

Re:View

Keeping excellence in your sights | January 2024 | Issue 46



Art with a message

Sustainability success

New principal and lecturers

Are we seeing the death of the High Street or a rebirth?



The traditional High Street is changing as consumers move towards online shopping for choice, price and convenience. However, the High Street is far from dead, but is transforming to be the place we work, dine, live, exercise and socialise, as well as use health and well-being services. Spending habits and the demand for service has changed with a shift from spending on stuff to spending on self.

Optical practices are well placed to be part of the High Street rebirth, providing eye examinations and the supply of spectacles, sunspecs, contact lenses, low vision appliances, eyecare health products and accessories. However, the products we dispense and sell are readily available online, hence our product knowledge, advice and selection skills must be exceptional if we are to differentiate ourselves from the online sales.

"Have a look round and let me know when you have found something you like" is an unacceptable process as is only taking one measurement, 'the PD' with rule and finger. Dispensing is a service, and our patients must recognise and appreciate that service. If not, our products sales will be easy prey to internet providers.

This exceptional service can only be provided by well-trained staff, and this includes support staff. ABDO College provides the ideal first step in training with a blended learning Optical Assistant Course, plus a senior Optical Assistant Course for the more experienced members of the practice team, or those who want to progress. The courses also provide the stepping stones for progression to dispensing optician and beyond.

ABDO College provides expert training for optical assistants and dispensing opticians, along with contact lens qualifications. Don't miss out on this revolution, start training and upskilling the whole practice team, optical assistants, DOs, CLOs and optometrists. For more information, visit www.abdocollege.org.uk

Clive Marchant FBDO
Chair of trustees

Offering expert FQE advice

ABDO is holding a two-day revision event for student DOs next month. Now in its ninth year, the event aims to help students revise with the support of expert tuition from ABDO practical examiners.

The FQE revision event is for final-year students and is being held for the first time at the ABDO National Resource Centre in Birmingham on 13–14 February. The event costs £80 and students will receive two days of FQE revision, PQP guidance and Q&A sessions, with lunch each day and refreshment breaks. The event is kindly sponsored by Stepper.



ABDO's head of professional qualifications and education, Miranda Richardson, said: "Using a separate training kit and based in our own venue, we can help candidates prepare for the requirements of the FQE's through practical skills, revision lectures and open discussions.

"With expert advice and guidance from current ABDO examiners, candidates will have the opportunity to review their own work and techniques in each of the FQE sections, helping to better understand the content and format."

The event is now sold out but students can join a waiting list at www.abdo.org.uk/events/fqe-student-revision-event/

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Be inspired in your career choice



New principal takes up the reins at the College

ABDO College has a new principal, Nina McDermott, who joined the College for two days per week in late November and became full-time from this month.

Nina is a higher education consultant and her most recent role was as executive director of the School of Professional and Continuing Education at King's College London, where she successfully led the design, development and set up of the cross-university school. This brought together a range of educational offerings into one school, enabling King's to expand its educational reach and deliver that education in a more integrated and effective way.

Nina had overall responsibility for over 11,000 students and 400 staff. She also sat on the University Executive and Academic Board.

Nina joins the College at a time when it is adapting to offer the new

apprenticeship in dispensing optics alongside its current range of courses.

Nina brings to the role substantial senior leadership experience and a strong track record in constructive stakeholder engagement. She has previously worked and taught at the University of Salford, University of Manchester, London School of Economics and Political Science and the University of East London.

ABDO College's chair of trustees, Clive Marchant, said: "I'm delighted with Nina's appointment and confident that, with Nina's experience and expertise, she can lead the College team through the exciting development of delivering the FBDO diploma as an apprenticeship."

Nina said: "It is evident that ABDO College is a very special place, with an outstanding reputation in ophthalmic dispensing. I feel privileged to support the College, staff and students in the next stage of development and I look forward to taking on this role at such an exciting time."

The previous principal, Dr Robert Cubbidge, moved on from the role after two years in October to focus on optometry and his academic interests.



Nina McDermott

OA Course application closing date is looming

Practice staff interested in applying for the College's Optical Assistant Course are reminded that the closing date for applications is 21 January, with the course starting on 30 January.

The Optical Assistant Course has been created for all support staff working in optics and is designed as an introduction to formal learning to help them progress in their career and educational pathway.

Successful completion of the Optical Assistant Course will allow the learner direct entry into year one

of the FBDO Diploma without the need for prerequisite GCSEs or A-levels while studying subjects directly applicable to everyday practice.

Students on the course benefit from a workshop which demonstrates the types of optical screening equipment in practice and how to carry out basic repairs and adjustments.

For more information, visit www.abdocollege.org.uk courses or call the College's courses team on 01227 738829, option 1.

Putting the focus on education and training at 100% Optical

Information on all of the College's courses and training on offer will be shared by staff at 100% Optical at ExCeL London next month.

The 10th year anniversary show from 24–26 February is promising a reinvented visitor experience, with over



The College stand at the last 100% Optical 250 companies exhibiting, some new and many returning with bigger and better stands.

Over 10,000 UK and international visitors attended 100% Optical last year. At the 2024 show College staff will be on stand B351 to answer any training queries, and to help practice owners to plan training for their practice team.

Head of the College's operational services, Steve Hertz, said: "It was lovely to meet so many people at last year's exhibition. We had a busy weekend and look forward to the same again this year. I would actively encourage anyone, from students and supervisors to

employers and managers, to pop over for a chat to see if there is anything we can help them with."

Details will be available on the College's courses, including the FBDO ophthalmic dispensing programme and the popular contact lens courses.

Information will also be available on the College's revision courses, as well as the two courses to help optical assistants develop their practice skills.

The ABDO College Bookshop will be on the stand for competitively priced dispensing, optometry, ophthalmology and contact lens books plus equipment such as rules, gauges and charts. Free postage is offered at the event so that customers do not have to carry their purchases around at the tradeshow.

Information on the courses and the items available from the College Bookshop can be found at www.abdocollege.org.uk

Making testing time easier

New near vision test cards have been produced by ABDO and are now available from the ABDO College Bookshop. The cards are to help with the assessment of near vision correction.

Building and bookshop administrator, Justin Hall, explained: "Over recent months we have been asked for near vision test cards that flow in the other direction, so when the opportunity arose for us to produce more stock, we decided to take note and have two different versions printed.

"They are now available in N24 down the page to N4.5, and from N4.5 down the page to N24. These can be ordered online at www.abdocollege.org.uk/bookshop, priced at £10 for a pack of five A5, wipe clean cards."



Contact Lens Certificate Course numbers increase

The contact lens certificate course has proved so popular that it has expanded, with an additional intake starting this month.

Head of operational services, Steve Hertz, said: "Due to overwhelming demand, ABDO College was

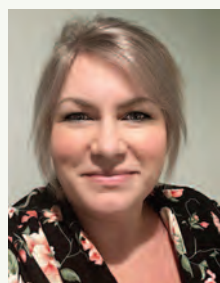
pleased to announce an additional intake on its contact lens certificate programme, beginning in January 2024.

"All information on block dates and course structure is contained within the course page on our website."

Former students return to the College as lecturers

Two new lecturers, Charlotte Carroll and Emily Lawrence, who are former students of the College, have joined the teaching staff at Godmersham.

Charlotte Carroll teaches dispensing students through years one to three and is also teaching contact lens students.



Charlotte is a contact lens optician (CLO) with a minor eye conditions service (MECS) qualification and 26 years of optical experience. She

started as a 'Saturday girl,' with Boots Opticians, until eventually managing her own store at 17 while continuing with her A-levels.

She moved to Dolland & Aitchison a year later, working as an assistant manager of a large flagship store, and it was there she decided to undertake the dispensing course at the College.

"I fell in love with the place," she revealed. "There is a real romanticism about Godmersham, driving through the beautiful Kent countryside, turning into the College and making your way over a little stream via a stone hump-back bridge, and being surrounded by sheep and horses."

Once Charlotte qualified as a dispensing optician (DO) in 2005, she undertook various management roles but wanted to explore more clinical options. In 2006 she joined Specsavers and again studied at the College to become a contact lens optician, qualifying in 2009.

Charlotte wrote some of the contact lens content that was delivered to stores

across the UK. She studied through the Specsavers training pathway and qualified with an Institute of Leadership and Management certification in accelerated learning. She was also in the first cohort for the new contact lens optician MECS qualification.

Charlotte was offered the opportunity to teach some of the practical sessions on the contact lens blocks at the College which gave her the flexibility to work as an 'optician on set', working on film sets fitting contact lenses.

"I want students to love the profession as much as I do," Charlotte emphasised. "I want them to know the possibilities that are out there."

Emily Lawrence is a new lecturer for both the FBDO dispensing diploma and the contact lens certificate.

"I always joked as a student that I would come back to the College and work one day," she said. "I was inspired by the quality of the teaching and support that I received during my time

at the College, plus the beautiful setting."

Emily began her optical career in 2014 at the age of 20 and started the dispensing diploma a year later. Qualifying in August 2018, she then went on to practise as a full-time dispensing optician and enrolled for



the Contact Lens Certificate in 2019.

Emily had six months of intense working and studying until Covid hit which took her out of practice

for four months, but only intensified her ambition to get qualified. She achieved her aim in September 2021 and was a practising DO/CLO for two years.

"I'm a very hands-on and practical learner due to my time in practice and feel some of the tips, tricks and, sometimes horror stories, I have faced will be entertaining but also educational," she said.

Annual report highlights success

The College has published its annual report for 2022 which highlights the College's social media initiatives, the success of its *Re:View* magazine and its promotional video tour. It reveals that the Optical Assistant Course proved popular again in 2022 with another record intake and that the Contact Lens Certificate Course was revamped.

The College's chair of trustees, Clive Marchant, said: "It is very encouraging to see student numbers returning to pre-pandemic levels, demonstrating the continued demand for dispensing and contact lens opticians. Those embarking on a career in optics will have a wonderful experience at ABDO College."

The report is at www.abdocollege.org.uk/about/annual-report/ **January 2024**

College is flush with success at carbon neutrality

ABDO College is celebrating after achieving carbon neutrality for the second year in a row, along with a significant reduction in emissions in a number of areas.

To achieve the Publicly Available Specification (PAS) 2060 Carbon Neutrality Standard and Certification, College staff provided information on its activities for 2022, which were then analysed to calculate emissions of greenhouse gases. These included water supply, the fuels burned, the electricity purchased and the waste generated, as well as business travel, employees' commutes and working-from-home emissions.

ABDO College sustainability champion, Karen Johnston, explained: "The College team and students have collaborated to decrease electricity, gas and water consumption and all waste is now recycled. Alongside this, there is now a positive desire from all staff and students to make sustainable choices every day, from swapping to one hundred per cent recycled paper and using technology over printing, to refurbishing optical equipment and office furniture.

"The awareness of the staff and what they can each contribute to carbon neutrality is continually growing, which is an amazing achievement."

Head of operational services, Steve Hertz, added: "To achieve this significant milestone for the second year in a row is enormously pleasing. The College staff have been working extremely hard on reducing our carbon footprint across all

departments and processes, so to see those efforts pay off again is fantastic."

Steve concluded: "We are constantly reviewing and improving our teaching and delivery methods, with sustainability being a key principle in this work. We



look forward to continuing this vital project for many years to come."

The College's emissions have been offset using the Larimar Wind Farm Project for the construction and operation of two wind farms in the Dominican Republic. The College has also made the Electric Vehicle Salary

Sacrifice and Cycle to Work schemes available to staff.

The mission, however, is continuous and the latest initiative involved choosing a new toilet paper now being used at Godmersham.

"One million trees are felled each day just for toilet paper so to continue with our drive to be a more responsible and sustainable organisation, we have started using a fantastic, relatively new product, from a company called Bazoo, which produces luxurious soft white toilet rolls using sustainably grown bamboo," explained building and bookshop administrator, Justin Hall. "This means no trees need to be felled to produce the paper pulp, just to be flushed away.

"Bazoo also doesn't use harmful chemicals or bleach in the process, unlike more well-known brands, so it's much friendlier to the environment too. In addition, for each order of toilet rolls we buy, the company has partnered with the Rainforest Trust UK and they pledge to protect endangered eco-systems that range from right here on British coastlines to all around the world. To top this off, the packing is one hundred per cent plastic-free, so it's win, win."

The Climate, Community and Biodiversity Standards identify projects that simultaneously address climate change, support local communities and smallholders, and conserve biodiversity.

'No trees need to be felled.'

Artwork turns the optical spotlight on to reusing discarded lens waste

A new sculpture was unveiled at ABDO College in November to highlight the issue of sustainability. Designer Yair Neuman created the sculpture of a child from discarded demo lenses and the waste from the production of optical lenses in Millmead Optical Group's Liverpool factory.

Millmead chief executive officer, James Conway, said: "I am excited and proud to unveil this statue which highlights the need to find more sustainable uses for our waste products. My hope is that this beautiful artwork, made from discarded demo lenses and lens swarf, will get people talking about the issues

of sustainability in the industry that we all love."

Designer Yair Neuman said at the unveiling in the common room: "It's nice to see the statue in such a relevant place. I think it has arrived home as the College is the core of eyewear education in the country."



Comparing graft survival rates of penetrating keratoplasty and endothelial keratoplasty over the last 20 years, carried

By Matilda Oldham BSc(Hons) FBDO

INTRODUCTION

It is well-documented that disease of the cornea is a leading cause of blindness worldwide (Liu, Wong, Walkden 2022). Solid organ transplantation of a healthy donor cornea can be used to manage corneal diseases (Coco, Romano 2022), although due to the indisputably complex nature of keratoplasty procedures, graft survival can vary (College of Optometrists 2022). Over the last decade, there appears to have been a paradigm shift in the UK towards endothelial keratoplasty (EK) from penetrating keratoplasty (PK) (Borrioni *et al* 2021), (NHS 2022).

This study focuses on the survival rates of two of the most performed graft types in the UK: PK and Descemet's stripping endothelial keratoplasty/Descemet's stripping (automated) endothelial keratoplasty (DSEK/DSAEK) (Liu, Wong, Walkden 2022), (NHS 2022).

METHOD

To cultivate the initial topic area and generate ideas, brainstorming between academic peers commenced, encouraging innovative thinking (Mohammed, Al Noori 2020). A mind map was constructed, promoting critical thinking in a digestible form (Rezapour-Nasrabad 2019), while generating keywords and topics (Kalyanasundaram *et al* 2017), which were subsequently applied, or disregarded, when searching. The search diary reflects the breadth and depth of research, documenting databases, synonyms, keywords/phrases and 'hits' (Andreasen, Reinholt 2019).

Academic literature was sourced using online search engines (Google Scholar, PubMed, Canterbury Christ Church Library Search) and databases (ScienceDirect, MEDLINE), incorporating filters, Boolean operators and an inclusion/exclusion criterion to help evade irrelevant literature (Connelly 2020). Caution was taken using the 'AND' 'NOT' operator to avoid inadvertently excluding literature attributable to double negatives (Foo *et al* 2021). Google Scholar was the primary search engine exhausted due to convenience, although perhaps not an astute decision, attributable to limited Boolean search functionality and algorithmic concerns (Gusenbauer, Haddaway 2020).



Snowball sampling was also implemented, although retrospectively, this induced publication bias since only older articles were obtained. Wohlin *et al* (2022) suggest alternating between backward and forward snowballing to evade bias.

Due to identifying mixed method data collection, Letts *et al* (2007) and targeted aspects of the Law *et al* (1998) critical frameworks were employed tandemly. Critical reviewing supports evidence-based practice (Bowling Ebrahim 2005), and it is also important among the wider sphere of healthcare since poor critical appraisal could result in inaccurate conclusions, yielding concern and controversy (Aveyard 2019).

FINDINGS

The following studies were reviewed, Figueiredo *et al* (2015), Woo *et al* (2019) and Wai *et al* (2023). Figueiredo *et al* (2015) investigated the incidence and outcome of cornea transplant rejection following EK and PK over a six-year study (2005–2011). It is a multicentre cohort study of patients registered on the UK Transplant Registry (UKTR), with either Fuchs endothelial dystrophy (FED) or pseudophakic bullous keratoplasty (PBK).

A total of 3,486 corneal transplants were undertaken, 1,961 PK and 1,525 EK. Ultimately, Figueiredo *et al* (2015) found no significant difference in rejection-free survival between

EK and PK for FED or PBK. P-values > 0.05 supported this, resulting in accepting the null hypothesis (Amrhein, Greenland 2022).

Woo *et al* (2019) compared the long-term graft survival outcomes and complications of patients who underwent DMEK, DSAEK and PK for FED or PBK, over a 26-year study (1991–2017). Patients were followed up to five years. It is a retrospective cohort study derived from the Singapore Corneal Transplant Registry and performed at the Singapore National Eye Centre by a controlled selection of eight surgeons and 30 fellows.

A total of 828 corneal transplants were undertaken, 405 PK and 423 EK. Comparatively, Woo *et al* (2019) found, besides DMEK, DSAEK has the best overall cumulative graft survival (78.5 per cent) compared to PK (54.6 per cent). P-values respectively indicated statistical significance, whereby the null-hypothesis was subsequently rejected (Andrade 2019).

Finally, the Wai *et al* retrospective cohort study (2023) compared the two-year graft survival and outcomes of DSEK (26 participants) and PK (32 participants) for the treatment of PBK, over a four-year period (2015–2019). Participants were extracted from the corneal transplant logbook recorded in the Ophthalmology Department of Kuala Lumpur Hospital, Malaysia. Participants were transplant-virgin and procedures were performed within Kuala Lumpur Hospital by one of three corneal consultants and three fellows.

Ultimately, the study found that graft survival for DSEK and PK respectively was 80.8 per cent and 75 per cent (p=0.765), with DSEK marginally surviving longer than PK. Cumulative graft survival showed no statistical significance between DSEK and PK (DSEK 73.1 per cent and PK 53.1 per cent, p-value=0.119) and therefore the null hypothesis was accepted.

DISCUSSIONS

This critical comparison aims to determine whether one surgical graft method appears more successful than the other. Letts *et al* (2007) and aspects of the Law *et al* (1998) critical frameworks are implemented for critical appraisal and academic debate, supporting the process of evidence-based practice, therefore such findings contribute towards best

sty and Descemet's stripping (automated) out on subjects aged 60 to 80

practice, based on the best available evidence (Bowling, Ebrahim 2005).

Each study was a retrospective cohort study, an appropriate design for clinical research when there is evidence suggesting an association between exposure of an independent variable and outcome, and time and development of the outcome (Wang, Kattan 2020). Although time-efficient and cost-effective, retrospective studies rely on data collected in the past, obtained using a database extracted from electronic medical records (Wang, Kattan 2020). Data collection was therefore outside of the researchers' control, with all studies employing outside registries and/or hospitals to record data. It is therefore uncertain whether data collection was accurate, or consistent, resulting in a source of information bias (Wang, Kattan 2020).

A limitation to cohort study designs, acknowledged by Woo *et al* (2019), is the non-randomised nature, increasing the likelihood of generating biased results, prohibiting application to clinical practice (Cook 2009). However, where equipoise exists, literature suggests randomised clinical trials (RCTs) have a more limited role in assessing surgical techniques (Cook 2009), with some researchers believing that blinding of patients and surgeons is not feasible from an ethical and moral point of view (Ma *et al* 2020).

Only Woo *et al* (2019) acknowledge that their findings were in concordance with those of a recent RCT, giving the study confirmability. The Woo *et al* (2019) and Wai *et al* (2023) studies are limited by racial preponderance towards Southeast Asian ethnicities (Chinese, Malay, Indian), resulting in non-transferrable results (Clark *et al* 2019). Nevertheless, such ethnicities were strategically chosen by Woo *et al* (2019) as a result of a lack of diversity. It can be argued, therefore, that this study is an attempt to represent already under-represented racial and ethnic minorities.

Woo *et al* (2019) and Wai *et al* (2023) obtain comparatively smaller sample sizes than Figueiredo *et al* (2015), limiting transferability, inducing bias and unreliable results (de Souza *et al* 2023). The Figueiredo *et al* (2015) study is the only multicentre study which may explain why a large sample size was achieved (Jo

2020). There are concerns associated with multicentre cohort studies, given that patients are subject to different physicians of varying titles and experience (Jo 2020). Without this variable being controlled, it is not possible to demonstrate that the physicians did not, to any extent, influence graft survival, leading to a biased estimate of risk (Bowling, Ebrahim 2005). Both the Woo *et al* (2019) and Wai *et al* (2023) studies limit the physicians, making these results comparatively more reproducible and less biased.

All studies acknowledge short follow-up durations as a limitation, although Woo *et al* (2010) appear to have the longest follow-up period with most patients reaching between the one and three-year follow-up. A limited follow-up to two years would be expected to capture first rejection episodes in almost all grafts (Gurnani *et al* 2023), however, graft failure can occur up to 10 years (College of Optometrists 2023) and 20 years post-transplant (Gurnani *et al* 2023).

All findings were consistent with, and reflective of, the data collected. Survival rates were measured on a time-to-event basis, thus the Kaplan-Meier survival analysis and Cox Regression method are used, estimating survival and risk ratio (Rich *et al* 2010).

This data presentation is important within a wider sphere of conversation, since it can reflect how procedures may influence quality of life (Dudley, Wickham, Coombs 2016). All survival curves depict that, after around 12 months, overall, there is less cumulative graft rejection for EK/DSAEK than PK. To support statistical analysis, statistical significance was assessed using p-values, removing the 'best guess' that the results obtained were not due to chance (Averard 2019), increasing validity (Nahm 2017).

CONCLUSION

It seems fair to deduce that all the studies developed appropriate conclusions based upon their findings, leading to the researchers accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis. Based upon the demonstrated studies, a trend depicted, upon initial inspection, that DSEK/DSAEK appeared to have the best graft survival rate. It was not until a sound and critical analysis of the entirety of the studies that the

true meaning and significance of the results could be fathomed, and in fact there was a mixture of conclusions both accepting and rejecting the null hypothesis.

A significant limitation applicable to all studies was the lack of transferability attributable to ethnicity, and some sample size limitations and the absence of RCTs, seen to induce bias throughout. To create more valid and reliable results which can be more confidently implemented into clinical practice, future researchers should recognise these gaps in research and prioritise embracing inclusion of those aspects missing.

Following critical appraisal, the Woo *et al* (2019) study appears to achieve the highest overall rigour, evidencing comparatively better procedural and analytical thoroughness. It promotes sustained descriptive clarity, transparency and develops sound theoretical connections throughout. Consequently, as a result of a better cumulative graft survival, DSAEK appears to be the most successful procedure. Nevertheless, all studies carry clinical importance, therefore this conclusion is not accepted indefinitely.

Although it is appreciated that comparing graft survival rates of PK and DSEK/DSAEK is beyond the scope of a DO's practice, it should be acknowledged that there are instances where a DO, as a General Optical Council registrant, is responsible to refer and provide duty of care by acknowledging that a patient may need a permanent tint post-operatively due to photosensitivity, or requires special frame considerations due to induced high astigmatism, symptoms and complications as reported by the NHS (2021).

It is therefore useful that DOs investigate such topics simply for context on keratoplasty so that there is, to some extent, an appreciation and understanding. Patients may feel more comfortable and reassured in a DO's care if the professional can demonstrate understanding, resulting in increased rapport, patient satisfaction and increased quality of care.

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

A clear career path from the very first interview

In their final year, ABDO College degree students are all required to complete an independent study research project which focuses on a research question of their choice. In this feature you can read about Matilda Oldham and her research paper, 'Comparing graft survival rates of penetrating keratoplasty and Descemet's stripping (automated) endothelial keratoplasty over the last 20 years.'



Matilda Oldham

Matilda Oldham is now a qualified dispensing optician at Braniff and Davidson Opticians, an independent practice in Cumbria. "Dispensing is both practical and theoretical, that is what I enjoy about it," she highlighted. "I enjoy going to work to be practical as well as use my brain."

Like many other students, she found her career unexpectedly. Matilda had not long finished sixth form in summer 2019 and was searching for a job when she stumbled across an advert for a receptionist at Braniff and Davidson and her whole career path changed at that first interview.

"Joanne and Howard, now my bosses, saw potential in me to become a dispensing optician and instead offered

to support me through the BSc (Hons) Ophthalmic Dispensing Course. I have never looked back," she emphasised. However, Matilda joined optics just a few days before the first lockdown.

"Although this was an uncertain time, I look back on it as a valuable period as I was able to work one-to-one with my boss, responding to community urgent eyecare service (CUES) type calls when the practice was shut," Matilda explained. "I learnt so much about optics and the practice."

Matilda's first experiences of ABDO College were also different due to the pandemic. "My entire first block release was held online and it was not until the following year that I was able to attend the College in person. However, the College was incredibly adaptive and I did not feel like I had missed out," she said.

One of Matilda's favourite parts of the course was studying the anatomy of the eye and she quickly developed it as an interest. "The overriding highlight, however, was meeting such lovely people on the course, all of different backgrounds and ages," she added. "It was so inspiring."

The biggest challenge though was trying to maintain a healthy work, study, life balance. "When working and studying

become the same subject, it can feel quite life-consuming and, at times, it left me feeling overwhelmed," said Matilda. "Fortunately, I had an incredibly supportive workplace which helped me in numerous ways."

Inspiration

Matilda's inspiration for her research came from realising her interests. "I think this is a key part, choosing something that genuinely interests you because you spend a lot of time writing about it," she shared.

"I was initially inspired by a lecturer whose enthusiasm for anatomy was contagious. I wanted to choose a topic which appears to explore a world slightly beyond the scope of dispensing to show how such research may be relevant and link back to practice."

Matilda's independent study was based on three academic studies. "My conclusion was that the Woo *et al* study appeared to achieve the highest overall rigour. It was, therefore, fair to deduce that Descemet's stripping (automated) endothelial keratoplasty appears the most successful procedure."

Matilda's advice to others considering a similar study path is: "Just do it. Ensure you have a supportive network of people around you and get into a routine of doing your weekly assignments. Reach out to your online tutor and lecturers because they are there to help. Create an online chat among other student peers and share discussions on topics you may find difficult."

Matilda enjoyed her studies so much that she is doing the College's Contact Lens Certificate Course.

Overseeing to ensure that standards are maintained

Trustees play a vital role overseeing and advising on the strategic running of the College to ensure there is alignment between the management team and the General Optical Council and ABDO regulations. Trustees are responsible for the College finances, which involves approving the annual budget and accounts.

A trustee can serve for a maximum of eight years during which time they attend quarterly meetings, either in person at Godmersham or at the National Resource Centre in Birmingham, or remotely. At the meetings the trustees receive reports from senior staff, discuss future planning and student enrolment across all courses. They receive updates from the chief finance officer, on GOC reviews, ABDO requirements and staffing. In addition, the board chairman and chief executive give reports on any other matters which have arisen.

Claire Walsh has been a college trustee for three years. Having been a distance learning tutor for 12 years, what attracted Claire to the role of trustee? "I am incredibly passionate about our profession," Claire told *Re:View*. "Having been a distance learning tutor, I wanted to be more involved in the work that goes on behind the scenes to ensure the College maintains a high level of teaching.

"I am very enthusiastic about ensuring that standards are met, and that the College reflects modern dispensing to ensure students have the scaffolding to become a competent dispensing optician (DO), contact lens optician (CLO) or optical assistant (OA)," Claire added.

"I'm not afraid to question and ensure accountability is upheld. I genuinely want to ensure that the College thrives."

So, what attributes does a trustee have to have? "A keen interest in the successful provision of educating our future professionals is key, also the ability to respect the peers around you while actively debating the agenda," said Claire. "A commitment to attending quarterly meetings is required, alongside taking the time to pre-read the preparatory documentation."

Like many in the profession, Claire discovered her career by accident. Wanting a job after her A-levels, she interviewed for a role as a trainee



Trustee Claire Walsh

DO in a local independent practice.

Three years later she qualified as a DO and has never looked back.

Claire passed the contact lens course in 2001 then moved to Dublin. She became a distance learning tutor for the College as it was something she could do while bringing up a young family. When she returned to England several years later, she decided that she wanted to learn more and applied to do, and passed, the SMC (Tech) course.

Claire's first visit to the College left a lasting impression. "Having qualified as a DO and CLO prior to the College's existence, my first visit was for a distance learning tutor meeting over six years ago. I fell instantly in love with the majesty of the building and the beautiful grounds. It is a stunning place to learn and work.

"Since then, I have assisted the teaching staff by helping contact lens students with practical learning while on block over the last couple of cohorts and became an ABDO final examination theory marker last year," Claire revealed. "Throughout this, I have continued to work in independent practice, part-time."

Claire would recommend others to consider becoming a College trustee if they are enthusiastic about supporting the profession and the training involved.

"The meetings are super friendly and consist of a board of nine trustees sitting around a table with a common interest, the future of our profession and how to maintain it.

"The position is unremunerated but wanting to contribute to the future success of the College and the profession is very rewarding," Claire emphasised.

Optical Support Courses from ABDO College

Optical Support Courses from ABDO College are great for new staff induction and development of your existing support teams.

Optical Support Courses lead to qualifications awarded by the Association of British Dispensing Opticians.

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Call the ABDO College Courses Team on **01227 738 829 (Option 1)**

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