

Optometrist

Introduction

Optometrists examine the eyes to find defects in vision, signs of injury, diseases and problems with general health. They make a diagnosis, give advice and, where necessary, prescribe and fit glasses or contact lenses. They work in a number of places, for example, in private (high street) practice, hospital eye departments, research and teaching posts.

Also known as

- Ophthalmic Optician
- Optician, Ophthalmic

Work Activities

Most Optometrists work in independent (high street) practices, where you will examine patients' eyes by running a series of tests.

Eye examinations usually take about 20-30 minutes. You will usually start by asking the patient why they have come in for an eye test - is this a routine check-up or has the patient been experiencing a problem? If the patient has come in for a specific reason, you'll need to find out what the symptoms are and for how long the patient has had them.

Next, you will need to ask questions designed to find out about the patient's general health, including whether they experience headaches, for example, when they read. You will ask about any illnesses the patient has, such as diabetes, and any eye conditions that might run in the patient's family.

At an early stage, you will need to find out how well the patient can read with each unaided eye. You'll examine the eye tissues from a variety of directions, using instruments that shine light into the patient's eye and magnify various features, such as the cornea and retina. You'll use an ophthalmoscope to look at the inside of the eye. Then you can carry-out further tests, for example, to measure pressure within the eye (a test for glaucoma).

As well as problems specific to the eye, you will also be able to spot some general health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, that can show symptoms in the eye.

You can also use instruments to find and examine any injury in the eye - for example, caused by a piece of grit or the impact of a squash ball.

If the patient has an illness or specific eye problem, such as a detached retina or cataract, you must refer them to their GP. You can also refer patients directly to a hospital eye department. In urgent situations, you can refer patients immediately to hospital accident and emergency departments.

At a later stage in the examination, you'll place a combination of lenses in front of one or both of the patient's eyes, to check how well the eye focuses. This will also detect any errors or limitations in the range of vision and colour vision. If you diagnose a vision problem, you will work out a prescription to correct it.

In some practices, especially smaller ones, you will go on to supply and fit spectacles and contact lenses, and test the accuracy of the lenses.

In larger practices, you might be helped by a Dispensing Optician. As an experienced Optometrist, you can qualify and specialise in prescribing contact lenses or in correcting the visual problems of young children.

In hospitals, Optometrists usually diagnose and advise on the treatment of more serious eye conditions, often caused by accident or disease.

Certain problems require an operation and you'll will advise the eye Doctor/Surgeon (Ophthalmologist) on this.

As a Hospital Optometrist, you might specialise, for example, in diabetes monitoring and screening, glaucoma management, or monitoring patients before and after cataract operations.



Companies that make glasses or lenses employ Optometrists to research into lens theory and design, optical instrumentation and optical design. Much of the work is laboratory-based and there is little contact with patients. This work also takes place in some universities and academic research centres.

Being able to read, write and speak Welsh may be an advantage when you're looking for work in Wales.

Personal Qualities and Skills

To become an Optometrist, you'll need:

- an interest and ability in science
- communication skills to explain things and give advice clearly
- tact, patience, understanding and the ability to reassure nervous patients
- good hand skills, for example, for fitting contact lenses into patients' eyes
- the ability to take accurate notes
- teamwork skills, and also the ability to work on your own
- good judgement, observational skills and a logical, methodical approach to your work
- decision-making skills, for example, to decide when to refer a patient to a Doctor

Self-employed Optometrists in independent general practice need the skills to manage their own business.

In senior positions, you'll need the ability to manage staff.

Pay and Opportunities

Pay

NHS employees are paid on a rising scale within defined pay bands, according to their skills and responsibilities. The pay rates given below are approximate.

- Starting - Band 4: £21,089 - £23,761
- With experience - Band 6: £30,401 - £37,267
- Senior Optometrists - Band 7: £37,570 - £43,772

In the private sector, pay rates vary depending on the organisation and role and responsibilities, but are broadly in line with NHS rates.

Hours of work

Optometrists usually work 35 hours a week. You might need to work at the weekends and have some late finishes.

Where could I work?

Employers include high street spectacle retailers (where some Optometrists own franchise branches), the NHS (in hospitals) and lens manufacturers. Opportunities for Optometrists occur in towns and cities throughout the UK.

Self-employment

There are opportunities for Optometrists to become self-employed in independent general practice.

Where are vacancies advertised?

Jobs are advertised on job boards, in local/national newspapers and on the NHS Jobs website.

Entry Routes and Training

Entry routes

To become an Optometrist, you need to complete a General Optical Council (GOC) accredited degree in optometry. Following graduation, you begin a pre-registration year. This involves working under the supervision of a qualified Optometrist. After successfully completing this pre-registration year, you can register with the GOC as a qualified Optometrist.

To get on to an optometry degree programme, you will typically need 3 A Levels, including 2 science subjects.

A great way to get into this career is through an internship. Take a look at our information article 'Internships', for more details.

Work Experience

Previous experience working with the public in a customer service position would be really useful for this career.

Progression

With experience, you could become self-employed in your own practice or in partnership. You could go into an NHS hospital or a research post, for example, for a lens manufacturer. Optometrists also progress into teaching and lecturing posts. Some Optometrists qualify to prescribe drugs that can treat some eye problems.

Rehabilitation of Offenders Act

This career is an exception to the Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974. This means that you must supply information to an employer about any spent or unspent convictions, cautions, reprimands or warnings, if they ask you to.

This is different from other careers, where you only have to reveal information on unspent convictions if you are asked to.

Qualifications

For entry to a degree course in optometry, the usual minimum requirement is:

- 3 A levels, including at least two science subjects. Biology is essential at some universities.
- GCSEs at grade C/4 and above in your A level subjects
- a further 2/3 GCSEs (A*-C to 9-4), including English and maths

Equivalent qualifications, such as the International Baccalaureate Diploma, can be acceptable for entry. Please check college/university websites very carefully.

BTEC level 3 qualifications might also be acceptable for entry. However, some universities will accept these only alongside the specified academic A levels. Again, please check prospectuses carefully.

Some universities accept the Welsh Baccalaureate as equivalent to 1 A level.

Adult Opportunities

Age limits

It is illegal for any organisation to set age limits for entry to employment, education or training, unless they can show there is a real need to have these limits.

Courses

Cardiff University offers an optometry degree course with an extra foundation year (preliminary year) for students without the traditional science A levels usually required for entry to optometry courses.

If you don't have the qualifications usually needed to enter an accredited degree in optometry, you might be able to start one after completing an Access course, such as Access to Science. You don't usually need any qualifications to start an Access course, although you should check this with the course provider.

There are some exemptions to entry requirements for optometry degree courses if you are a graduate with a

relevant background.

Further Information

Contacts

- **Health Careers**
Website: <http://www.weds.wales.nhs.uk/contact-nhs-wales-careers/>
- **NHS Wales Careers**
Publisher: National Leadership and Innovation Agency for Healthcare
Email: abm.wedsteam@wales.nhs.uk
Website: www.wales.nhs.uk/sitesplus/829/page/36090
- **NHS Jobs**
Website: www.jobs.nhs.uk
- **Step into the NHS**
NHS careers
Tel: 0345 6060655
Website: www.stepintothens.nhs.uk
- **Skills for Health**
Skills for the health sector
Address: Goldsmiths House, Broad Plain, Bristol BS2 0JP
Tel: 0117 9221155
Email: office@skillsforhealth.org.uk
Website: www.skillsforhealth.org.uk
- **NHS Education for Scotland (NES)**
Scottish enquiries
Address: Westport 102, West Port, Edinburgh EH3 9DN
Tel: 0131 6563200
Email: enquiries@nes.scot.nhs.uk
Website: www.nes.scot.nhs.uk
- **General Optical Council (GOC)**
Address: 41 Harley Street, London W1G 8DJ
Tel: 020 7580 3898
Email: goc@optical.org
Website: www.optical.org
- **Eyecare Trust**
Address: PO Box 804, Aylesbury, Buckinghamshire HP20 9DF
Tel: 0845 1295001
Email: info@eyecaretrust.org.uk
Website: www.eyecaretrust.org.uk
- **College of Optometrists**
Address: 42 Craven Street, London WC2N 5NG
Tel: 020 7839 6000
Website: www.college-optometrists.org
- **People Exchange Cymru (PEC)**
Public sector recruitment portal for Wales
Email: peopleexchangecymru@gov.wales
Website: www.peopleexchangecymru.org.uk/home

Related Careers

- Dispensing Optician

- Orthoptist