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Ysgrifennydd y Cabinet dros Iechyd a Gofal Cymdeithasol
Cabinet Secretary for Health and Social Care



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

Peter Fox MS
Chair
Health and Social Care Committee

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24 June 2025

Dear Peter,

I am writing to provide the committee with additional information following the evidence session on 5 June about eye care. The committee asked for:

1. Update on timescale re findings of the review by the Royal College of Ophthalmologists, following 'safety concerns regarding age related macular degeneration' in Cardiff and Vale University Health Board.

Cardiff and the Vale University Health Board has not yet received the final report from the Royal College of Ophthalmologists about the review related to age-related macular degeneration last year. It has committed to sharing the report with the Welsh Government, and to working with NHS Wales Performance and Improvement team to make any necessary improvements to services in light of the findings.

2. Providing data and details on the levels of upskilling for optometrists.

The 2025-26 Education and Training Commissioning Plan allocated £0.658m to increase opportunities for optometrists to deliver enhanced services, aligned to the Welsh Government's *Future Approach for Optometry Services* (2022), underpinned by optometry contract reforms (2023-24).

Changes to regulation (Education, Training Review GOC 2021) and education and training for undergraduates and postgraduates have been implemented to facilitate new ways of working and to support newly-qualified optometrists to have additional skills and qualifications.

Health Education and Improvement Wales (HEIW) commissions postgraduate higher qualifications for optometrists and dispensing opticians working in Wales. Since 2021, HEIW has commissioned 460 higher qualifications to enable optometrists to develop enhanced skills supporting the delivery of patient care in primary care settings to reduce demand on secondary care specialist services. These higher qualifications are designed to ensure optometrists are equipped to deliver these services in primary care.

HEIW's focus is on high priority, high demand areas, such as, glaucoma, medical retinal disease management and independent prescribing. Equipped with these enhanced skills, the optometry workforce in primary care has a direct impact on

patient care and outcomes, enabling rapid and timely patient access, which is vital to reduce long-term and often irreversible morbidity associated with these eye conditions.

Optometrists in Wales are among the most highly-trained in the UK. Table 1 demonstrates the increased number of services, facilitated by the qualifications in each health board. Table 2 details further optometry recommendations agreed via the Education and Training Commissioning Plan 2025-26.

Table 1: Service provision with higher qualifications; health board comparison 2021-5.

Health Boards	Medical Retina filtering and monitoring		% Increase	Higher Certificate Glaucoma (monitoring)		% Increase	Independent Prescribing		% Increase
	2021	2025		2021	2025		2021	2025	
ABUHB	12	22	83.3	1	11	1000	9	22	144.4
BCUHB	16	37	131.3	1	4	300	5	11	120.0
CAVUHB	15	22	46.7	5	14	180	7	19	171.4
CTMUHB	5	8	60.0	8	11	37.5	8	14	75.0
HDUHB	14	31	121.4	3	15	400	9	25	177.8
PTB	2	7	250	0	8	800	1	5	400
SBUHB	6	10	66.7	0	4	400	0	12	1200

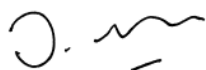
Table 2: Training and Education Commissioning Plan, HEIW 2025 to 2026

Optometry	2025-2026 training places	Context
Independent Prescribing (Optometrists)	22	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Independent Prescribing pathway is now Wales wide, which enables patients to be moved from secondary to primary care. The aim is to recruit from all Health Boards in equal numbers for equity of patient services.
Higher Certificate in Medical Retina (level 7)	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> There is a stable number of specialised qualifications to ensure expertise across Wales. Due to population demographics, BCUHB, HDUHB and ABUHB take preference for places.

Professional Certificate Medical Retina (level 7)	14	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The new Wales General Ophthalmic Service (WGOS) Medical retina pathway enables patients to be moved from secondary to primary care. • Qualifications are commissioned across all Health Boards and assigned to clusters with small numbers of optometrists with the qualification. • Due to population demographics, BCUHB, HDUHB and ABUHB take preference for places.
Higher Certificate in Glaucoma (level 7)	7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are a stable number of specialised qualifications to ensure expertise across Wales. • Due to population demographics, BCUHB, HDUHB and ABUHB take preference for places.
Professional Certificate in Glaucoma (level 7)	14	
Diploma in Glaucoma	7	
Low Vision Certificate	20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This service has been expanded to allow for an increase in numbers of practices that can offer Low Vision services.

I look forward to receiving the committee's report.

Yours sincerely,



Jeremy Miles AS/MS

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