

World Council of Optometry Strategic Plan 2017 – 2020

Towards a better world – optometry's role

September 2017

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1. Background

The World Council of Optometry (WCO) has been in existence since 1927. It was initially known as the International Optical League thereafter as the International Optometric and Optical League until 1994 when it was changed to WCO as it is known today.

Throughout its history the organisation has worked to advance the practice of the profession by supporting its development through the improvement of education and practice standards and assisting countries where optometry was not yet developed or recognised. All these actions/goals were ultimately aimed at achieving our vision of a world where optometry makes high quality eye health and vision care accessible to all people.

Worldwide, the role of optometry within health systems and the recognition of its importance is growing. The World Health Organisation (WHO) recognises that uncorrected refractive errors represent the major cause of visual impairment (43%) and that optometrists, often the first point of contact in the delivery of eye care, provide an important defence against avoidable visual impairment, as well as, eye disease. The WCO is the only optometric body in official relations with the WHO and it is critical that this be leveraged to entrench the role of optometry in national and global health systems, including contributing actively to the implementation of the WHO Global Action Plan 2014-2019 - Towards Universal Eye Health.

Currently, WCO represents the interests of organised and individual optometrists around the world with a membership of 55 national optometry associations, 51 affiliates which include universities and schools of optometry and 39 individual optometrists across six world regions.

Our Vision

Our vision is of a world where optometry makes high quality eye health and vision care accessible to all people.

Our Mission

To achieve our vision, our mission is to promote eye health and vision care as a human right. This is achieved through advocacy, education, policy development and the promotion of sustainable eyecare services and is intended to facilitate the development of optometry and optometrists around the world

Our Objectives

Our objectives, as defined in our Constitution, are the worldwide improvement and conservation of human vision.

This may include:

- The enhancement and development of primary eye and vision care by optometrists.
- The promotion of high standards of education and practice by optometrists including by the promotion of international co-ordination of optometrists.

- The provision of support to aid programmes directed at the provision of eye and vision care to societies in need.
- The promotion and the advancement of the science of optometry.

2. Achievements – 2013-2015

During the last strategic planning period 2012 -2014/5, WCO made significant headway in its plan to engage more comprehensively with its membership and to promote the vision, mission and the profession. In particular:

- Regional engagement with ALDOO has been strengthened through presidential visits and co- hosting with FEDOPTO the 1st World Congress of Optometry.
- The establishment of the 1st World Congress of Optometry in 2015 attracted an international delegation of educators and participants to Medellin, Colombia
- Support for colleagues for the recognition of optometry and the development of regulation and standards
 - Latin America: Brazil, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico and Trinidad and Tobago
 - Asia Pacific: India
 - Eastern Mediterranean: Lebanon
 - Europe: Moldova, Italy, Belgium, France
 - Africa: Mozambique, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya and Uganda
- Hosting the first Presidential Forum in Medellin, Colombia to enable wider engagement with the profession
- The development of the WCO Advocacy Strategy
- Engagement with the World Health Organisation and concluding the collaboration plans for 2013 - 2015
- Agreement with the World Health Organisation for the collaboration plan for the period 2015 -2017
- The establishment of online education resources with particular value for developing countries where resources are more limited
- Strengthening of strategic partnerships with the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), Optometry Giving Sight (OGS) and Brien Holden Vision Institute (BHVI)
- Review of the Global Competency Model to reflect the definition of minimum competencies for an optometrist and the introduction of indicators
- The development of *Why Optometry?* as a resource for advocacy

- The scope of practice questionnaire has now been completed by 64 associations and is published by the European Region (ECOO) as an important comparative tool and reference source about optometry across Europe.
- WCO participation in IAPB Work Groups - Refractive Error, Diabetic Retinopathy, Low Vision, Human Resources for Eye Health and Long Term Global Indicators

3. Outcome of the 2012 – 2015 Strategic Plan Objectives

In 2011 WCO created the Strategic Plan 2012-2014 with the following Strategic Themes, including –

Theme 1 - To ensure that the way WCO interacts with interested parties leads to increased membership and maximises the effectiveness of the organisation for the benefit of the public and the profession.

Theme 2 - To maintain a WCO Global Competencies Framework to encourage the most appropriate patient care.

Theme 3 - To organise WCO events that will be relevant to and advance optometry's role in healthcare worldwide.

Theme 4 - To ensure that WCO communicates effectively with all stakeholders.

Theme 5 - To ensure that the governance structure of WCO facilitates the management of its resources in the most effective way.

These Themes helped guide our progress these past few years, including the following successes:

- Increased Awareness and Membership in WCO, as well as a new Governance Structure and Plan
- Expanded and more detailed Global Competencies Model
- Case Statement for Optometry (Is this now the 'Why Optometry' book?)
- On-going Global Mapping
- Updated Concept of Optometry (or is this the 'Why Optometry' book?)
- On-going Scope of Practice Questionnaire

4. Goals of the current Strategic Plan

In November 2013, the Governing Board adopted an Advocacy Strategy for 2014-2017. This Strategy emphasised Optometry's intrinsically important role in solving the global problem of Uncorrected Refractive Errors (UREs). The Governing Board recognised that this strategy fits with the World Health Organization Global Plan 2014-2019, which aims to further improve eye health, reduce avoidable visual impairment and secure access for rehabilitation services and sets up a global target to reduce the prevalence of avoidable visual impairment by 25% by 2019.

The new Global Action Plan 2014 – 2019 intends to address previous limitations, such as its capacity to mobilise high levels of political will. The framework provided by this Global Action Plan will support the

inclusion of primary eye care into primary health care, improve co-ordination mechanisms, ensure funding for eye health within a comprehensive integrated health care service and develop human resources for eye health, including optometrists, as part of wider human resources for health planning. Multi-sectorial approaches and effective partnerships with other WHO programmes and the non-communicable diseases agenda will be needed for the successful implementation of this plan.

Next, the WCO Governing Board held a Strategic Workshop in Maputo, Mozambique 15 June 2014. Here, the Governing Board dissected the successes and unmet challenges from the Strategic Plan 2012-2014, with the intent of giving early direction for the drafting of the next Strategic Plan (2016-2020)

With this in mind, some areas to consider for attention and action may include, but shall not be limited to the following:

Advocacy – Optometry needs to take advantage of its unique position of providing vision health and eye care to the world. Uncorrected Refractive Error (URE) and cataracts (both of which are simply managed) continue to be overwhelmingly the leading causes of avoidable blindness throughout the world. As with other health or disease conditions that have affected the world’s population over the years (i.e. AIDS, Malaria, Ebola, etc.), we must not move on from these important topics until they are better identified and managed. Optometry, in general, and WCO, specifically, needs to advocate on behalf of these patients to governments and other bodies for timely access and appropriate care for these people.

Public Health – Optometry must continue to be relevant in the world of public health. It is imperative that others recognise our unique and important role in this field as well.

Philanthropy – Optometrists and their industry partners, for the most part, enjoy a successful profession and industry. It is our collective obligation to give back to society in both volunteerism and philanthropic donations.

Collaboration with Others (IAPB, BHVI, WHO, Industry, etc.) – WCO is but one player on a large world ‘team’ of vision care providers and advocates. We should foster relationships that already exist and create ones where we have yet to make an impact. As a small organization, we need to be aware of the mandates of the larger groups and keep that in mind when we develop our strategy. Alignment, without compromise, is key.

Good Global Citizens – Good vision is a Human Right. As a result, we need to do everything in our power to make this a reality.

Education – Nothing is static and Optometry is no different. We need to continuously advance the training and standards of the profession to continue to improve eye health and vision globally.

Strategic Global Research – It is important to make sure we use credible research criteria and carefully select projects that both fit our mandate and will be of need or use by others.

Regulation – It is imperative that we continue to uphold the highest ethical standards for both optometry, as well as others, which may provide similar services.

Beginning in the spring of 2015, the WCO began the task of developing a new four-year Strategic Plan to help guide the organization in its vision “of a world where optometry makes high quality eye health and vision care accessible to all people”. While it is understood that this is a monumental task, it is also a necessary one. A draft guideline was presented to the Governing Board and at the “The World Council of Optometry Presidential Forum” during the 1st World Congress of Optometry in Medellin, Colombia 13 August, 2015.

The specific objectives of the Forum were to:

- Identify priority issues for the profession that WCO should work on in the coming 5 years, both globally and across regions
- Identify inter-regional and inter-sectorial partnerships required to strengthen the impact of the profession
- Outline strategies to improve the public perception and recognition of the role of optometry by local communities and governments
- Define the supportive role that the optical industry and research/education bodies could/should play to facilitate the highest impact for the profession
- Define the type of leadership role that WCO is expected to play in support of the profession, and
- Identify approaches to mobilise resources in support of the profession

With these objectives in mind, the participants’ discussion helped to inform and modify the draft Strategic Plan 2016 -2020 which has been outlined in Section 6 of this document. Feedback from the Governing Board, Presidential Forum and the Congress was considered during the next phases of the draft. The updated draft Strategic Plan was then circulated to the Governing Board for its final approval and launch at its meeting in Durban in October 2016.

5. Strategic Parameters

5.1 WCO’s Role in Education

The focus of WCO’s role in education has been to develop resources that will be of benefit in particular to developing countries where optometry does not have a well-established infrastructure. The resources that will continue to be developed over the next five years will include the following -

- WCO has a partnership with the World Continuing Education Alliance to develop online education resources. The aim is to promote this resource to those developing countries without sufficient access to education resources. Access to these resources is often free of charge to participants.
- A review of accreditation models has been undertaken to date and the intention is to develop accreditation resources that will be of benefit to regional associations, governmental agencies and universities to support the development and evaluation of university optometry programs. There are a number of accreditation systems including the Accreditation Council on Optometric Education in North America, European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) accreditation system and the accreditation manual of the Optometric Council of Australia and New Zealand, which help provide a

framework that can be produced for developing countries. WCO believes it has a critical role working with regional associations and universities offering optometry courses, in particular, in Latin America, Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean regions. WCO supports the view that optometry should be a degree-based profession. Also, universities in regions where the profession is practised at a level less than Level 4 should be encouraged to develop courses that enable existing practitioners to expand their skills to achieve, at minimum, Level 4 competencies.

- The Education Committee will consider developing specific curricular elements required to advance practitioners from Level 2 to Level 3 and from Level 3 to Level 4 and eventually to Level 5. The overall benefit is to bridge the gap between current levels of practice and a minimum of Level 4 competencies. Global Optometry Competency Levels 1-4 have now been updated by WCO and it will be a critical role for WCO's Education Committee to proactively promote the use of the Competency Framework for all universities to benchmark their programmes. This enables universities to argue for increased resources to ensure their programmes meet the minimum standards recommended by WCO. Work will continue to develop Level 5 competence standards to reflect the levels of practice undertaken in North America and in other developed countries offering therapeutics as part optometric practice.
- WCO's Fellowship Programme is under review. During the next strategic period, Fellowship funds will focus on supporting WCO's priorities and will give individuals opportunities to participate in WCO's programmatic work. The Committee will continue to explore additional ways in which optometry programs, faculty and optometrists can interact, mentor and otherwise help further the education experience in optometric programs in developing countries.

5.2 WCO'S Role in Legislation, Registration and Standards

Optometry is a healthcare profession that is autonomous, educated, and regulated (licensed/registered), and optometrists are the primary healthcare practitioners of the eye and visual system who provide comprehensive eye and vision care, which includes refraction and dispensing, detection/diagnosis and management of disease in the eye, and the rehabilitation of conditions of the visual system. The focus of WCO's role in the development of Legislation, Regulation and Standards has been to work closely with Regional and National Associations to support the development of regulation. The principles of regulation are to *"assure the quality of professional services in the public interest. The regulation of a professional involves the setting of standards of professional qualifications and practice: the keeping of a Register of qualified persons and the award of titles; determining the conduct of registrants, the investigation of complaints and disciplinary sanctions for professional misconduct"* (UK Interprofessional Group, 2002)

- In particular, WCO has supported the Indian Optometric Association to petition ministries to initiate regulation for the profession, supported the campaign in Mexico to ensure that the profession of optometry is degree-based and has worked with National Associations in France, Moldova, Lebanon, Poland, Mexico, Brazil, Croatia, Peru and Korea and has supported the development of the Eastern Mediterranean Optometry Region.
- WCO continues with the review of the *Global Competency Based Model of Scope of Practice in Optometry* and the development of indicators. The intention is to consider developing Level 5 competences and to continue to articulate the developing international standards in optometric

practice. The Global Optometry Competence standards Levels 1 -4 have provided an international bench-mark for optometry practice.

- A critical new resource has been developed - *Why Optometry? the case for delivering quality, advanced and equitable eye health and vision care for patients.* (WCO, 2015) This is available on the WCO website to support globally advocacy to highlight the scale of avoidable visual impairment and the role of optometry to meet primary health vision needs. It will also provide a resource for Regions and members to use for local advocacy.
- Going forward, WC wishes to continue its support for regional and national associations to ensure the widest adoption of optometry standards within a regulatory framework that supports the interests of both patients and the profession. This would also involve the encouragement of new associations and increased membership in WCO.

5.3 WCO's Role in Public Health

"Why Optometry? the case for delivering quality, advance and equitable eye health and vision care for patients" (WCO, 2015) outlines the need for optometry to be fully engaged with national public health agendas. The challenges of avoidable vision impairment are articulated and optometry's role as a primary care profession is explained.

- WCO sees its role as strengthening partnerships to advance advocacy for vision care to be fully integrated into the public health agenda globally. Since 2006, WCO has been recognised by The World Health Organisation (WHO) as a profession with the appropriate skills to have a profound influence on the provision of comprehensive eye and vision care, which includes refraction and dispensing, detection/diagnosis and management of eye disease.
- WHO/WCO have now entered into the next phase of its collaboration with WHO for the period 2015 - 2017 and the following areas have been identified to support the *Universal Eye Health: Global Action Plan 2014 -2019* (GAP). WCO has committed to the systematic collection of the number of optometrists and their scope of practice around the world and, to support this work, WCO has entered into a Memorandum Of Understanding with BHVI. WCO will also offer specialised technical advice when required by the WHO.
- WCO committed to organising high level policy symposia during the 1st World Congress of Optometry that took place in Medellin, Colombia, the Presidential Forum and supporting the implementation of GAP at regional and national levels through the implementation of WCO's advocacy strategy. The Presidential Forum's objectives were to: identify priorities for the profession; strengthen partnerships; improve public perception and recognition of the role optometry by governments and local communities; define the supportive role that the optical industry and research/education bodies should play; define the WCO's leadership role and identify approaches to mobilise resources in support of the profession and its mandate to provide quality accessible eye care.
- In partnership with BHVI, WCO has supported the development of an Advocacy Toolkit for training trainers. Advocacy remains an important role for WCO to lobby regional and national optometrists' associations and argue for well-funded eye health services, integrated national eye health policies and multi-sector approaches.
- Additionally, as a Board Member of the IAPB, WCO continues to contribute to three IAPB standing committees: Uncorrected Refractive Error, Diabetic Retinopathy and Human Resources, which

facilitate collaborative work with our Ophthalmology colleagues and other health sector professionals to increase access to quality eye health and vision care.

5.4 WCO's Role in Optometric Leadership - Biennial Congresses

- As a membership organization, WCO has over 100 members, 48 national associations and 52 affiliates representing over 200,000 optometrists internationally (NOTE – are these numbers still accurate?). Regional Associations are formally recognised as Trustees on the board of WCO. WCO continues to strive to work collaboratively with the regional bodies and to understand the challenges they face within their region in relation to the delivery of eye health and vision care and to build a relationship with regional WHO offices. WCO proactively encourages all national associations to participate in their regional associations to enable a cohesive voice for patients and for the profession.
- In order to provide opportunities for regional and national associations to present their education and clinical work, WCO partnered with FEDOPTO and ALDOO to co-host the 1st World Congress in Medellin, August 2015. WCO's intention is to run a global congress biennially to harness global optometry's voice for increasing access to patient as a basic human right as well as to empower optometrists with the necessary updates so that they can appropriately meet their mandate.

6. Strategic Plan for 2016 -2020

Theme 1 - Enhance optometric education globally for the benefit of patients and the profession

Objective 1.1 - To continue to develop guidelines and resources for the evaluation of optometric education programmes

WCO will continue the development of guidelines and resources for the evaluation of optometry education programmes for use by institutions, governments and regulatory agencies in countries with limited or no history of formal accreditation of optometry education.

Governing Board members and Education Committee members will present and promote the resource at regional meetings and the World Congress. Workshops may also be arranged at the World Congress, with invitees to include educators, academic leaders and regulators.

Outcome measures will include the posting of the final accreditation document on the WCO website, and feedback on document's relevance and usefulness.

Objective 1.2 - To proactively promote the *A Global Competency-Based Model of Scope of Practice in Optometry* document.

WCO will promote the Global Competency document and encourage educational institutions to benchmark their programmes against the document. Governing Board members and Education Committee members will present and promote the resource at regional meetings and the World Congress. Workshops may also be arranged at the World Congress, with invitees to educators, academic leaders and regulators.

Outcome measures will include feedback on the document's relevance and usefulness.

Objective 1.3 - To proactively promote the *Curricular Support Elements for an Optometry Programme* document

WCO will promote the *Curricular Support Elements for an Optometry Programme* document and encourage educational institutions to benchmark their programmes against the document. Governing Board members and Education Committee members will present and promote the resource at regional meetings and the World Congress. Workshops may also be arranged at the World Congress, with invitees to educators, academic leaders and regulators.

Outcome measures will include feedback on the document's relevance and usefulness.

Objective 1.4 - To provide WCO Fellowships that promote the vision, mission and objectives of WCO

WCO will offer fellowships that promote its vision, mission and objectives. The highest priority for fellowships are innovative projects which result in long-term sustainable results. Areas of priority are education; advocacy; public health; standards; and policy and legislation.

Outcome measures will include the receipt of fellowship reports highlighting impact and posting of these reports on the WCO website.

Objective 1.5 - To engage proactively with the international optometry education community

WCO will engage proactively with the international optometric education community and international health workforce efforts. This range of activities includes, but is not limited to, an educators meeting at the World Congress, and establishing a speakers bureau.

Outcome measures will include increased affiliate membership of WCO, increased educator attendance at the World Congress, increased participation in the WCEA Education Portal.

Objective 1.6 - To expand online education resources

WCO will expand its online education resources in partnership with the World Continuing Education Alliance (WCEA), and explore additional partnerships.

Outcome measures will include increased content, numbers of participants using courses—paid and free, and satisfaction ratings of participants’ ongoing evaluation of course content

Objective 1.7 – To work with member countries/regions to ensure that optometric education is at the highest level possible to ensure quality eye care is available worldwide.

Objective 1.8 – To support the global development of low vision and rehabilitation education is available to assist in ensuring the those with visual impairments receive appropriate rehabilitation services and are not simply identified and treated as blind.

Objective 1.9 – To engage optometric education to focus on providing eye care for vulnerable populations including those who are disabled, young, and unable to access eye care services independently.

Theme 2 - Support the Maintenance and Development of Legislation, Registration and Standards for the benefit of patients and the profession

Objective 2.1 - To continually update and promote the *Why Optometry?* document

WCO will continue to update and promote the *Why Optometry?* document, including creating it as a web-based resource. In addition, a one-page executive summary will be produced and translated into other languages.

Outcome measures will include, annual review, relevant updates, the creation of a web-based resource for member use, and translations of the one-page executive summary.

Objective 2.2 - To promote the development of organised optometry

WCO will promote the development of organised optometry through new associations and new regulatory bodies, targeting regions where the greatest potential exists. WCO will engage with regional and national associations to identify the appropriate support that WCO can provide to develop regulatory frameworks, and to be responsive to their needs.

Outcome measures will include the number of new associations, new regulatory bodies, new WCO members and any regulatory advancements and successes.

Objective 2.3 - To promote the expansion of optometric services

WCO will continue to promote expansion of optometric services to higher levels. This will include support of developing legislative documents and rapid response to time-sensitive legislative needs.

Outcome measures will include the number of countries where the scope expands.

Objective 2.4 - To facilitate the gathering of knowledge of optometric practice across the world

The Scope of Practice questionnaire is a valuable tool for gathering and comparing information from members about the state of optometry across countries. WCO will continue to develop and promote this tool, to become a hub for optometric country data.

Theme 3 - Increase access to quality eye health and vision care by integrating optometry within the global public health community.

Objective 3.1 – To promote the expansion and integration of the role of optometry in the global health work force.

WCO will collect and disseminate data on the global optometric workforce and scope of practice. In particular, the Scope of Practice questionnaire will be revisited and refined and the data disseminated. In addition, WCO will work with BHVI and IAPB on a Global Mapping Study in line with the WHO/IAPB/WCO collaboration plan. The goal is to provide the baseline data for future human resources in optometry to identify the gaps and monitor needs in human resources development.

Outcome measures will include completion and dissemination of these data, with the goal of adding data from at least two new countries annually.

Objective 3.2 - To implement an advocacy training strategy

WCO will support advocacy efforts through training workshops in partnership with national and regional organizations.

Outcome measures will include the number of advocacy workshops at regional meetings and World Congress, training of trainers, training of others, along with workshop evaluations.

Theme 4 - Leadership of the optometric profession globally.

Objective 4.1 - To host the Biennial World Congress of Optometry

WCO will host a Biennial World Congress of Optometry in collaboration with a regional or national organization aimed at educators, leaders and clinicians.

Outcome measures will include increased attendance, participation and satisfaction, financial viability or profitability, generation of new strategic goals, and a communiqué on the state of global optometry.

Objective 4.2 - To host the Biennial WCO President's Forum

WCO will host a President's Forum—a high-level policy symposium engaging optometric leaders from national associations, international organizations, education and industry.

Theme 5 - Partnerships and strategic alliances

Objective 5.1 - To create and sustain strategic alliances

WCO will create and sustain strategic alliances including, but not limited to organisations that share our core values and mission including the World Health Organization, International Agency for Prevention of Blindness, Optometry Giving Sight, Brien Holden Vision Institute, NGOs and not-for-profits organisations.

Outcome measures will include joint actions, memoranda of understanding, and collaborative funding.

Theme 6 - Membership, Sustainability, Communication, Governance

Objective 6.1 - To develop and grow the WCO membership

WCO will develop and grow its membership and work with its regions towards a shared responsibility for membership.

Outcome measures will include an increase in WCO membership across all categories, and increased engagement with all members.

Objective 6.2 - To continue to support the development and expansion of the World Optometry Foundation

Objective 6.3 - To communicate effectively with all our constituents

WCO will develop a comprehensive communication strategy, including social media, updated WCO website, a permanent Congress website, an E-bulletin to promote the work of WCO and its members.

Outcome measures will include frequency of newsletters, “opens” of emails and “follows” on Facebook and Twitter.

Objective 6.4 - To ensure that WCO's governance is effective and compliant

WCO will ensure that its governance regulations are compliant with US regulations.

Outcome measures will include ongoing Risk Analysis Assessments and appropriate governance restructuring as required.

Outcome measures will include, sound financial plans, a clean audit, a World Congress that promotes long-term sustainability, new articles of association/bylaws.