



## MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

*Royal College of Ophthalmologists*

*British Orthoptic Society*

*Ophthalmic Nurses Forum of RCN*

*Society for Clinical Electrophysiology of Vision*

*Association of British Dispensing Opticians*

*National Association of Theatre Nurses*

*Association of Operating Department Practitioners*

*British Association of Retinal Screeners*

*British Ophthalmic Photographers Association*

*United Kingdom and Ireland Society of Cataract and Refractive Surgeons*

*College of Optometrists*

*Ophthalmic Technicians Network*

*UK Ophthalmic Pharmacists Group*

*Orbital Prosthetists*

*Vision 2020 UK*

## Correspondence

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## INTRODUCING THE ASSOCIATION OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS IN OPHTHALMOLOGY - AHPO

### WHAT IS AHPO?

AHPO is an organisation that represents the different professions that work in ophthalmology. It seeks to encourage and promote the training and professional

development of ophthalmic allied health professionals and supporting staff, to agree common standards of practice where different professions undertake the same work, and

to promote the profile and contributions of ophthalmic allied professionals to the public at large.

### THE HISTORY OF AHPO

AHPO has come into existence as a result of an initiative of the Royal College of Ophthalmologists. In 1999 the College established the "Ophthalmic Skills Sub-Committee" to consider and recommend a programme for the education and training of ophthalmic support workers.

The sub-committee recommended a vocational training programme, and was then included in the Healthcare Science Project to develop National Occupational Standards for the healthcare science sector of the NHS workforce. In 2002 the sub-committee formed the

Ophthalmic Multiprofessional Group, to incorporate in a more formal way all the different professional groups involved in or affected by its work. This group, renamed AHPO, is being established as a company limited by guarantee, and is seeking charitable status.

### WHAT WILL AHPO DO?

AHPO will continue the work of developing National Occupational Standards for ophthalmic skilled procedures and, with other relevant bodies, will develop the procedures to assess competence against these standards. A range of ophthalmic and vision science standards have now been written, and piloting of the vocational qualification is

planned to commence in September of this year.

AHPO will develop and provide courses and training for vocational qualifications with NHS University and other academic institutions. A BSc/ MSc course in Ophthalmic Science, Technology and Care is planned for 2004. The vocational qualification will be an essential part of this course and credits will be given to

students who have attained the vocational qualification. AHPO is establishing a faculty that will produce a standard textbook/study guide, and other textbooks and course materials. AHPO is seeking to take a leading role in agreeing standards and providing courses for Continuing Professional Development in areas of common professional practice.

### WHAT AHPO WILL NOT DO

AHPO will not be concerned with issues of professional registration, codes of conduct and disciplinary procedures. This is the remit of the professional organisations and their registration bodies such as NMC, HPC and GMC.

### THE OBJECTS OF AHPO

- to promote the practice, education, training and research in the field of ophthalmology and vision science
- to promote high standards of care and treatment of patients with disease or disability affecting the eyes or vision
- to advance public education in ophthalmology and vision science
- to represent the needs and interests of ophthalmology and vision science in the provision and advancement of health care throughout the United Kingdom

## MAKING THE CHANGE – A STRATEGY FOR PROFESSIONS IN HEALTH CARE SCIENCE [HCS]

*Ophthalmic Medical Technical Officers (MTOs) and clinical scientists are a small part of the ophthalmic workforce, but if we are to meet the ever-increasing demands for ophthalmic services their numbers and career prospects must improve. In this article, Anne Burge, Service Manager Neurophysiology, City Hospital, Birmingham, explains how the Healthcare Science workforce is being transformed. Ophthalmic scientific and technical staff will only benefit from these developments if they, too, form a professional organisation, and a meeting on 19th May was held for this purpose.*

The NHS Plan covers a wide remit but its major thrust is for investment and reform to ensure that the NHS becomes more patient centred with faster access of essential services. One of the ways it is seeking to achieve this is through new ways of working of healthcare staff. There are approximately 40,000 staff in healthcare science, and even though they make up only small portion of the workforce [4%] their contribution is seen as crucial. Professionals working within HCS provide a wide range of services which impact upon diagnosis and treatment of patients and they are one of the key elements required to achieve many of the NHS targets, e.g., improving services for patients with cancer and coronary heart disease, implementation of the digital hearing aid program, to mention a few.

Making the Change ([www.doh.gov.uk/makingthechange/index.htm](http://www.doh.gov.uk/makingthechange/index.htm)) is a document that seeks to raise the profile of the diverse groups involved - engineers, technicians and scientists. Bringing them together under the generic title of Health Care Scientists will, it is proposed, create a cohesive group that will be recognised in line with other Health Care Professionals - Doctors, Nurses and Allied Health Professionals.

### ***Making the Change seeks to address the following issues for the HCS workforce:***

- Ensure planning for HCS is integrated with other staff groups
- Tackle recruitment and retention issues
- Promote a diverse workforce
- Introduce National Occupational Standards framework
- Modernise education and training
- Promote state registration for unregulated HCS
- Ensure access to Continuous Professional Development and Life Long Learning
- Raise profile of Healthcare Scientists Careers

### ***Statutory Regulation of Practice***

The requirement for State registration is primarily to safeguard the public. Only practitioners who fulfil the following criteria need consider whether they should become registered:-

- Involved in at least one of the following criteria:
  - invasive procedures
  - clinical intervention with the potential for harm
  - exercise of judgement by unsupervised professionals which can substantially impact on patient health or welfare

- In general, practitioners need to be practicing autonomously, making independent judgements on treatment and taking responsibility for their actions.

The new Health Professions Council [HPC] will consider regulating professions who meet these criteria and can demonstrate that they are already self regulating. Potential new groups are then required to petition showing that they

- fulfil the above criteria and
- can demonstrate they meet the other 10 points the HPC consider necessary. Full details available on the HPC website at [www.hpc-uk.org](http://www.hpc-uk.org)

The Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists (RCCP) was formed for the purpose of presenting a petition, which would be multi disciplinary in nature, covering Audiology, Cardiology, Hearing Therapy, GI Physiology, Neurophysiology and Respiratory Physiology and plan to do so at the earliest opportunity. RCCP have held meetings with other 'potential' groups who might share common criteria of entry with the current disciplines it represents, including representatives from Ophthalmology and Vision Science. More details about RCCP can be viewed on the website - [www.rccp.co.uk](http://www.rccp.co.uk)

### ***Agenda for Change***

UK Health Departments and staff organisations have now concluded negotiations on a package of proposals for a new pay system in the NHS that will go forward for wider consideration. If accepted this will for the first time bring all NHS staff, with the exception of doctors and dentists, onto a new pay spine. Further information about Agenda for Change, Job Evaluations and the Knowledge and Skills Frameworks can be found at [www.doh.gov.uk/agendaforchange](http://www.doh.gov.uk/agendaforchange)

These developments are all very important for the Healthcare Science workforce. Clearly the onus, as with many other aspects of development within the NHS, is on the professionals. If we fail to take this opportunity it is highly unlikely anything will change or at least not at the speed we would like.

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### ***Anne Burge***

*Service Manager Neurophysiology, City Hospital, Birmingham  
Honorary Chairperson, Registration Council for Clinical Physiologists*

## WHAT ARE NATIONAL OCCUPATIONAL STANDARDS AND NATIONAL VOCATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS?

There are plenty of misconceptions about occupational standards and vocational qualifications. In this brief article we will try to dispel a few of them.

National Occupational Standards (NOS) are statements that describe the processes and knowledge required to undertake work in an industrial or occupational sector. In effect, they are a description of what represents good practice. They are, to a lesser or greater extent, designed to be generic, so that they can encompass the wide range of disciplines and specialities found in industries and occupations. They form the basis for assessment of competence in the workplace but can be an extremely flexible tool that can be used for more than just the development of qualifications. Purposes range from appraisals, job descriptions, standard operating procedures, learning objectives, and principles of behaviour.

Occupational standards define the outcomes of an activity, rather than the methods that should be used to achieve that outcome. They are not a prescriptive methodology for how things should be done – it is up to practitioners to decide what methods should be used. What is important is that during any assessment of competence, practitioners should be able to provide a rationale for their decisions. Many of the competences described in standards are concerned with selecting the most appropriate options depending on the factors that are important at the time.

Occupational standards and vocational qualifications are not training programmes. Standards do not specify the type of training and development activities that should be undertaken (e.g., courses, work experience, self-study) and can therefore be used to validate the competence of practitioners with different professional and educational backgrounds who are performing the same work.

National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) are a national system of qualifications awarded for achievement of competence assessed against defined groups of occupational standards in specific occupational areas. They take as their starting point the question, "What skills and knowledge do particular occupational areas need?" They are then concerned with measuring and accrediting whether someone can actually perform competently within that occupational area. Unlike previous vocational qualifications, they are not linked to specific training courses or programmes of study, i.e., they are based on outcomes, not on inputs.

Most people are familiar with or have at least heard of the different levels of NVQ's. How are these levels defined?

- Level 1:** Competence in the performance of a range of varied work activities, most of which may be routine and predictable.
- Level 2:** Competence in a significant range of varied work activities, performed in a variety of contexts. Some of the activities are complex or non-routine, and there is some individual responsibility or autonomy. Collaboration with others, perhaps through membership of a workgroup or team, may often be a requirement.
- Level 3:** Competence in a broad range of varied work activities performed in a wide variety of contexts, most of which are complex and non-routine. There is considerable responsibility and autonomy, and control and guidance of others is often involved.
- Level 4:** Competence in a wide variety of contexts and with a substantial degree of personal responsibility and

autonomy. Responsibility for the work of others and the allocation of resources is often present.

- Level 5:** Competence which involves the application of a significant range of fundamental principles and complex techniques across a wide and often unpredictable variety of contexts. Very substantial personal autonomy, and often significant responsibility for the work of others and for the allocation of significant resources feature strongly, as do personal accountabilities for analysis and diagnosis, design, planning, execution and evaluation.

### *In summary, National Vocational Qualifications are:*

- based on an analysis of work roles in terms of what functions need to be performed
- led by employers and industry-specific professional bodies - not by 'education'
- focus on competence and not whether someone is as good as or better than someone else
- define five different levels of competence
- concentrate on assessment as opposed to delivery.

### *Assessment of competence*

The procedure for assessment of competence is developed with the occupational standards. Those doing the assessment must also be trained and accredited as competent to assess. The standard of assessments within the workplace must be verified, and there is a further process of external verification.

Competent practitioners must have both knowledge and skill, and there are limitations on the assessment of knowledge in the context of a one to one assessment in the workplace.

Electronically delivered MCQ examinations of the knowledge base is one possibility that AHPO is pursuing which would also facilitate the granting of accreditation for an academic qualification.

### *NOS for Ophthalmic and Vision Science*

Twelve Ophthalmic and Vision Science standards have now been written covering most aspects of ophthalmic work except ophthalmic theatre and visual rehabilitation. The NHS University will be an awarding body, and pilots of the assessment procedures are planned to commence in September this year. Whether the NHSU will award qualifications as NVQs or in some other form is as yet unclear, but it is important to understand that there will not be an either/or approach to academic and vocational qualifications. All staff will be required to demonstrate their competence, but staff that wish to pursue an academic qualification will be credited with the knowledge required for the competence assessment, and will need to undertake additional work to achieve the academic qualification.

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*Rosalind Harrison*

*Consultant Ophthalmologist, Queen's Hospital, Burton on Trent  
Chairperson, Association of Health Professions in Ophthalmology*

## Do you want to contribute to the work of AHPO?

- Could your department be a pilot site for implementing the occupational standards?
- Are you interested in writing textbooks, course materials and MCQs? If so, you can apply to join the Faculty of AHPO
- If you have any opinions or suggestions, write to The Editor, AHPO Newsletter, PO Box 598, Stockton on Tees, TS20 1WY

## Ophthalmic Scientific and Technical Personnel

*Are you interested in becoming a member of a newly established association for Ophthalmic Scientific and Technical Personnel?*

Please fax the form to:

**01642 651208**

to go on the mailing list or email:

**omg@onyxnet.co.uk**

for further information.

*Please add my details to the Ophthalmic Technicians Network mailing list:*

Name .....

Address .....

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.....

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Tel number .....

Email .....

Job Title .....

Base Hospital .....

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## FUTURE EVENTS

### *Ophthalmic Technical Training in the US*

1 pm – 2 pm

Tuesday, 20th May

International Convention Centre  
Birmingham

**Speaker:**

**Dr Lynn Anderson,**  
*Chief Executive, JCAHPO*

JCAHPO, the Joint Commission on Allied Health Personnel in Ophthalmology, is the US organisation responsible for the certification of ophthalmic assistants, technicians and technologists. There are about 15,000 certified ophthalmic technical personnel in the US, and JCAHPO, which has been in existence for more than 30 years, has a wealth of experience in all aspects of education and training.

## AHPO

### Meeting to launch the Ophthalmic Vocational Qualification

Wednesday 17 September, Chester

To register your interest in attending this meeting, please contact AHPO, PO Box 598, Stockton on Tees, TS20 1WY

Or email: [omg@onyxnet.co.uk](mailto:omg@onyxnet.co.uk)

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We will soon be putting up a website at ...

[www.ahpo.org](http://www.ahpo.org)

