair and 100% Optical.

"Although only part-time throughout her employment, Deanne loved being a part of ABDO and turned her organisational skills to whatever she was asked to do. Her enthusiasm was infectious, and she would invariably confront any problem with her 'can do' attitude. Deanne will be missed, and will be remembered, by all."

Deanne was administrative manager at *Dispensing Optics* and was awarded HonFBDO by the Association in 2015. She leaves behind three daughters and seven grandchildren.



Providing a valuable link with Canterbury Christ Church University

The College's head of operational services, Steve Hertz, now has an additional role of academic link tutor, providing a pivot between Canterbury Christ Church University and the College to ensure the successful day-to-day



running of the degree programme.

"The degree programme has many different features within it which require looking after and constant review, so it is important to have a named individual assigned to this," Steve explained.

"I am really enjoying it," he added. "The main thing I liked about being a DO in practice was relationship-building and interaction with my patients. My head of operations role took me away from a lot of these scenarios, so it is great to be able to get to know the degree students better and to have that more personal side to my job come back.

"It is sometimes tricky to balance off the two roles, however, the many years' experience of the degree course in my ops role has been invaluable when

getting to grips with the expectations and requirements of the new position."

As part of the new role, Steve will be completing a Post Graduate Certificate in Academic Practice through the university. He hopes it will be useful for the future when the College looks at the overall design of the degree programme.

"Having already got a degree myself, I am passionate about the difference it can make to students in their roles now, as well as in the future," he emphasised.

"Having DOs able to critique, as well as lead, research will be crucial as we move forward into a more evidence-based optical world. Self-reflection and other more academic skills, such as presenting, planning and reviewing, will be incredibly useful to DOs moving forward and if I can play a small part in promoting and delivering that, I'll be happy," he concluded.

Discussing developments

ABDO College hosted the latest quarterly meeting of its Board of Trustees at Godmersham in April. The function of the Trustees is to oversee the College's teaching activities, finances and new developments to ensure that the College remains at the forefront of ophthalmic dispensing education.

At each meeting, the College principal, chief financial officer and head of operations provide written reports for discussion by the Trustees. Each of the Trustees is FBDO qualified and working in clinical practice. The ABDO president and vice president are also Trustees.



Making College commuting green

As part of the ongoing work towards making Godmersham more sustainable, the College has signed up to the Green Commute Initiative.

The initiative is a Social Enterprise scheme which aims to get commuters out of their cars by supporting members of staff with the finance for bikes. Justin and Paula Hall became the first to trial the initiative at the College.

Justin said: "We are both loving the bikes when we can get out on them. The spring weather was very

changeable but when the weather improved, we managed to get out on them much more."

Additionally, the College's sustainability team is looking at how it can support staff to switch to electric vehicles. The Godmersham Estate team is also putting plans in place to introduce EV charge points to add to its other sustainability initiatives, such as the biomass convertor, a carbon neutral and renewable source of energy that provides heat and hot water at the College.

London calling louder than ever before

The College team was out in force on the stand at 100% Optical which saw a record-breaking 10,657 attendees flock to the UK's largest optical event.

The three-day London show in February showed a 10 per cent year-on-year increase on its previous record attendance. With its strongest exhibitor



Networking proves popular on the College stand at 100% Optical

line-up to date, the show also had an expanded focus on contact lenses and more networking opportunities than ever before.



Steve Hertz answering queries on the stand



College principal, Dr Robert Cubbidge, and the head of operational services, Steve Hertz, by the bookshop on the College stand



Building and bookshop administrator, Justin Hall, and senior courses administrator, Paula Hall, waiting to help show visitors

The College's head of operational services, Steve Hertz, said: "The College stand saw a significant increase in attendance, with many past and prospective students visiting to catch up on all things Godmersham. There was particular interest in the degree programme, with prospective students enquiring about the options to study ophthalmic dispensing to BSc Hons level.

"We also met many employers who are looking to put their staff through further training, with the topics of the courses for optical assistants and DOs looking to progress in contact lenses, being popular discussions."

The show featured more independent and international eyewear designers than ever before, a world-class education programme, catwalk shows, the annual Love Eyewear Awards and a hugely popular celebrity guest appearance from Dame Prue Leith.

College principal, Dr Robert Cubbidge, said: "100% Optical was a great opportunity for us to engage with College sponsors and members of the profession. It was great to see the new innovations in instrumentation, spectacle frames and lenses and to develop new business relationships which will enhance teaching and learning at the College."

The College bookshop featured on the stand, with free postage offered so that customers did not have to carry their purchases around at the tradeshow.

Next year's 100% Optical is on 24-26 February and it will be the 10th anniversary show, featuring a new dedicated 100% Ophthalmology section and education programme.

Adding zest to the Orangery with sponsorship

Leightons Opticians & Hearing Care is the new sponsor of the Orangery at ABDO College. The picturesque Orangery is where students go to eat their lunch and unwind.

On behalf of the College, the principal, Dr Robert Cubbidge, thanked Leightons Opticians & Hearing Care

for providing sponsorship of the area which is popular.

"The Orangery is a great social space where students eat their lunch. They now also have the opportunity to find out about Leightons and can interact with its website to learn about the company and its ethos," he said.

Leightons Opticians & Hearing Care focuses on providing value through personal service using highly professional, qualified staff and by offering the latest technologies. All the company's retail shops are designed for customer comfort and provide an extensive selection of designer frames and sunglasses.



Talking of sustainability in optical manufacturing

Millmead Optical chief executive, James Conway (pictured below) visited the College in March and gave an informative presentation to students entitled, 'Going green. Our sustainability journey.'

Explaining the company's efforts to improve sustainability, James passed around examples of Millmead's sustainable products such as frames and cases.

Millmead is a sponsor of the College and provides educational artwork and imagery. New techniques and product innovations are explained, with the aim of providing more awareness on the manufacturing side of optics.

James said: "The team at ABDO College has always been interested

in the future of optics and it was a pleasure to present the students with some information on how the manufacturing and supply side of the industry is addressing the issue of sustainability. The College plays a key role in developing the future talent of the industry. We have enjoyed supporting it for many years now."



Help support the next generation

There are a number of opportunities to work with ABDO College as a sponsor and to contribute to the education and professional development of the next generation of dispensing opticians and contact lens opticians. If your business would like to discuss partnership opportunities, please email Antonia Chitty at achitty@abdo.org.uk

Combating mental health issues: don't suffer in silence, help is available

Doing a degree provides the greatest professional opportunity but mental health issues can creep up on anyone at any age, however, help is always available to help you achieve your dream qualification. In this case study, we look at how Matthew Farrugia battled depression and serious illness to achieve graduation last year and is now enjoying a successful career at an independent practice.

Matthew has a rare blood disorder called methemoglobinemia, which he has only recently discovered is badly affected by stress. His mental health struggles began when he failed two exams.

"I was very unwell on the day, but I wasn't prepared to accept that as a reason," he explained. "My colleagues and supervisors said that it was a bump in the road and that they knew I was very good at my job, but it fell onto deaf ears and towards the end of year two, I started to find myself depressed."

In year three of the course, a management change at Matthew's previous workplace started affecting his mental health. "Other things were a lack of sleep, worrying and over thinking," he said, revealing that his mental health deteriorated to the point of him even contemplating suicide.

"There was the feeling that I was a fraud, almost like imposter syndrome and one of the biggest things was not spending as much time as I should have with my little boy, yet I felt I was protecting him by not spending time with him as I felt I wasn't the father I should be," he added.

Matthew was studying late at night and dedicated all of his holidays to revision, coursework and exams. "I always kept myself to a high standard and being accountable if I failed or

'As someone who is also neurodiverse, change can sometimes be difficult, but this was negated by the fact it was a new and different opportunity with new people, so I took this role and never looked back.'

didn't understand something. Micro-management at work did not help and I believe this was a further major contribution," he said. However, the situation started to improve when Matthew sought help at the College.

"The tutors were incredible, especially Haydn Dobby, Simon Matthews and Sally Bates," said Matthew. "Haydn knew exactly what I was going through, and Sally always had me looking at how far I had come and how good I am in what I do and to ignore the negative people, while Simon referenced his own exam experiences."

Matthew self-referred through the psychological well-being team in his area and got basic cognitive behavioral therapy. He was on the waiting list for more intense therapy, but following the suicide contemplation in his car, the police who took him home provided a referral which helped expedite matters.

Matthew attended weekly therapy sessions which began to work. "We went at my pace with me being able to speak freely without judgement. I completed various activity sheets based on emotions and developed the understanding on how to interrupt the destructive cycle of my emotions

to provide a different outcome," he said.

Following various influencers on LinkedIn also led Matthew to realise that his employment situation was taking too big a toll on his mental health, so he left.

"I become an unemployed, recently qualified dispensing optician which caused me to spiral more. However, at rock bottom I took control," he highlighted.

Matthew took a pragmatic approach to his career options and decided to locum for a short time. He refreshed his CV and started to network even more through LinkedIn. He found opportunities and went through the

application and interview resulting in two offers of employment, one similar to his previous employer and another completely different.

"As someone who is also neurodiverse, change can sometimes be difficult, but this was negated by the fact it was a new and different opportunity with new people, so I took this role and never looked back.

"Now I am happy and not suicidal. Sometimes I have a bit of a rough day, but nothing in comparison to before

'I have a huge passion for my role and for optics. I would dare say, I have found my calling.'

and I have learned to laugh again," he emphasised.

Matthew is glad that he stuck with the course and graduated. He is now receiving a better salary and the

change of job has been beneficial for his emotional well-being. "I have a huge passion for my role and for optics. I would dare say, I have found my calling," he concluded.



Matthew's lessons from dealing with his challenges are:

- Try to have a glimmer of hope
- Take control of the situation that's impacting your mental health. If it is the job you are in, change it
- Don't be afraid to talk to someone you trust
- Seek professional advice or help

Matthew's advice to other students having similar problems is:

- Don't blame yourself and don't give up
- Confide in other students that you trust as they may have a coping strategy you haven't yet discovered
- Look at reducing your workload and/or take a break
- Speak to your college lecturers, your distant learning tutor and/or your supervisor.

As well as support at the College, outside help is on offer for those affected by mental health issues.

NHS mental health services such as therapy or counselling can be accessed online through www.nhs.uk or by calling NHS 111. The charity Mind offers mental health advice for students at www.mind.org.uk and the Samaritans charity runs a 24/7 helpline on 116 123. Don't suffer in silence and keep your dream of achieving a degree alive.

Dual-focus contact lenses in myopia management in

By Luke Ingold BSc(Hons) FBDO

INTRODUCTION

Myopia is a common refractive error caused by abnormal axial elongation. Various methods can be used to correct it but cannot rescue the underlying defect (Wu *et al* 2016). Its prevalence is rapidly increasing, projected to affect up to 50 per cent of the world population by 2050 (Resnikoff *et al* 2019).

In response, various myopia control measures have arisen, one being dual-focus contact lens (DFCL) wear. This is a lens design with four zones. Two treatment zones create myopic defocus, focusing light ahead of the retina, aiming to slow axial elongation, and two correction zones correct myopia in all directions of gaze (Singh *et al* 2022).

The aim of this research is to determine the efficacy of DFCLs in myopia management in children and young adults, the age range in which most refractive changes occur, hence when myopia control treatment would typically be employed (Ramamurthy D *et al* 2015). Many studies assume that DFCL wear carries high efficacy in myopia management and this review aims to accept, or reject, this hypothesis.

METHOD

Mind-mapping was used as an organised approach to structuring the literature search, enabling the generation of further ideas from an initial topic and identification of keywords (Aveyard 2018). Google Scholar was used, a powerful open-access database providing a range of journal articles (Haddaway *et al* 2015). The search terms used were documented in a search diary, used to evolve the focus of a search strategy (Ridley 2012).

An inclusion/exclusion criteria was employed to determine the articles that would be used, omitting those irrelevant to the research question (Greetham 2021). Four articles were selected and analysed using a critical framework, proposed by Caldwell *et al* (2011), due to its tailoring to qualitative health research. The framework was used to assess the quality of sources by identifying strengths and weaknesses, forming understanding towards the research question (Aveyard 2018).

FINDINGS

The four studies aimed to assess some effects of DFCLs on children and young adults with varying degrees of myopia. All assessed these effects by comparing DFCLs to single vision contact lenses and used MiSight concentric lenses as the DFCL design.

Three studies used a relatively small sample. Those conducted by Gifford *et al* (2021), Redondo *et al* (2022) and Singh *et al* (2022) used 20, 23 and 10 subjects respectively. Chamberlain *et al* (2022) used a far greater sample, with 109 subjects enrolled and 85 completed the study. Three studies utilised subjects aged 18-25 years, describing participants as 'young adults.' Chamberlain *et al* (2019) recruited children aged eight to 12 years, the oldest being 18 years by its conclusion. A range of refractions were used, from -0.50D to -6.50D, specified with low astigmatism. Uncorrected astigmatism can cause accommodation fluctuations and blurred retinal images, potentially increasing the axial growth rate (Gifford *et al* 2021).

Part one of the Chamberlain *et al* (2019) six-year study compared myopia progression in children wearing DFCLs against a control group and found that DFCLs reduced progression by an average of 0.73D, axial growth by 0.32mm, representing an overall myopia control effect of 59 per cent and 52 per cent respectively.

Part two (Chamberlain *et al* 2022) assessed progression in the control group when switched to DFCLs. Significant reduction was found, averaging from -1.24D in part one, to -0.29D during part two. Furthermore, a 71 per cent slowing of axial growth was observed. The test group wearing DFCLs for the full six years showed an average progression of -0.45D, and axial growth of just 0.22mm, compared with 0.30mm in part one. A total of 23 per cent of eyes showed no clinically meaningful change in spherical-equivalent refractive error.

Redondo *et al* (2022) assessed changes in accommodation and behavioural performance with DFCLs. A double-blinded test was used to compare accommodative responses wearing either DFCLs or control lenses during a psychomotor vigilance task. DFCLs led to greater lag and variability of accommodation,

with an average increased lag of 0.58D.

Variability and reaction time increased with time-on-task. Lag did not change significantly.

Gifford *et al* (2021) performed a similar study, comparing accommodative responses in DFCLs and control lenses measured after a 10-minute adaptation period at various distances. The results showed small average lags of accommodation of around 0.20D for both dual-focus and single vision lenses. However, DFCLs produced greater refraction instabilities than other designs, of around 0.20D.

Singh *et al* (2022) screened the retinal defocus of participants with 'good' and 'poor' accommodative responses, with target vergences between -2.00D to -5.00D. Those in a 'good' accommodating group experienced between +0.10D to +0.50D hyperopic defocus with single vision lenses, replaced by myopic defocus of -1.30 to -1.14 with DFCLs. Those in the 'poor' group experienced significantly higher hyperopic defocus with single vision lenses, from +0.92D to +1.87D, and lower myopic defocus in DFCLs, from -0.85D to -0.30D.

DISCUSSIONS

Each article was analysed using the Caldwell *et al* (2011) proposed critical framework to assess validity.

Gifford *et al* (2021), Redondo *et al* (2022) and Singh *et al* (2022) used relatively small samples. Fink (2013) expressed the importance of sample sizes and explained that a small sample risked the exclusion of necessary participants to observe an effect.

Statistical methods can be used to identify samples large enough to detect effects and be representative of a population (Fink 2013). Redondo *et al* (2022) considered and increased this, but Gifford *et al* (2021) and Singh *et al* (2022) provided no justification for their sample sizes. Marshall *et al* (2013) criticised this and explained that justification was evidence that the sample was sufficient to address the research question and its omission questioned the conclusions drawn.

Distinct designs are utilised. Chamberlain *et al* (2019) followed a randomised controlled trial and achieved reduced bias and enhanced accuracy in effectiveness research (Bothwell *et al* 2016).

children and young adults



A case-crossover design was used by three studies, with participants compared against themselves, reducing data exchangeability issues (Mittleman and Mostofsky 2014).

The Redondo *et al* (2022) and Chamberlain *et al* (2019) studies were double-blinded, reducing demand characteristics effects (Flanagan *et al* 2015). They, along with the Gifford *et al* (2021) study, were randomised, improving validity (Hariton and Locascio 2018). Singh *et al* (2022) used a selective sample, only assessing participants at extremes of the desired parameters. This ensures an effect is observed, but leads to more biased research, with less representative results (Faudemer *et al* 2015).

Redondo *et al* (2022) and Gifford *et al* (2021) assessed the effects of DFCLs after a short adaptation time. Singh *et al* (2022) did not state an adaptation period. Fernandes *et al* (2013) demonstrated that multiple contact lens wear deficits improved with extended wear. Chamberlain *et al* (2019) supported this, with no reports of visual acuity lower than that of the best corrected over the first three years. Multifocal contact lenses showed deficits such as visual acuity, comfort and quality of vision at initial fitting but these improved after an adaptation period (Kang *et al* 2017).

Redondo *et al* (2022) and Gifford *et al* (2021) acknowledged and accounted for this. No evidence suggested these effects would not improve with extended wear. Results of other studies contradicted these findings. Momeni-Moghaddam *et al* (2014) suggested that a contact lens presented its final fitting characteristics after a 20-minute adaptation, and effects should be measured after this time. However, this study did not account for long-term effects. Fedtke *et al* (2016) assessed the effects of various designs after eight days of adaptation and found no significant improvement in visual performance in all but one design.

Singh *et al* (2022) investigated defocus caused by DFCLs specifically and showed that the defocus induced by the treatment zones was sufficient to induce myopic defocus. Only those with high hyperopic defocus still experienced this with DFCLs, although significantly reduced.

Singh *et al* (2022) also concluded that DFCLs had no effect on accommodative behaviour, supported by Gifford *et al* (2021). Redondo *et al* (2022) challenged this, demonstrating increased lag and variability of accommodation when performing near-tasks, and stated that DFCLs altered accommodative function, although acknowledged that variables may improve after an adaptation period.

Chamberlain *et al* (2022) demonstrated significant reduction in myopia progression and axial growth, compared with a control group in the first part of the study, supported by results of similar methods by Anstice and Phillips (2011) and Turnbull *et al* (2016). The progression rates in part two of the Chamberlain *et al* (2022) study showed no difference between the treatment groups, indicating that prior treatment has no effect on DFCL treatment efficacy. This contradicted assumptions that extended treatment would show diminishing efficacy and demonstrated that effective myopia control treatment can be commenced at any age.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this research was to determine the efficacy of DFCLs in myopia management with mixed results found. Each study provided a breadth of information, presenting unbiased

findings that provided clear conclusions in isolation. When compared, however, conclusions become difficult to determine.

Drastically unbalanced samples were used across the studies, with the large disparity making comparison between the results difficult and less reliable. Chamberlain *et al* (2022) showed significant drop off in participants, however, each of these were acknowledged in the article. The other studies used small sample sizes, harming their validity as they were less representative of the population.

Despite this, each study utilised a strong method and provided reliable results with in-depth discussions regarding their significance. Chamberlain *et al* (2022), supported by multiple studies, concluded that DFCLs showed high efficacy for myopia management in children, significantly reducing myopia progression, while providing suitable visual performance.

Conclusions regarding efficacy of DFCL wear in young adults were conflicted. Singh *et al* (2022) concluded that DFCLs showed high efficacy in myopia management in young adults, with no significant effect on accommodative function. Redondo *et al* (2022) and Gifford *et al* (2021) stated that efficacy was limited, suggesting this was due to effects on accommodative function. All three studies demonstrated that individual differences were significant.

Each study, along with a majority of studies investigating the effects of DFCL wear on young adults, assessed these effects after a short adaptation period. Before conclusions regarding the efficacy of DFCL wear on myopic adults can be drawn, further study is necessary into long-term effects.

Furthermore, no other study was found comparative to that of Chamberlain *et al* (2022), utilising treatment-only and placebo-treatment groups changing at the study's midway point. The study stated that the efficacy of DFCL wear in children was not dependent on prior wear, however, further research is necessary before conclusions can be drawn.

For article references, visit
<https://abdocollege.org.uk/references/>

That's what friends are for

In their final year, ABDO College degree students are all required to complete a dissertation which focuses on a research question of their choice. In this feature you can read about Luke Ingold and his research paper, 'The efficacy of dual-focus contact lenses in myopia management in children and young adults.'



Luke Ingold

Friends are important to Luke. It was the suggestion from a friend working at Specsavers that first put him on the path to his career in optics and he credits his support network with helping him get through his course.

When Luke was doing his GCSEs and wanted a weekend job, his friend suggested Specsavers so Luke handed in his CV and got a phone call for an interview the same day. "Being my first job interview at 15-years-old, it went about as well as you'd expect, but I got the job," he reflected.

Luke worked as an optical assistant, mainly on pre-screening, over the

weekends throughout his GCSEs and A-levels. When it came to considering further education, he spoke to some of the other dispensing opticians in the practice about potential career pathways.

"Studying the Ophthalmic Dispensing course at ABDO College meant I could continue working and study from home, which suited me perfectly," he explained. "I was nervous going in on the first day and didn't really know what to expect but after meeting the other students and lecturers, I was quickly put at ease."

Like-minded

Luke's favourite part of the course was the block releases which he enjoyed for, "getting the opportunity for a couple of weeks away, getting ahead on work and meeting a group of likeminded people".

A least favourite part of the course was the build-up to exams. "Especially in the final year, there were a lot stacked up in a short span of time, but that made each milestone feel all the more relieving. Missing the block releases in the second year due to the Covid-19 pandemic was also a big disappointment," he added.

"The essays were also a struggle, particularly those that demanded a

more creative approach, as that is not one of my strengths, but time and effort got me through each one."

When Luke was considering topics for his research project his practice did not offer myopia management and he knew very little about it so he was interested in learning more.

Luke began by looking into various methods of myopia management, as well as the various causes of myopia progression. "The MiSight contact lenses appealed to me due to how current the research was," he highlighted.

The conclusion of the research was that dual-focus contact lens wear showed high efficacy in the treatment of myopia in children but with more mixed results in young adults.

Luke is now a qualified dispensing optician at Specsavers in Wellingborough, North Northamptonshire. "I enjoy being able to use the knowledge I have gained from doing this course to impact people in a real way, rather than just selling to them, particularly in the field of low vision," he said.

Looking to the future, Luke wants to progress further, potentially through an optometrist conversion course.

Luke's advice to students following in his footsteps is to make full use of the block releases, especially as there are only a few of them and they go by very quickly. "One of the things that got me through the course was the support network I had in place. Whether it's other students from the block releases, a supportive supervisor, or colleagues that know their stuff. Having that was invaluable," he concluded.

Funding and achieving the degree dream

The career journey for Emelye Castledine-Pearce began when she was still at school and joined Colin Lee Opticians at its Rugeley practice in Staffordshire for Saturday work.

Emelye moved on in June 2014 when leaving school, partly because the practice did not have a full-time position but also to consider other career pathways.

"In August 2017 we had a vacancy for an optical assistant which Emelye applied for and she started work that September," said ABDO College chair, Clive Marchant, the owner who opened the Rugeley practice in 1981.

"We agreed that Emelye needed to receive formal training, which we do with all our new optical assistants, hence she was enrolled onto ABDO College's Optical Assistant NVQ level two course. Having successfully completed level two, Emelye was eager to progress so we agreed to fund level three, which she completed and passed late 2020, early 2021, as all was delayed due to Covid.

"This was going to be the end of Emelye's study, however, with encouragement from us, her partner and her parents, she decided to aim for FBDO."

The practice was delighted that Emelye was taking the next step and agreed to pay the course and exam fees for the FBDO Fellowship Diploma.

"I never had a passion I wanted to follow when I left school, so when I ended up working in optics and fell in love with my job, I realised it was my time to get my degree in something I was really passionate about and



enjoyed," said Emelye.

Following some research, Emelye discovered that she was eligible for a student loan which would cover the difference between the cost of the diploma and the BSc Hons course. "This has worked incredibly well," she emphasised. "My employer pays for the

diploma part for me, as they want me to progress onto becoming a dispensing optician but as I am already a valued member of staff, it doesn't really matter to them if I get a degree or not. This was a personal choice and allowed me to pay the additional cost to also get my degree and progress my career.

"The additional amount I decided to have via student finance which enabled me to only borrow the specific amount I needed to upgrade what my employer was contributing to pay for the degree. I think by the time I've finished, my total loan will be less than £6,000," Emelye explained.

Clive highlighted: "Emelye is now in her second year and the funding system has been incredibly simple each year. ABDO College invoices the practice for the diploma fees and Emelye for the balance. Nothing could be simpler."

Emelye concluded: "I see a benefit of the degree as a personal achievement. Many students don't end up getting a job related to the degree they have studied and worked so hard for, whereas with mine, I will be able to use the knowledge gained daily."

A degree delivers opportunity

Earning a degree is a significant achievement that will have lifelong benefits. It's an opportunity to:

- **Develop knowledge and expertise in a subject you enjoy**
- **Improve your career prospects and potentially earn more money**
- **Pursue a career that you are passionate about.**

Studying for a degree with ABDO College also smooths the path to doing a research degree. For more information, visit www.abdocollege.org.uk/courses

A close-up photograph of a young woman with short, dark brown hair, looking down at a pair of red-rimmed glasses she is holding with both hands. She is wearing a white lab coat. The background is softly blurred, showing what appears to be a clinical or laboratory setting with shelves and equipment.

Study for a degree with ABDO College

If you want to further your career in optics and learn while you earn, why not study for a degree with ABDO College?

You can:

- Study online and learn new skills to use in practice
- Attend block release, experience College life and make great friendships
- Learn from dedicated and experienced academic staff
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Applications close: **30 July 2023**