Notes of the fourteenth President's Consultation Day with the Areas
Held on Wednesday 16th May 2012
At the Medical Society of London, Lettsom House, Chandos Street, London W1G 9EB

1. WELCOME AND REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT

The President welcomed Area representatives and members to the meeting and was pleased to see representation from a large proportion of Areas. She outlined the agenda for the day, highlighting the item on the proposed changes to the Memorandum and Articles and Association title. She urged everyone present to put forward their views on these proposals and encouraged members to stimulate debate in their Areas. Comments should be submitted to her by the 15th June, when the Board would review all responses and submit final proposals to the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in September, when a vote would be taken.

The President noted that she had attended a joint Area 8/9 event, and had visited Area 11. She would shortly attend an Area 7 CET event and would visit Area 9 again in June. She hoped to visit several other Areas during the coming months.

2. REPORT FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY

The General Secretary was pleased to report that eye care and eye health had at last been included in the public health agenda as part of Government policy. In the past, eye health matters had been excluded from public health considerations but from now on, measurable public health outcomes would be introduced for these elements. This would mean new responsibilities for local authorities in monitoring eye health, which would in turn provide the eye care professions with an opportunity to influence funding decisions through local commissioning bodies. Local Optical Committees (LOCs) would clearly be involved and the General Secretary urged members to become engaged in the process at a local level.

The General Secretary mentioned a current Law Commission review of regulation and regulatory bodies. The outcome would be changes to the ways in which regulatory bodies operated and could result in the General Optical Council (GOC) having greater flexibility to change its rules without the constraints of seeking Section 60 Orders or changes to the Opticians Act. The President and the General Secretary held regular meetings with the GOC Chairman and Chief Executive in order to maintain a constant awareness within the GOC of issues which affected the profession.

The General Secretary reported on the Association's involvement in the Optical Confederation, noting in particular that a recent increase in voucher values, at a time of general public spending cuts, had only been achieved because the optical bodies had presented a united front. This joint approach had also facilitated regular discussions with the Minister of Health, and the Confederation had taken the opportunity to press for the exclusion of the profession from a new Government scheme called 'Monitor', which would have drastic powers over the whole health sector.

The General Secretary noted that the ABDO College intake, which had previously been capped at 180 entrants per year, had been increased by the GOC to 240 and that this year's intake had comprised some 200 students. The General Secretary felt that this indicated a high regard for the College and the profession, and a healthy demand for dispensing opticians. He mentioned that negotiations with the New Zealand Association had culminated in the enrolment onto the ABDO
course of around 60 New Zealand practitioners who wished to upgrade their qualification to FBDO.

3. PROPOSED CHANGES TO MEMORANDUM AND ARTICLES AND ASSOCIATION TITLE

The President introduced this item, emphasising that the proposed changes to the Articles were a completely separate issue from the proposed name change. The Articles had been redrafted in modern terminology and streamlined to meet the provisions of company legislation. One proposed change would enable dispensing opticians who qualified through other training institutions to become full ABDO members, although they would be distinguished from ABDO-qualified members by being prohibited from using the affix FBDO. In the immediate future this would allow membership of the Association to be granted to practitioners who qualified through the new Anglia Ruskin University route. The Board had taken the view that practitioners should not be penalised because their employers required them to train elsewhere. The Board had also been concerned that if membership was refused to these practitioners, they might establish their own association, which would be divisive for the profession. They would be allowed to upgrade their qualification to FBDO, and thus be able to take ABDO’s higher qualifications, but until the content of the Anglia course was known, it was not possible to develop an appropriate upgrading process.

In response to a query, the General Secretary confirmed that the Articles would be voted on as a single entity, with a separate vote for the name change. It would be impractical to vote on individual changes to the Articles as they had been completely rewritten to produce a smaller, more streamlined version to meet the requirements of the Companies Act 2006 and to allow the Board more flexibility, whilst continuing to protect the essential rights of members. If the AGM approved the new Articles and the name change, a supplementary vote would then be taken to change the title of the Articles to match the new name.

With regard to the change of title, the General Secretary reported the reasons for the Board’s conclusion that this would benefit the Association and the profession. Removal of the term ‘dispensing’ from the title would better reflect the Association’s membership. For example contact lens opticians did not call themselves ‘dispensing opticians’ and did not undertake any dispensing, and a similar situation applied to low vision practitioners. In addition, 20% of the membership, a percentage which was likely to increase, comprised non-British practitioners and clearly the current title was inappropriate for them. Furthermore, it had to be borne in mind that many overseas members were from countries where ‘dispensing’ did not exist and their regulatory authorities had no understanding of this term.

The General Secretary had expected the proposed name change to generate a difficult debate, with strongly held views on both sides. He had therefore been surprised at how few comments had been received from members and he urged Areas to hold meetings to discuss all these issues and to explain to the wider membership the reasons for the proposed changes. He indicated his willingness, and that of the President and Board members, to attend Area meetings to explain the rationale for the changes and hear members’ views. It was not the Association’s intention to force these changes upon the membership; they could only be introduced after full consultation and approval.

The General Secretary pointed out that in order to comply with the terms of the Companies Act, all members would be sent a proxy form for voting on the Articles and the name change. The forms would be sent out at the end of July and members could either:

- Do nothing;
- Complete the form nominating the Chairman of the AGM (i.e. the President) to vote on their behalf with or without pre-indication of their preference;
• Complete the form nominating a member attending the AGM to vote on their behalf, with or without pre-indication of their preference; or
• Attend the AGM and vote in person.

In answer to a query, the General Secretary confirmed that the proposed Articles should retain the provision that any member who was an undischarged bankrupt would not be allowed to stand for election to the Board; this was a requirement of the Companies Act. He would ensure that this provision was included.

It was confirmed that approval of the new Articles and the name change required a majority of 75% of the votes cast. In view of the importance of encouraging as many members as possible to use their vote, it was suggested that information be publicised not only in Dispensing Optics but also in Optician and Optometry Today. The General Secretary welcomed this suggestion and added that every possible use would be made of electronic communications with members. He would consider a suggestion to publicise the vote in company in-house journals, although he questioned whether this would be entirely appropriate. There was, however, no reason why individual members should not seek to persuade their colleagues to vote.

Comment was made about the potential cost to practices of the name change in terms of signage and stationery, and the costs to ABDO in terms of ABDO-branded merchandise. The General Secretary indicated that the major costs for the Association were legal fees, circulation of proxy voting forms and, in due course, the cost of changing stationery. However, this last item was changed every two years anyway, when a new President took office. There followed a discussion on ‘front of house’ practice materials such as nameplates showing the FBDO affix, although it was noted that few members now purchased ABDO badges or nameplates. The President expressed the hope that if members approved the name change, they would wish to be known by their new affix.

It was pointed out that if the name change was agreed and members were issued with new certificates that showed their new affix from 2012, this would be extremely misleading as an indication of the length of members’ qualification and could be damaging to patients’ perceptions. The General Secretary acknowledged the importance of taking this into account when the details were finalised.

The General Secretary urged everyone present, as leaders of the profession, to stimulate debate and, if they agreed with the proposed changes, to promote their importance. If local members asked questions that those present felt unable to answer, they should be put in touch with the Association so that their concerns and queries could be addressed.

4. ABDO CONFERENCE 2012

The Head of Professional Services gave a presentation on the format and content of the ABDO conference that would take place at the Holiday Inn in Stratford-upon-Avon on 29-30 September 2012. She outlined the facilities at the hotel and the social activities that had been arranged as part of the event. These included a gala dinner at the nearby Gaydon Motor Museum, which would be sponsored by Transitions. The conference objectives were highlighted, as follows:

• To be accessible to all members in terms of location and cost.
• To offer opportunities to enable members to perform better in practice; this would mean the inclusion of more business and practical elements.
• To offer ideas for diversification
• To provide a networking event, meeting fellow professionals and bodies, industry partners and students.
To create a platform for debate of important issues such as the proposed name change and career progression.

Pricing would be in line with the previous conference, i.e. single delegate package - £175; one delegate and one non-delegate package - £195; two-delegate package £270; exhibition only - free of charge; Saturday delegate pass £15; Sunday delegate pass £65; and gala dinner £85. The Head of Marketing had generated a series of advertisements for maximum exposure and had developed other publicity activities. The conference guide would again be included in an issue of Optician.

The Head of Professional Services presented the full conference programme, noting that some lectures were accompanied by additional web-based material with an extra CET point, to be available after the conference; attendance at the lecture would be a prerequisite for this additional learning. The Sunday programme would incorporate a drop-in advice desk for members wishing to become more involved in schools. This was an area that the Association was keen to promote, particularly as the current vision screening programme in schools appeared to be inadequate. It was hoped to produce a kit to enable members to carry out school vision screening and the Sunday programme would include sessions relevant to this topic.

The Head of Professional Services listed the exhibitors who had confirmed their attendance, noting in particular the support of Shamir, who were proving to be an excellent partner. Conversely she had been disappointed with the response of some of the previous major sponsors but acknowledged that the current economic climate made it difficult to obtain sponsorship at past levels. She urged members to encourage their suppliers to support ABDO by exhibiting at the conference and she suggested Area initiatives to stimulate attendance by members.

The Head of Professional Services mentioned that the Area 5 Committee was assisting at the conference and with its planning. The Committee had cancelled the Area’s September meeting in order to concentrate on the conference and was offering a £45 subsidy to Area 5 members who would have attended the Area meeting and booked the conference instead. She wondered whether other Areas might feel able to support its members in a similar manner.

5. AREA ACTIVITY

The Members Support Manager gave a presentation on his activities since he had taken up his post. He reminded members of the support provided by the Association in terms of CET. This had comprised an average of 390 points per cycle, mostly within the cost of the membership fee. He outlined the role of Areas in CET provision and noted that as of January 2012 only 750-800 members had attended ABDO events each year. There continued to be a lack of funding for CET for dispensing opticians except in Scotland, a situation that was unlikely to change in the near future.

The Members Support Manager outlined the results of a membership survey that he had undertaken earlier this year. Although only a small number of responses had been received, these had demonstrated that members would prefer not to pay for CET and that some were not prepared to travel far to CET events. A majority of respondents had indicated a preference for email communications about events and a small number had pressed for crèche facilities.

The Members Support Manager outlined possible changes to the GOC’s CET requirements, as follows:

- Half of all points per cycle would have to be achieved by attending events
- Contact lens opticians would no longer be required to obtain additional points
- Peer discussion would be a mandatory activity for contact lens opticians
• E-learning would be an option
• CET would have to be undertaken in all core competencies.

It was clear that if these changes were introduced for the next cycle, members' expectations would increase and Areas would have to be even more active in providing a variety of events and locations. Areas were urged proactively to prepare for the new situation by ensuring that they had proper structures and effective communications both within their Areas and with the Association. Forward planning would be essential and the Members Support Manager put forward the following propositions:

• Each Area should offer a minimum of 12 points per year (some Areas already met this target)
• Areas should strongly consider the workshop concept
• Facilitator training for peer discussion would be offered to a representative from each Area.
• Full year meeting plans should be released a year in advance. Ideally the programme for 2013 should be ready, at least in outline, by the end of October 2012, with full information being published in Dispensing Optics and on the website in January 2013.
• There would be a review of financial assistance from ABDO in recognition of the higher financial burden placed upon Areas by the new requirements
• Consideration would be given centrally to engaging with industry partners
• Contact had already been made with hotel chains to try and negotiate preferential rates for Area events

The Members Support Manager stressed the support available from the Association staff and suggested that a steering group of Area Chairmen be established to discuss the above propositions. Comment was made that it would be helpful if the CET events list could include more detailed information; for example the title of a lecture did not necessarily indicate the content. It was felt that events would have to offer more than one CET point if they were to attract a good attendance and in this context members were reminded that visual recognition tests provided two points and could easily be added to an evening event.

6. AREA REPORTS

Area 2: a full CET day had been arranged for October 2012; this would offer eight CET points, including one contact lens point. It was hoped to attract 50-70 members to the event and eleven exhibitors were anticipated, which would enable the event to be provided free of charge to members. The usual revision day for students had taken place last year and feedback had been positive. Thanks were expressed to the Committee members for their hard work.

Area 3: an evening presentation, run jointly with the Cheshire LOC, had recently taken place and had been well received by the 18 optometrists and 22 dispensing opticians who had attended. The next event would take place on 17th October and would be an evening visit to the Hoya Lenses factory at Wrexham. The tour would provide two CET points, with a further two points being provided by visual recognition tests. Longer-standing Committee Officers were gradually stepping down and their roles taken on by enthusiastic younger members.

Area 4: the last meeting had taken place in March and had comprised a visit to the Shamir factory, with a presentation on occupational lenses by the company’s product development manager. Although only a small company, full sponsorship had been provided. The next event would take place on 13th June and would hopefully be sponsored by Transitions. A full Committee was in place and included a student member.
Area 6: a successful meeting had been held in March; this had provided seven CET points and had been completely self-funding due to the large number of sponsors. Discussions were under way with regard to another meeting in 2012, and with regard to ways of encouraging more members to join the Committee.

Area 7: the President had attended the last meeting and would be attending the CET day taking place on 17th May. Two new members had joined the Committee, both of whom were students, and thanks were expressed to all the Committee members for their hard work. Future plans would await the new GOC requirements and would take into account points put forward by the Members’ Support Manager. Area 12 was congratulated on organising the mini-conference and exhibition in Scotland.

Area 9: an evening meeting on paediatric eye care had taken place at the end of 2011, providing two CET points and attended by more than 40 members. The quality of the speakers was a major contributory factor to good attendance at all events, as evidenced by the paediatric event and the joint event held in March 2012 with Areas 8 and 10. The latter had also been attended by the President and Board members. The Area AGM would be held on 21st June, and would include two lectures and offer 2 ½ CET points. The President would attend the AGM to talk about, and hear views on, the proposed Articles and name change.

Area 10: since the previous President’s consultation day, a Committee had been formed comprising a chairman, secretary and events coordinator, and the President had attended the inaugural Committee meeting. A joint meeting had been held with Area 9, which had been well attended and well received. A garden party was being organised for the summer, offering six CET points as well as a family fun day. If successful, this could become an annual event.

Area 11: a CET day had been held in November 2011, and another event in March 2012, which had been attended by the President and General Secretary. It had attracted around 30 members and had been sponsored by Silhouette. A CET day had been arranged for 4th November 2012.

Area 12: a successful mini-conference and gala dinner had taken place, providing five CET points and two additional points from a subsequent postal course. Two presentations had been made at the gala dinner - ABDO life membership to Donald Cameron, who had been instrumental in setting up Optometry Scotland; and an Area 12 presentation to a longstanding member for his services to dispensing optics in Scotland. A student revision day had been held in May, which had been well received. Two one-day events had been arranged in early October, both funded by NHS Education for Scotland. This funding support was much appreciated by members. A further meeting was planned for November, offering two CET points, and it was hoped to run a mini-conference again, although the Committee was mindful of the need to avoid any adverse impact on the ABDO conference.

The President made brief mention of the two visual recognition tests available to Areas, one on myopia and one on low vision, both providing two CET points. She felt that these were useful in providing extra points at evening meetings.

There followed a discussion on coordination of dates between Area events. Although the Members’ Support Manager planned to be in contact with all Areas to obtain their plans a year in advance, it was suggested that it would also be helpful to have an interactive diary on the website to which Areas could add their meeting dates and check for any clashes. There was also a need to avoid clashes of topics, especially between neighbouring Areas. Comment was made that it would be useful to know about national events such as the BCLA and Specsavers conferences, and the NOC. The General Secretary reminded the meeting that much information
was already published in Dispensing Optics but he would give some thought to the electronic diary option.

Mention was made of standby arrangements in Area 3 to cover the contingency of non-attendance by a speaker. In this context, it was suggested that peer discussion, based on case studies, was another way of providing CET at short notice, as long members of the Area had been trained as facilitators. In answer to a query, it was confirmed that peer discussion was likely to become a mandatory CET activity for contact lens opticians but that any dispensing optician could participate as part of their CET programme. The view was expressed that whilst peer discussion was effective in practice-based learning, it might not work so well for an evening meeting with a larger attendance. On the other hand, larger meetings would just require more facilitators to run parallel sessions. The GOC was likely to insist on face-to-face peer discussion, although it acknowledged that there could be circumstances where this might not be possible and was considering allowing e-contact/Skype in exceptional cases.

Discussion then turned to the question of non-attendance by members who had booked for an event. Some Areas provided events free of charge, some made a charge for the catering, and others charged a refundable deposit or took cheque/card details to be used for payment of the deposit if the member failed to attend. The Head of Membership Services felt that a simpler method would be through the use of online booking and use of smartphones. The President suggested a voucher scheme. The view was expressed that as members would in future have to attend events in order to obtain half their CET points, the incidence of non-attendance was likely to reduce.

Consideration was given to the continuing lack of funding for dispensing opticians’ CET and the lack of parity with optometrists in this regard. The General Secretary stressed that in the current climate of public spending cuts the Government in England would not change its stance, however strong the arguments in favour. The fact remained that dispensing opticians had to undertake CET and ABDO provided its members with enough CET for this purpose, free of charge wherever possible. He pointed out that as a result of the new public health agenda mentioned earlier in the meeting, there would be local funding for training initiatives and it was up to members to ensure that they were included.

8. CLOSE BY THE PRESIDENT

The President drew the meeting to a close at 3 p.m. She noted that the next President’s Consultation Day would take place on 14th November 2012.