



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

2024

Chief Optometric Advisor Wales Eye Care Digest



Chief Optometric Advisor for
Wales, David O'Sullivan OBE

Dear Colleagues

As we close another busy year, I want to take a moment to thank you for your dedication and hard work during 2023-2024. This has been an important year of transition for the optometry profession in Wales, with significant advancements in the delivery of eye care services. From the collaborative work with ophthalmology and the roll-out of new pathways, to the introduction of key regulations and the establishment of

oversight committees, this year has truly marked a turning point in the evolution of eye health in Wales.

In this edition of *Eye Digest*, we celebrate our collective successes and look forward to the future of optometry in Wales. Together, we are continuing to shape eye care services to be more accessible, comprehensive, and integrated into the broader healthcare system.

Contents

1. 2024: A Landmark Year for Eye Care in Wales
2. The Year in Numbers: A Growing Demand for Eye Care. Record Levels of Primary Eye Care Activity, Good News Stories
3. The Impact of Wales General Ophthalmic Service (WGOS) Pathways on Eye Care
4. Embedding Prevention and Wellbeing: Making Every Contact Count (MECC) Approach
5. Optometry in Wales: A Growing Workforce, A Bright Future
6. Looking Ahead: The Future of Optometry in Wales
7. In Conclusion: A Progressive Path Forward
8. Contact Details and resources

2024: A Landmark Year for Eye Care in Wales

New Regulatory Frameworks

This year, Wales has introduced the **National Health Service (Wales Eye Care Services) (No. 2) Directions 2024** and the **Wales Eye Care Services (Administrative List) (Wales) Directions 2024**, which are aligned with the **NHS (Ophthalmic Services) (Wales) Regulations 2023** and the **NHS (Optical Charges and Payments) (Amendment) (Wales) Regulations 2023**.

These regulations complete the regulatory framework for the **Wales General Ophthalmic Services (WGOS)** pathways 1-5. With these changes,

we are now better positioned to deliver equitable, high-quality eye care across the nation.

The **NHS Wales Eye Health Care Committee**, which oversees the delivery of services across Health Boards, is also a key development. Chaired by Jill Paterson, the Director of Primary Care, Community, and Long-Term Care at Hywel Dda Health Board, this committee will continue to evaluate WGOS pathways and ensure the profession evolves in response to emerging needs.

Good News Stories

The Year in Numbers: A Growing Demand for Eye Care. Record Levels of Primary Eye Care Activity.

The implementation of the new WGOS has led to a record-breaking year for NHS Wales primary eye care services. In 2023-2024, **over 841,000 sight tests** were claimed, marking a **6.6% increase** compared to the previous year. Additionally, **243,000 examinations** were conducted under WGOS 2, reflecting a **15.8% increase** in demand.

Other key statistics include:

- **8,400 low vision assessments** in WGOS 3, a **3.7% increase** from the previous year.
- **101 patients with sight loss** have been certified in primary care, accounting for 29% of all certifications for atrophic Age-related Macular Degeneration performed in Wales (Total n=352). Of those 18% (n=18) were performed as a mobile assessment within a person's own home.

Eye care statistics: April 2023 – March 2024 | GOV.WALES

These figures illustrate the increased access to eye care, particularly in the community setting, and highlight the important role optometrists are playing in managing more complex conditions.

The Certification of Vision Impairment pathway has been particularly welcomed with **Owen Williams, Director of Wales Council of the Blind** saying:

- *“We are delighted that so many patients with bilateral dry AMD have been issued with a Certificate of Vision Impairment on the high street or in their own home. Thanks to an accompanying leaflet, these patients have had faster access to additional support, welfare benefits, financial concessions and services in social care, the third sector, and elsewhere; helping them maintain their independence and wellbeing at a difficult time.”*

The Impact of WGOS Pathways on Eye Care

The latest NHS Wales data shows a **17% increase** in clinical episodes for the first half of 2024-2025, with **591,370 interactions** reported. If this trend continues, we are on track to surpass **1.18 million interactions** by the end of the year, a significant leap from

last year's **1.01 million**. This growth indicates a continued shift towards primary care as the hub for eye health services, with optometrists leading the way in managing eye health and providing enhanced care in the community.

Embedding Prevention and Wellbeing: The MECC Approach

In 2024, we continue to emphasise the importance of **prevention** and **well-being** in eye care. The Welsh Government's focus on prevention as part of its health strategy aligns with the growing emphasis on primary care services as the first line of defence.

As part of this shift, we have embedded the **Making Every Contact Count (MECC)** approach into our WGOS pathways. Through MECC, optometrists and dispensing opticians are encouraged to use every patient interaction

as an opportunity to promote healthy lifestyle choices, prevent disease, and support mental well-being.

MECC empowers professionals to offer advice and guidance on issues like healthy eating, smoking cessation, exercise, and mental health – all of which can have a profound impact on patients' long-term health and quality of life. Each contact is a chance to make a difference, and it is inspiring to see so many of you embracing this approach.

Optometry in Wales: A Growing Workforce, A Bright Future

GOC Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2024 (GOC Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2024 | GeneralOpticalCouncil)

Satisfaction in the Profession

Wales continues to see higher job satisfaction rates. This is largely due to the expansion of clinical services and the opportunity to deliver a wider range of enhanced services through the WGOS pathways. Optometrists with advanced qualifications and those engaged in delivering enhanced care are finding their work more fulfilling and rewarding. Wales is diverging from national trends in the UK, which show an increase in dissatisfaction among optometrists.

This trend points to the unique position Wales is in, to attract and retain skilled professionals, and it highlights the positive impact that working at the top of your clinical licence can have on job satisfaction. In a profession facing increasing pressures, the ability to work to full scope and to have a direct impact on patient care is something to be celebrated.

Delivering rewarding and interesting work. Satisfaction was higher amongst respondents with additional qualifications and those involved in the delivery of enhanced services. Both these groups, as well as those who worked in a hospital setting, were more likely to indicate that they felt satisfied because their work is rewarding and interesting.

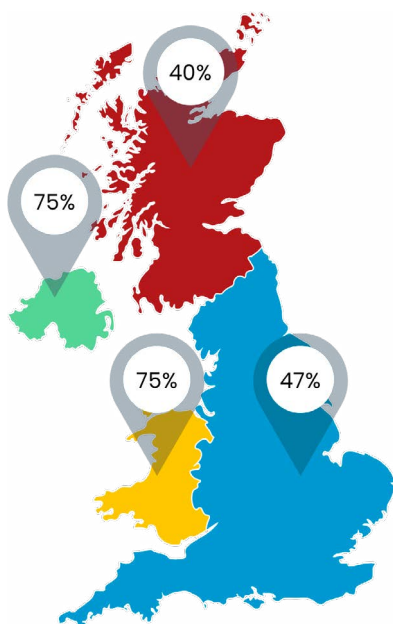
Delivery of enhanced eye care services is far more common in Wales and Northern Ireland

Respondents in Wales and Northern Ireland were far more likely to be involved in the delivery of enhanced eye care services when compared with those in England and Scotland.

Within England, a larger proportion of those based in the North (56%) were involved in the delivery of enhanced eye care services when compared with the rest of the country.

Figure 19 – Involved in the delivery of enhanced services by UK nation

Base: England (3,026); Wales (193); Scotland (387); Northern Ireland (132)



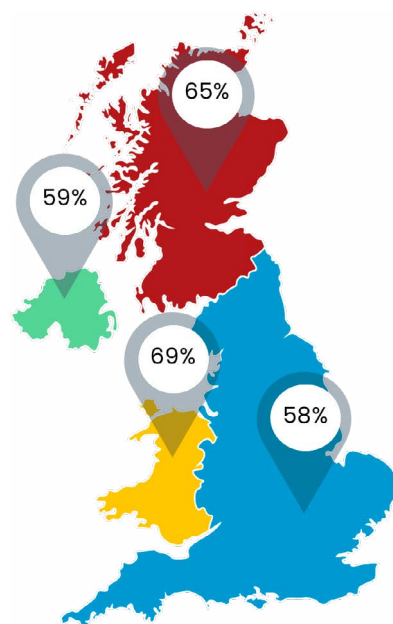
Better opportunities to develop in Wales and Scotland

Those who worked in Wales, and to a lesser extent in Scotland, were more likely to agree with all statements about development opportunities.

The map below shows the combined level of agreement across all four statements, highlighting that those who worked in England and Northern Ireland were less likely to agree in comparison.

Figure 89 – Agreement with statements about development opportunities at work by UK nation

Base: England (3,026); Wales (193); Scotland (387); Northern Ireland (132)



Looking Ahead: The Future of Optometry in Wales

With over 2,000 appointments per month already being provided under the **WGOS 5** pathway, and the rollout of **WGOS 4** (Glaucoma and Medical Retina pathways) underway, the future of optometry in Wales is bright. The appointment of **Jeremy Miles** as the new Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care signals a renewed commitment to further accelerating the transformation of eye care services. His challenge to move **“further and faster”** underscores the urgency of delivering eye health services close to home and strengthening the role of optometrists in managing more complex conditions.

As the profession continues to grow and evolve, the challenge for practices will be to ensure they have the appropriate workforce in place to meet increasing demand. This is an exciting time for optometry in Wales, and the opportunities for professional growth, development, and patient impact have never been greater.

The General Optical Council (GOC) workforce and perception survey again shows the trends in Wales moving this forward:



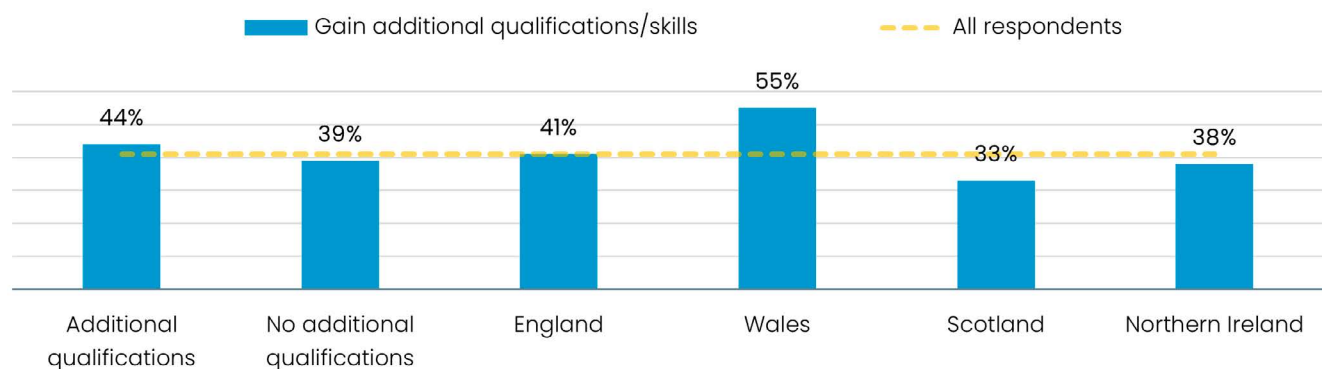
The Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care, Jeremy Miles, delivering the keynote speech at our Annual Eye Care Conference 2024

More interest in developing skills from those who already have additional qualifications, particularly in Wales

Respondents who indicated that they already had additional qualifications were more likely to plan to gain more. Furthermore, respondents based in Wales were more likely to plan to gain additional qualifications or skills when compared with the rest of the UK, where a greater proportion of respondents in Wales already have additional qualifications.

Figure 70 – Plan to gain additional qualifications/skills by additional qualifications and UK nation

Base: Additional qualifications (1,356); No additional qualifications (2,693); England (3,026); Wales (193); Scotland (387); Northern Ireland (132)



In Conclusion: A Progressive Path Forward

The last 12 months have been transformative, and the journey towards delivering comprehensive, accessible, and high-quality eye care is underway across the whole eye care pathway. We are on the cusp of a new era for optometry in Wales, where optometrists and dispensing opticians are empowered to work at the top of their clinical licence and provide care that is both impactful and rewarding.

Thank you once again for your dedication, your expertise, and your commitment to improving eye care across Wales. Let us continue to embrace the opportunities ahead, working together to provide exceptional primary eye care services that will benefit the people of Wales for generations to come.

David O'Sullivan OBE,
Chief Optometric Advisor for Wales

Contact details and resources

Welsh Government

Feedback and items for including in the next edition of the Eye digest:
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Please contact your local health board to speak to your local optometric advisers and other primary care contacts:

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Useful links

The National Health Service (Ophthalmic Services) (Wales) Regulations 2023 (legislation.gov.uk)

The National Health Service (Wales Eye Care Services) (Wales) (No. 2) Directions 2024
<https://www.gov.wales/national-health-service-wales-eye-care-services-wales-no-2-directions-2024>

Optometry: delivering 'A Healthier Wales' 2021 to 2031 | GOV.WALES

NHS Wales eye health care: future approach for optometry services | GOV.WALES

Eye care statistics: April 2023 to March 2024 [HTML] | GOV.WALES

GOC Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2024 (GOC Registrant Workforce and Perceptions Survey 2024 | GeneralOpticalCouncil)