



Qualifications across the branch

A practice manager reveals how a WCSM qualification has boosted the confidence of his staff and helped to streamline the running of the business. **Graham Jones** reports

For nearly a century, the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers (WCSM) ran qualifying examinations for opticians. You can still see the letters FSMC or SMC (Disp) in the windows of some high-street practices today.

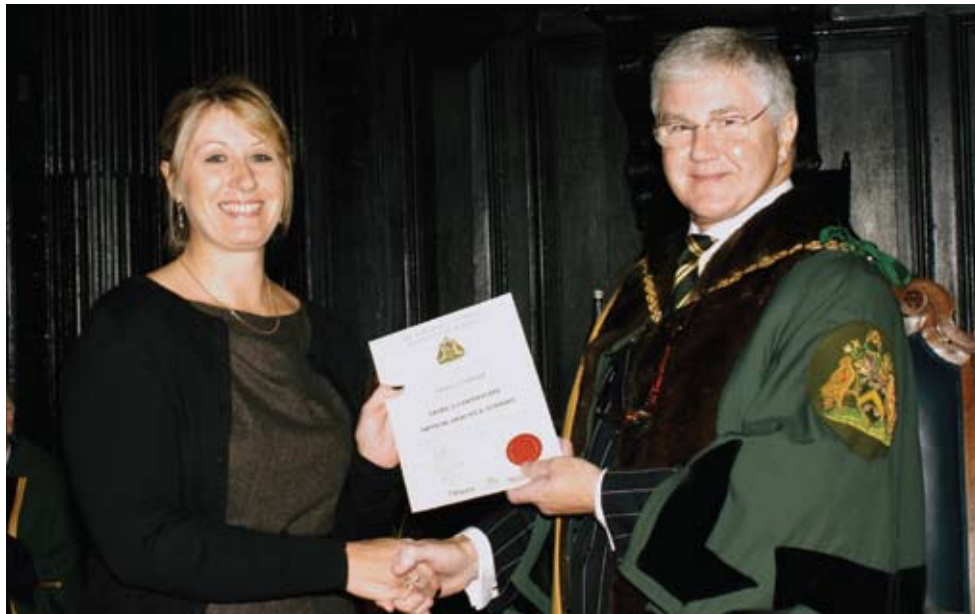
But over the past three decades, having first helped to create the College of Optometrists (in 1980) and ABDO (in 1986), the WCSM has shifted the focus of its training programmes and examinations towards the 'non-regulated' side of optics.

Now, across the UK, around 2,500 practice managers, supervisors, assistants, technicians and receptionists hold a WCSM qualification. For all these people, the decision to invest time and energy in becoming trained and taking examinations was entirely optional (unlike optometrists and dispensing opticians, of course). So why do they do it?

Roger Davies is the practice manager of David Wood Opticians. It's an independent practice in Burnham-on-Crouch, an Essex coastal town at the extremities of the London commuter belt. Last year two of Davies's staff, Denise Cridland and Charlotte Robinson, were awarded the WCSM's Level 2 Certificate in Optical Practice Support (OPS).

'I'm a big fan of what the course has achieved for the practice,' says Davies, a qualified dispensing optician. 'We took the decision to enrol when I became aware that Denise and Charlotte were beginning to flounder on the front desk. They could and should have been able to do so much more.'

'For example, a situation had developed where basic queries were always referred to me or another dispensing optician. What the WCSM course did was give Denise and Charlotte the confidence to handle



Denise Cridland is awarded the Level 2 Certificate in Optical Practice Support by the master of the WCSM, Professor John Marshall

routine questions along with many other aspects of the business on their own. This has been good for them, good for our clients and good for the DOs, who can devote more time to dispensing and making money.'

Career path

Level 2 OPS is a tutor-supported, distance-learning course designed for receptionists and optical assistants. The Level 3 version is targeted at senior assistants and supervisors, and can be a stepping stone to becoming a dispensing optician. There are many more qualifications in the WCSM's portfolio, ranging from the short and sharp Level 2 Award in Optical Screening (for staff who assist the

optometrist with screening tasks) to the two-year Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians (regarded by many within the optical industry as the gold standard. There is also a six-month fast-track version of this course for qualified dispensing opticians).

As well as streamlining the running of the practice, Davies thinks qualifications help to improve everyone's attitude. 'It's nice to be able to say that everybody here has some sort of qualification, and I know that Denise is considering enrolling on the Level 3 OPS course. Actually, we're all incredibly proud of Denise as she won last year's prize for getting the highest marks in the Level 2 examination.'

Employers may also be tempted by the money being handed out by the government for certain kinds of training. The WCSM's Level 2 Diploma in Optical Retail Skills, for example, can be taken as a stand-alone qualification or as part of the Intermediate Level Apprenticeship in Health (Optical Retail), for which full funding is available for eligible learners.

The list of examinations offered by the WCSM for 2012/13 is shown in Table 1. Enrolment for courses beginning in September will be closing soon; anyone interested should contact the WCSM urgently on 020 7236 2932 or at www.spectaclemakers.com

TABLE 1

WCSM examinations for 2012/13

- Level 2 Award in Optical Screening
- Level 2 Award in Glazing Spectacles
- Level 3 Award in Rimless Glazing
- Level 2 Certificate in Optical Customer Service
- Level 2 Certificate in Optical Production Processes
- Level 2 Certificate in Optical Practice Support
- Level 3 Certificate in Optical Practice Support
- Level 2 Diploma in Optical Retail Skills
- Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians