



**THE ASSOCIATION OF
OPTOMETRISTS IRELAND**
MEMBERSHIP BOOKLET

Supporting our Optometrists, Promoting our Profession

The Association of Optometrists Ireland (AOI) is the professional representative body for Optometrists in Ireland

94% of registered Optometrists in Ireland and a large number Optometrists registered overseas, enjoy AOI membership. The AOI is comprised of individual Optometrist members each of whom has an equal voice in running it and an equal vote.

Our professional affixes M.A.O.I. and F.A.O.I. are the publicly recognised indicators of our professionalism both nationally and internationally.

The AOI is a professional association which is a collection of members who care about our profession and wish to see it protected, progress and prosper, both for our benefit and also for the benefit of the public.

As with all professional bodies, the membership elects a leadership which is mandated to speak in a coherent voice on behalf of the profession and its members to the government, public and fellow professional bodies.



The AOI also works to enhance the role of our profession by identifying and encouraging standards of best practice for the benefit of patients.

MISSION STATEMENT - PHILOSOPHY ...

Optometrists are primary level healthcare professionals. The vast majority of eye examinations are provided by Optometrists through approximately 400 practice locations around the country.

These practices are the gatekeepers of eye health and Optometrists are the first port of call for most people experiencing visual or ocular-health problems.

The AOI believes that supporting our members in the practice of high clinical standards engenders public and government confidence and develops respect for Optometry. This in turn promotes the growth of the profession and the professionals engaged in its practice.



WHAT IS OUR ROLE?

Representation

The AOI is the recognised voice of the profession with Government bodies. This is because the AOI represents Optometrists as individual professionals rather than business entities. The AOI speaks for all Optometrists, regardless of their differing working circumstances. We seek to obtain what is best for the profession as a whole.

Protection

The AOI works to ensure that Optometrists have a strong collective voice to protect the profession against competing interests which do not serve our goals. Over the years, the AOI has fought much adversity in order to protect both the profession and public.

Support

The AOI is fully committed to supporting every member on an individual needs basis. The National office is open Monday to Friday, providing ongoing clinical, professional and personal support to members.

This includes the services of an Optometric Advisor who

is an experienced practicing Optometrist and conversant with all issues relating to the profession and the public.

The AOI also provides an information service to the public on queries relating to the profession. We mediate and provide support to our membership in cases where complaints arise.

The advent of regulation under CORU will see modern fitness to practice legislation apply to Optometry. The Association will provide confidential support and advice to any member who becomes subject to a fitness to practice complaint.

Education

Professions are founded on education and knowledge and progress through Continuous Professional Development (CPD). The AOI CPD programme was adopted to ensure that all our membership have access to high quality up to date CPD to maintain high professional standards of Optometry in Ireland.

The AOI seeks to lead the way in educating Irish Optometrists into the future. As the profession enters

CORU this access to and support for CPD is crucially important.

The AOI also liaises with the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) to ensure that those graduating into the profession are of the highest calibre and can practice with confidence within Ireland and internationally.

The AOI implements the Professional Qualifying Examinations which are required by the regulator CORU (www.coru.ie) for registration. All successful candidates have demonstrated competency to practice Optometry independently and to high professional standards.

Research and Guidance

The AOI monitors development of the profession internationally. We research new standards and provide best practice guidelines designed to protect members and patients.

Under the new CORU environment, Irish Optometrists enjoy a wider scope of practice and professional autonomy. The AOI was instrumental in ensuring the abolition of section 48 of the 1956 Opticians Act which limited our scope of practice.

To support this, the AOI develops guidelines and provides

relevant CPD to support our membership in this new and broadened clinical environment.

Communications

Optometrists who are Association members benefit from regular communication from the AOI. This is delivered by text, email, the members' website and by post. These communications ensure that our members are up to date on current issues, professional and political affairs, Council activities and upcoming events.

Connectivity

Over many years the AOI has built up valuable relationships with many organisations with whom we interact for the benefit of our profession. Some of these organisation have AOI representatives. Examples include, the World Council of Optometry (WCO), the European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO), the Association of Optometric Practitioners (AOP, UK), the National Vision Coalition, the Irish College of Ophthalmologists (ICO), FODO and many others.

These connections allow networking opportunities to ensure that the AOI is up to date with all matters, both domestically and internationally, relating to eye care.

MEMBER SERVICES

Leadership and Management

The AOI Council and Executive, and their sub-Committees, meet regularly to monitor developments and to plan ahead. These are comprised of member volunteers who work in conjunction with the AOI office to implement plans and policies.

AOI Office

The Association employs a number of staff at its National office to implement Council decisions, provide support to members, organise events, communicate with the membership and provide administrative services.

The staff comprises a Chief Executive Officer, Optometric Advisor, Administration Manager, Finance Officer and Administration Officer.

Flexible Membership Options

Various membership categories are available to members as their mode of practice varies. Subscription payments can be made annually, half-yearly, quarterly or monthly.



Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII)

Professional Indemnity Insurance (PII) is an imperative for a practising Optometrist. For those who are not covered by their employer's scheme the AOI has a Group Scheme which is competitively priced compared to individual policies.

It is a personal policy for the member and covers any work s/he does in Ireland or the UK. Even if your employer pays your premium it is still YOUR policy, you are not relying on a policy in the name of your employer where they may have some say in dealing with claims. The PII broker is available to provide advice in the event of a claim, or potential claim.

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

CPD has become the norm for professions as technology changes, information expands and standards improve.



The AOI implements a mandatory CPD programme to encourage members to participate in ongoing education. We organise CPD events and advertise and support events by other providers. We also supply many FREE CPD events for members.

Radharc Journal

Our bi-annual Journal includes articles of interest and three free CPD articles. It is delivered free to members.

Practice Insurance

There can be considerable variations in the cost of practice insurance—fire, flood, theft and public liability etc.. The AOI has a relationship with a broker who specialises in such insurance and provides very competitive cover and premiums. (This cover is separate from Professional Indemnity Insurance.)

Permanent Health Insurance

Permanent Health Insurance (PHI) policies pay an income to the insured while they are unable to work (certified). Most policies require the insured to be out of work for six weeks before the policy comes into effect. An AOI policy provides day-one cover.

Life & Pensions Services

We have established a relationship with a professional Irish brokerage for advice and services to AOI members for all financial services under this heading.

Health Care Plan

Our Health Care Plan provides hospital and medical cover at affordable levels which are selected by the insured person. This is provided through our partner organisation HMCA.

Website

The AOI website provides information to the public and also includes a password protected members' area which includes:

- members' individual CPD records and points total, updated weekly.
- member news
- jobs forum for those seeking employment, including locums, and those seeking staff
- sale of equipment and practices
- upcoming CPD events
- on-line CPD modules
- member Forum for exchange of views and information.

Free Legal Helpline

A free Legal Helpline is available to members. Advice can be obtained on both professional and personal issues, including contract law, employment law etc. In the past year calls were dealt with on taxation, injuries, supply and sale of goods, employment law and other topics.

Benevolent Fund

The AOI Benevolent Fund is available for cases of hardship among members. They can apply on their own behalf, or on behalf of others, in complete confidence for support in the event of illness, incapacity or other reasons.

Fitness to Practice Support

With the advent of regulation by CORU in late 2015 members will come under fitness to practice legislation. The AOI will be available to provide confidential support to members if they find themselves the subject of complaints or under investigation by the regulator.

Expert witness service

We provide an expert witness service for members, if sought. This is only applicable to cases where a member is the accused person in the case, i.e. defence only.

GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURES

The AOI is a non-profit company limited by guarantee.

The AOI is managed by a Council of 16 elected members, including four regional representatives.

Sub-Committees perform much of the day to day governance of core functions such as Professional Services, Continuing Professional Development and PQE etc..

AOI's National office provides general administration and support services including financial management.

An AGM is held annually which is the ultimate decision-making forum.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES (with various appropriate subscription fees.)



FREE MEMBERSHIP FOR NEW GRADUATES

FULL MEMBERSHIP FOR FULL-TIME OPTOMETRISTS

SENIOR MEMBERSHIP FOR LONG-SERVING MEMBERS

NEWLY-QUALIFIED MEMBERS YEAR ONE IS FREE, YEAR TWO IS DISCOUNTED

NON-PRACTISING MEMBERSHIP TO FACILITATE ONGOING CONNECTION WITH THE PROFESSION

NON-RESIDENT MEMBERSHIP FOR EMIGRANTS IN PRACTICE WHO WISH TO KEEP IN TOUCH WITH DEVELOPMENTS AT HOME

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