



There's more to WSCM courses than you might think, says **Graham Jones**

Keep on training

Things change fast in optics, observes Keith Sheers, founder and managing director of Optisoft. Sheers is an IT person, not an optician, but he knows all about change: his career in computers began just as IBM was introducing the world to its first PC.

In 1988, his brother – who is an optician – asked him to recommend a computer system he could use within his practice. 'I had a good look, but came to the conclusion there was nothing suitable on the market.' Optisoft was launched the following year; today, the company's ophthalmic practice management software is used by one in five independents.

In 2011 Sheers enrolled on the Level 2 Certificate in Optical Customer Service (OCS), a nine-month distance learning course from the Worshipful Company of Spectacle Makers (WSCM).

'I thought it might be a useful qualification for some of my staff to have,' he explains. 'But I wanted to be sure that it was the right thing for the company, so I decided to try it myself first. Having been involved with optics for so many years, I didn't expect to learn a great deal, but it's benefited me in lots of areas.'

'Firstly, it's filled gaps in my knowledge about how a practice works. It's shown me elements of the business that I hadn't seen before, and it's improved my understanding of the practice workflow. Secondly, it's taught me more about different conditions – from short-sightedness and long-sightedness to diabetes and so on – and how they affect the patient's life.'



Keith Sheers: giving staff the skills they need in a fast changing sector

Thirdly, on the lens side, I now know things I didn't know before: lenticular and aspheric lenses, for example, and things like weight issues.'

Accredited awards

The WSCM was founded in 1629 to promote assistance to the visually impaired. One of the principal ways it fulfils its mission in the 21st century is through its training programmes and examinations for 'non-professionals', such as practice managers and optical assistants. The WSCM is an accredited awarding body in all four countries of the UK, and its awards, certificates and diplomas form part of the National Qualifications Framework (and its equivalent in Scotland).

Sheers has been quick to apply what he's learned. 'One part of the OCS course covered facial shapes. As a result of this we changed the design of a module in our software called Frames on Faces, which lets patients see themselves on screen wearing different frames. It's saved us time, and it's given

● Level 2 Certificate in Optical Customer Service

Who it's for: customer-facing staff in optical practices, spectacle manufacturers, prescription houses, frame suppliers and contact lens manufacturers.

Examinations: held a number of times a year; can be taken by e-assessment or as a written paper.

Funding: government support is often available for WSCM courses; Optisoft received partial funding for its two members of staff currently on the OCS course.

Details: www.spectaclemakers.com

● Other WSCM qualifications

- Level 2 Award in Optical Screening
- Level 2 Award in Glazing Spectacles
- Level 2 Certificate in Optical Practice Support
- Level 2 Certificate in Optical Customer Service
- Level 2 Certificate in Optical Production Processes
- Level 2 Diploma in Optical Retail Skills
- Level 3 Award in Rimless Glazing
- Level 3 Certificate in Optical Practice Support
- Level 4 Diploma for Optical Technicians
- Level 5 Certificate in Optical Care (Scotland)
- Level 7 Certificate in Optical Care (Scotland)

us extra functionality.'

As its name makes clear, however, the focus of the course is on customer service. Sheers says this is the main reason why he has encouraged other members of his team to enrol.

'The sections on interpersonal skills, on handling customers and dealing with complaints would be beneficial to anyone in any business,' he notes. 'But to have all of that within an optical context, with specific examples from retail optics, it's invaluable.'

'Our head developer and our trainer have just started the course. Eventually, I'd like everyone here to do it. I see it as a process of rounding off my staff, of giving them the skills and knowledge they need in a sector that is always changing and moving forward.' ●

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