

## IN THIS ISSUE:

Pg2 LOC Chairs back strategy

Pg2 New Student Ambassador

Pg3 Prescribing pilot for MECS

Pg4 Devo-Manc cash for IT

Pg4 Model Constitution update

Pg6 MECS dents A&E attendance



March 2016 Newsletter

## NHS to host eye health summit

NHS England is to host an eye care commissioning summit on **7 June 2016**.

*“Immediate solutions to address demand and capacity in the Hospital Eye Service”* is being organised by NHS England with support from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, the College of Optometrists and LOCSU to bring together commissioners from across the country to hear about successful solutions and options to address demand pressures.

The event will feature a number of case studies from areas that LOCs and LOCSU are heavily involved with including the East Lancashire Integrated Eye Service and the Better Care Together Vanguard.

## PEC insurance rate cut

RUNNING costs for Primary Eyecare Companies will be lower in the coming year (2016-17) due to a reduction in the company insurance premium rate negotiated by LOCSU.

Company insurance for the year will be £1054 plus Insurance Premium Tax (currently 10%), a 15% reduction from last year for the same cover.

## Breakthrough priorities unveiled



A PRIORITY list of CCGs and support for LOCs with no Primary Eye Company were among the crucial activities to deliver the new [Breakthrough Strategy for Optics](#), delegates at the second LOCSU Commissioning Forum heard last month.

Representatives heard that a priority mapping exercise to target the introduction of Minor Eye Condition Service (MECS) is already drawn up and dedicated help for LOCs with no or low activity services is in hand. Currently, 96 CCGs have or are planning MECS.

An expanded team of Commissioning Leads and new Commissioning Support Officers will spearhead the Breakthrough Strategy to a priority list of CCGs; as well as working with secondary care on opportunities for “step down” care from hospitals.

To aid this, forum delegates heard from Webstar Health about pioneering plans on IT connectivity to achieve the secure transfer of patient records for monitoring patients in the community rather than hospital.

Discussions to ensure sufficient capacity to provide

the volume of clinical assessments that will be required to accredit the workforce to deliver MECS are also in hand.

LOCSU data shows that – although MECS episodes and revenue had doubled in two years – some LOC Company and legacy services show activity well below population averages.

Commenting on the event Katrina Venerus said: “MECS is a real driver of patient activity. The enhanced team will give us the capacity to get under the skin of this data and build the full picture. It is vital that we get quality people into these roles so that we are able to hold discussions by the summer with CCGs in advance of them setting their commissioning intentions for 2017–18.”

Venerus said she would be looking across the sector for advocates to support LOCs in delivering the strategy.

## LOCSU appoints first Student Ambassador

LOCSU aims to strike closer links with student optometrists and identify future leaders for the sector through a new role for the organisation.

Hassnain Safdar (*pictured below*), who is a final year optometry student at Aston University, has been appointed as the first-ever LOCSU Student Ambassador and will become a Pre-reg Ambassador when he completes his degree this year.



Announcing the role, Katrina Venerus said: “Our plan is to establish opportunities to engage with the student and pre-reg optometrists to give them a chance to understand more about the pivotal role played by LOCs and about the wider policy world of optometry as a primary care profession in today’s fast-changing NHS. It will also help us identify and nurture future leaders for the profession.”

Hassnain got his first taste of the broader professional world of optics at NOC 2015 and admitted he was fascinated by the broader policy context beyond his academic life.

“As students, we are focused on our clinical studies and have a fairly set notion of what our future working life will entail. Visiting the NOC was a real eye-opener for me and there is definitely a gap in our training that the ambassador role will aim to bridge.”

The world of politics is one that high-flying Hassnain is already familiar with. The 20-year-old award-winning debater is currently Co-Chairman of the Central Region United Nations Association UK. Through university-level conferences the grassroots UN body provides young people with an insight into politics, diplomacy and global affairs.

## Strategy receives strong support from LOC Chairs

**LOCs responded positively to a series of webinars to discuss the publication of the LOCSU’s new [Breakthrough Strategy](#).**

LOCSU’s Managing Director Katrina Venerus opened each of the four webinars held between Monday 22 February and Wednesday 2 March 2016, with a brief summary of the new strategy and the reasons behind it.

Chairs and representatives from around two-thirds of LOCs participated in the sessions and the response was overwhelmingly positive in terms of their support for the new strategy, their appreciation of why it is essential that we upscale and



that we need to increase the levy back to its original level to fund the additional work.

Speaking afterwards, Katrina Venerus said: “The feedback from LOC Chairs was that they recognise the

progress we have made with the services that are in place but understand the need to push through to another level at a time when the NHS is looking to innovate and the sector faces the threat of external competitors looking at gaps in provision.

“Chairs can clearly see that, in order to deliver the objectives outlined in the strategy for the sector, we need to boost the LOCSU team to provide adequate support for the leaders on the frontline.

“They appreciate that to achieve that, the increase in the levy makes common sense and I’m pleased LOC leaders accept the rationale for the restoration of the levy back to its original level.”

Summing up the consultation exercise, Venerus said: “We are delighted by the mature and agile response from LOCs to the new strategy and we will be working to harness the enthusiasm of experienced and emerging local leaders to be able to tackle the opportunities and challenges it throws up for committees.”

## Regular drop-in webinars planned

A NUMBER of LOC Chairs took advantage of the webinars to seek advice on topics not directly linked to the strategy, such as better sharing of information between LOCs and the value of regional meetings for officers; no topic was off limits. This has led us to look at hosting monthly drop-in webinars as advice sessions for LOCs and LOC Companies”. The first of the new monthly webinars for LOCs and LOC Companies will take place on 27 April. Register on the Events page of the website [here](#).

## Heart of West Midlands tops CCG news items

THE roll out of new Primary Eyecare Heart of West Midlands services was the top item in the recent [CCG newsletter](#).



Commissioners highlighted that patients can receive help from optical practices rather than GPs and A&E.

The news item also signposts other health care professions to a range of Primary Eyecare Company produced resources. These include locally-branded leaflets posters and leaflets which feature the logo and website details for Heart of West Midlands Regional LOC Company.



The resources were adapted from templates produced by LOCSU and available on the [LOCSU website](#). LOC Companies with a MEC service can download and adapt the templates by adding their own logo and a list of practices delivering the service.

## Optometrists now with eye-Pads!

UPSKILLED optometrists will help deliver landmark NHS innovation under a new initiative being trialled in the North West.

As part of the pilot, optometrists participating in MECS will have access to an NHS prescription pad and budget to help ease pressure on GPs, A&E and the Hospital Eye Service.

To date, almost 60 optometrists have signed up for the programme which is being funded by Health Education England North West and has been jointly devised with the North West Local Eye Health Networks.

The programme will support 80 training places in total.

Would-be prescribers must complete a distance learning module with Aston University, a clinical placement in a North West Hospital Trust and undertake the College of Optometrists examination.

Launching the pilot, Liz Thomas, Senior Programme Manager of Workforce Transformation at HEE said: "Upskilling the existing workforce is a key element of transforming the workforce to deliver new services and expand the potential of new models of care. The intention of this particular project is to support development of the workforce to maximise the effectiveness of MECS, further reducing unnecessary referrals to secondary care and supporting GPs."

Chair of the Greater Manchester LEHN and LOCSU Commissioning Lead, Dharmesh Patel, one of the architects of the £100,000 initiative, said that it was important that optical practice staff were seen as an integral part of the primary care workforce; developing skills and delivering health.

*'It's important that optical practice staff were seen as an integral part of the primary care workforce; developing skills and delivering health.'*  
- Dharmesh Patel



"Optometrists and opticians want to play a significant part in delivering a more efficient and cost-effective NHS. This initiative will help demonstrate that optical practices and MECS can help reduce the pressure on GP and A&E visits and be more convenient for the patient: the type of reform that is called for in the 5YFV."

The inter-professional programme will also see trainee GPs, nurses and other health professionals work in optical practices to gain a better understanding of the role we play to reduce pressures.

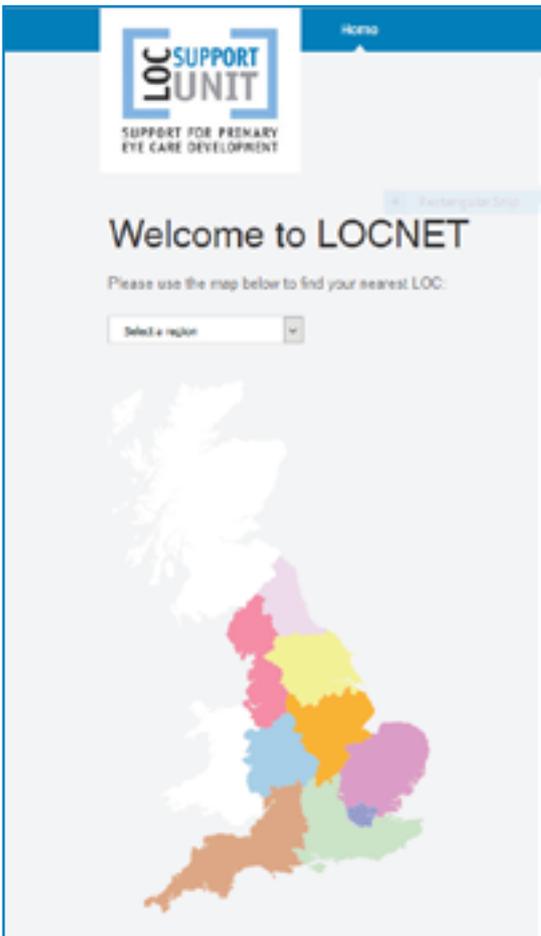
Another round of applications to fill the remaining funded places will open in April 2016. It is anticipated that students will have completed the training and exam by early 2018.

LOCSU understands that the prescribing pilot has already sparked interest in several other areas with conversations between Health Education England's Local Education and Training Boards in Yorkshire and the Midlands and involving other pathways, such as glaucoma.

## Wolves LOC takes a bite out of LOCNET

A WARM welcome from LOCNET to Wolverhampton LOC, whose recently re-launched website is one of the latest to go live on the platform provided by LOCSU.

LOCSU is in discussions with a number of other LOCs who are looking to take up the offer of a free template and hosting.



“It’s a great way of keeping in touch with your members and stakeholders, particularly if you are rolling out new services, said Chris McGachy, Head of Communications. And best of all, the LOCNET platform is provided free of charge for LOCs.

Why not take a look at some of examples ([Leicester & Rutland](#), [Northumberland](#), [Tyne & Wear](#)), on LOCNET to see what an adaptable, free template could do for your LOC.

Contact [Chris McGachy](#), to discuss developing your LOC site on the LOCNET platform.

## Devo-Manc cash points to potential progress on IT

WHILE the sector’s bid to link optical practices with the NHS IT infrastructure chimes harmoniously with the Five Year Forward View as “electronic glue” allowing integrated patient care, secure record sharing and a paperless NHS, the changes have yet to reach their way down the budget chain.



Despite warm words from officials, the sector is still waiting on a response to the £28 million sector IT bid submitted to NHS England in autumn 2015.

But one ray of hope is that, as part of the Devo-Manc proposals, it was recently announced that £500,000 is to be made available to enable IT connectivity for optical practices across Greater Manchester.

“Despite widespread support for the objectives of the national bid, no progress has been made,” said Peter

Hampson, Co-Chair of the Optical Confederation IT Committee and LOCSU Advisor. “Although there are some concerns as to whether the level of funding secured in Greater Manchester is enough to deliver wholesale transformative change it is an excellent start. We are hoping that the Greater Manchester approach could be a potential model for investment nationally to jump start the process.”

The LEHN has been leading on this project with the GM confederation of LOCs.

## Model Constitution update

LOCSU has submitted an updated LOC Model Constitution to NHS England for approval following consultation with LOCs and ratification by the LOCSU Board.

The key changes that are proposed to the model include the election of officers by the committee at the first following Annual General Meeting rather than election of officers by the AGM and the specific

inclusion of a practising dispensing optician on the committee by co-option.

LOCSU will inform LOCs as soon as approval for the revised LOC Model Constitution is received from NHS England.

**RECENT MP practice visits – organised by the Optical Confederation’s Public Affairs team along with LOCs – help spread the message about the cost-effectiveness of community services.**



### **Pickles passionate about community-based solutions**

MP FOR Brentwood and Ongar, Sir Eric Pickles, visited Cole Martin Tregaskis Optometrists in Brentwood for a meeting with the Essex Local Optical Committee.

Essex LOC Chair, Stuart Humfrey said: We were able to outline exciting new areas of community services as well as touch upon the need for quality eye care for children in his constituency and beyond. It was fantastic to hear how Sir Eric is passionate about health issues and keen to promote community-based solutions.”

Practice Director, Professor Bruce Evans, said: “Research indicates that one-in-five school children in the UK have a visual anomaly and children may not report difficulties because the problem has developed gradually. Regular eye examinations are recommended for all children and are especially important if the child is under-achieving in the classroom.”

**Image L-R: Stuart Humfrey LOC Chair, Sir Eric Pickles MP, Professor Bruce Evans – Optometrist and Practice Director.**



## **Optical pathway savings worth ‘serious consideration’ admits Devon Central MP**

**AROUND 40,000 GP appointments per year could be freed up across Devon if primary care opticians were used to triage, manage and prioritise patients who would otherwise visit their GP or turn up at A&E a local MP has heard.**

**Central Devon MP, Mel Stride, backed the plans – which could save the NHS £450,000 a year – to treat minor eye conditions in optical practices. Following the meeting at Specsavers in Okehampton, the MP said the proposals were “worth serious consideration”.**

**The MP met with Ophthalmic Director Kath Dandy, Jonathan Drew from Devon LOC and Jenny Gowen, from the Optical Confederation, describing it as one of the most interesting meetings he has attended.**

**Following the visit, Mr Stride said: “The arguments put forward by the opticians today were very compelling.**

**If people can get a better service, closer to home and if the number of people making GP appointments and visiting A&Es with minor eye conditions is reduced as a result, then the proposals I heard today are worth serious consideration.”**

**Ms Dandy said: “Mel took a great deal of interest in our drive to bring a wider set of services to the high street. This would not only bring these closer to the community but reduce waiting times but save the NHS money.”**

**Image: Central Devon MP Mel Stride (left) at Specsavers in Okehampton with Ophthalmic Director, Kath Dandy (right).**

**More MP coverage on Pg 6**

## Royal College report response

LOCSU and the Optical Confederation responded to national coverage of the announcement by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists that hospital eye services are bursting at the seams.

In an interview for the BBC Breakfast Programme on 16 March, Professor Carrie McEwen explained that follow-up appointments can be “delayed by years” due to the capacity problems Acute Trusts are facing. The story also featured the next day in the *Daily Mail* and *The Times*.

LOCSU has urged all CCGs to commission community services that utilise the capacity available in high street optical practices to reduce the pressure on hospital services. Read the news release [here](#). The release was also covered in [Primary Care Today](#).

## LOCSU media roundup

MEDIA highlights in the last month include the publication of our latest Commissioner Blog and a LOCSU-produced report on health minister Alistair Burt’s address at 100% Optical last month – his first speech to an exclusively optical audience. In [Commissioning Review](#), Helen Ashcroft, Head of Commissioning at West Cheshire CCG, explained how a Glaucoma Repeat Readings service delivered by community optometrists can deflect up to 70% of patients from secondary care, making it a cost-effective service and allowing hospitals to concentrate on the most urgent and serious cases.

[Primary Care Today](#) featured our coverage of Alistair Burt’s speech at 100% Optical, headlining a greater role for optical practices and that GPs should not be the first port of call for every ailment.

# MECS dents A&E attendance

## MP hears service ‘reverses year-on-year increases’

A LOCAL West Midlands MP has heard how a minor eye conditions service has reduced the number of eye-related A&E visits, following a visit to an optical practice, organised by the Wolverhampton LOC and the Optical Confederation last month.



*Pat McFadden MP, (centre, with MECS leaflet), flanked by Wolverhampton LOC Secretary Peter Rockett (left) and optometrist, Paul Sidhu (right).*

Pat McFadden, Wolverhampton South MP, heard how the year-old service had reversed year-on-year increases which had risen 4% prior to its introduction.

The West Midlands MP visited Scrivens Opticians in Bilston to find out why regular eye tests are so important in preventing blindness, and to hear about the role optometry can play in delivering routine eye care – above and beyond the sight test in locations handy for patients.

During the visit, Wolverhampton LOC Secretary, Peter Rockett said: “With the NHS under pressure to reform and patients finding it increasingly difficult to get a GP appointment, an NHS-funded walk-in service for minor eye conditions is an obvious way to help reduce pressure.

“It was great to meet with Pat, and talk through the services in the Wolverhampton area,

particularly the Minor Eye Conditions Service, that, since its introduction, has allowed 80% of patients attending optical practices with minor conditions to be managed within those practices.

### Reducing

“The first year of the service has seen a reduction of 2% in eye-related A&E visits – breaking the trend of year-on-year rises, as much as 4% the year before MECS. This shows the service is making a very significant contribution to reducing pressures on other parts of the NHS.

“I hope that through Pat McFadden’s practice visit, MPs and health decision makers can act on the potential that community eye health services have to be more cost-effective for CCGs and more convenient for patients.”

# Venerus' View

AS we move rapidly towards Easter, the lighter nights and brighter days seem to create a more positive vibe around the place. A renewed energy to drive our professions forward certainly came across in the recent webinars we held with LOC Chairs to discuss the new LOCSU strategy (see Page 2). Similar feedback has come from the AOP Council as well as ABDO and FODO members. Whilst the many challenges we face were acknowledged, colleagues overwhelmingly agreed that we need to boost the level of support LOCSU can provide for LOCs and LOC Companies to increase the scale and pace of commissioning.

With the unwelcome announcement from the Government last week that it intends to freeze NHS sight test fees in England at 2015–16 levels for 2016–17, grasping opportunities to deliver care beyond the sight test is all the more crucial.

We are currently in the midst of recruiting the additional staff we will need to deliver the objectives in the strategy and, although there is a lot to do, our whole team are really excited to be leading this bold approach for the sector.

Sticking with a theme of positivity, it was refreshing to see eyes getting a bit of prime-time profile last week through Professor Carrie MacEwen's appearance on BBC Breakfast to discuss capacity and demand issues faced by NHS eye services (see Page 6). As many of you will have seen, the Royal College of Ophthalmologists President was focussing on the fact that ophthalmology clinics are struggling to cope, resulting in delayed follow-up appointments, which in turn leads to avoidable sight loss.

I fully support the Royal College's call for mandatory collection and monitoring of data on follow-up appointments. A review of current targets so that more equitable care can be provided for new and review patients on the basis of urgency of clinical need is an important

part of this complex jigsaw of reform that is necessary.

The need for change and new solutions is something that we all agree on. Since LOCSU has existed we have been regularly highlighting the increasing demand on NHS eye services

and promoting collaboration between the different professions to develop new care models to meet current and future needs.

We are already supporting community optometrists in a number of areas to work with ophthalmologists in Acute Trusts on initiatives to help address capacity problems. But we need CCGs to work together to put patients' sight at the top of their agenda.



At a national level, through the Clinical Council for Eye Health Commissioning, we have worked to develop a Community Ophthalmology Framework and are currently developing a Primary Care Framework. Getting CCGs to implement frameworks that have been developed by the country's eye health experts is still a bit of an uphill struggle. Having more dedicated staff within LOCSU to advise on local commissioning will help enormously.

Finally, I am delighted that NHS England have agreed to host an eye care event on 7 June 2016 in recognition that there are problems to be solved. *Immediate solutions to address demand and capacity in the Hospital Eye Service* is being organised by NHS England with support from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, the College of Optometrists and LOCSU to bring together commissioners from across the country to hear about successful solutions and options to address demand pressures. A single event will not bring about universal change but it is a good start!

I hope you all enjoy the long weekend and have a good Easter Break.

Your comments and suggestions are always welcome: [katrinavenerus@locsu.co.uk](mailto:katrinavenerus@locsu.co.uk) or [@katrinavenerus on Twitter](https://twitter.com/katrinavenerus).

## Learning disabilities role plans for LOCs

LOCSU and SeeAbility recently met with the leads from NHS England's Learning Disabilities team to discuss how eye care for adults with learning disabilities can be addressed as part of the Transforming Care Programme.

From April 2016, 48 Transforming Care Partnerships will be established nationwide.

Although the major priority for the Partnerships will be replacing inappropriate and outmoded inpatient facilities and establishing stronger support in the community for people with learning disabilities, improving access to mainstream health services for people with

learning disabilities is also part of their remit.

SeeAbility and LOCSU will be working to promote the importance of good eye care to these partnerships and there will be a role for LOCs and Local Eye Health Networks to support this work at a local level. Further updates will be provided in *LOCSU News* once the Transforming Care Partnerships are established.

## Find your LOC AGM

TO find out when your LOC AGM is, take a look at the [LOCSU website](#) for a handy list of upcoming dates and details.

If the AGM for your area does not appear on the list, please check back regularly as the website is updated when meeting details are confirmed.

All contractors and performers are encouraged to attend their LOC AGM to learn more about the current work of the committee and how they can help shape and support future plans for the area.

LOCs can check out our [2015 blog](#) for tips on making your AGM fit for purpose.

And don't forget to let LOCSU know when your AGM is taking place. Please email [info@locsu.co.uk](mailto:info@locsu.co.uk) with the details.

## Dates for your Diary

- [Optrafair](#), NEC Birmingham, 9–11 April 2016. Come and visit the LOCSU stand over the three days in the Association Lounge.
- 12 April 2016, Pre-Reg placement event at University of Portsmouth. Bookings via [sarah.williams1@port.ac.uk](mailto:sarah.williams1@port.ac.uk)
- BCLA UK Conference & Exhibition, 12–13 June 2016 includes lectures and workshops to improve confidence in contact lenses. For full programme bookin visit the [BCLA Events page](#).
- The [Vision UK 2016 conference – Expanding Horizons](#) takes place Tuesday 14 June at The Grange Tower Bridge Hotel, London.
- The College of Optometrists is hosting 25 [regional events](#) throughout the year.
- The Association of Optometrists (AOP) has launched its extensive programme of CET and CPD events throughout the country, offering over 200 CET points during the course of the year. [Download the guide](#).
- Fight for Sight is making its research presentation roadshow available for LOCs. The presentations aimed at both optometrists and dispensing opticians, and are CET certified. Email [Julian Jackson](mailto:Julian.Jackson) or call 07773 800073 for more information.

If you have an item of interest for *LOCSU News*, contact Editor [Chris McGachy](#), Head of Communications. You are receiving this email from the Local Optical Committee Support Unit. If you would like to unsubscribe, please contact [info@locsu.co.uk](mailto:info@locsu.co.uk).