

Nicky Collinson reports on the official opening of the ABDO NRC: a "visionary project" come to fruition



# Beacon of progress for optics

The ABDO National Resource Centre (NRC) occupies the top two floors of a bright and contemporary building just outside Birmingham city centre called Aqueous II. Incredibly, it took the Association just over 12 months to set up its state-of-the-art education and training facility – an achievement celebrated at its official opening by the Mayor of the West Midlands, Andy Street CBE, in September.

Praising ABDO for choosing to invest in the region, Andy told guests during the celebration: "We welcome the decision ABDO has made to invest in the West Midlands; to create jobs across region and make the most of all the facilities Birmingham has to offer. This is a day of celebration and looking forward with great confidence to a bright future for both the National Resource Centre and the expanding role of the optical profession."

In his preceding welcome address, ABDO president, Clive Marchant, spoke of the journey to 'build' the NRC and of its purpose. He said: "It's a little over a year since Sir Anthony Garrett, ABDO general secretary, and Pavan, our chief finance officer, began the search for a suitable property. Having found the Aqueous II building, the ABDO board approved this visionary and ambitious project last autumn and Alicia Thompson, director of professional examinations, and Phil Hall, head of the NRC, set to work designing the centre."

Clive went on to explain that an increase in student numbers and the challenges of using external facilities had necessitated ABDO establishing its own centre. He also spoke of the increased demand for dispensing opticians in the workplace, and the need to embrace new technology, and to adapt and expand practitioners' scope of practice.

"This centre of excellence provides ABDO, along with all of the optical profession and industry, with facilities not only to provide entry examinations and qualifications – but



From left: Phil Hall, Miranda Richardson, Clive Marchant, Andy Street, Alicia Thompson, Tony Garrett and Thurailingam Pavanakumar

the ability to upskill and advance," Clive said. "With his years of experience, Phil Hall is only too aware of how difficult it can be to find good quality facilities for training; a comfortable environment, excellent hospitality and high tech teaching aids and equipment. Phil and his team can provide us with the complete package."

Adding to Clive's comments, Alicia Thompson said: "Today's event has been an excellent chance for leaders in UK optics to join ABDO at this outstanding new facility. The NRC is the pinnacle of training and assessment. These facilities will ensure our members are both competent and confident to embrace change and explore the exciting potential this brings as we extend our scope of practice."

### "AMAZING" TRAINING FACILITY

The clinical facilities at the NRC embrace the latest technologies in a wide range of equipment for dispensing, refraction, contact lenses, screening, minor eye conditions services and glazing. There are rooms for practical examinations, which can be opened up for conferences, seminars, training, revision and CET courses. There are also spaces for viva exams and smaller meetings, a fully functional glazing lab and 10 clinical bays equipped for refraction and contact lens training.

With the generous support of companies including Birmingham Optical, Essilor, Jai Kudo, Mainline Instruments, Millmead, Norville, Optix Software and

Specsavers, the NRC has all the tools it needs to firmly established itself at the forefront of optical training and education. Representatives from many of the supporting companies joined in the opening celebrations to learn more about its future potential.

Speaking to *Dispensing Optics* after the event, Trevor Rowley, managing director of Optix Software, said: "Nobody who visits the NRC could fail to be impressed. It will be of huge value to the profession and it's especially welcome to see such a resource being developed outside of London. We're delighted to sponsor the NRC by providing Optix software within the new clinics, and look forward to working with the ABDO team."

This was a view shared by Andy Hepworth, Essilor professional relations manager, who said: "The new ABDO NRC is an amazing optical training facility, which is in and around the best I've have seen across Europe. Top marks to all involved in its development, and we look forward to enjoying the centre over the coming years."



Dame Mary Perkins takes a tour with the mayor

## Meet the NRC team

### PHIL HALL: HEAD OF THE NRC

A qualified DO and CLO, Phil managed various independent practices in the North East before moving to Specsavers professional training and development. As well as overseeing the staffing and management of the NRC, Phil works closely the ABDO Examinations Department in the delivery of the Association's exams programme.



Phil Hall

### GEMMA EVANS: EVENTS COORDINATOR

Gemma has a BA in events management and was previously events and administration coordinator for the British Association of Social Workers. In her spare time, she volunteers and runs the Black Country Festival for Dudley.



Gemma Evans

### CARLY FINCH: OPTICAL SUPPORT TECHNICIAN

Caryl began her optical career 17 years ago in quality control at a surfacing lab. She then entered the retail side of optics for 13 years, working as a dispensing assistant and in a glazing lab. Carly's main interest lies in the dispensing side of her job, especially the more complex cases.



Carly Finch

### SONIA MARSHALL: EVENTS ASSISTANT

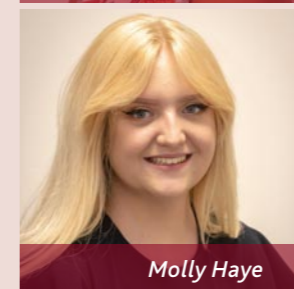
Prior to joining the NRC, Sonia was an admin assistant within a car logistics company. In her new role, Sonia will take care of NRC clients' hospitality needs. Sonia said she was "very excited" to have joined the team at the NRC.



Sonia Marshall

### MOLLY HAYE: EVENTS ASSISTANT

Molly's previous experience lies in hospitality and catering for events at Cheltenham racecourse, undertaken during her university studies. Her fine arts course included arranging and organising exhibitions and events within the field. Alongside Sonia, Molly supports Gemma in the provision of various events – from conferences to exam set-ups.



Molly Haye

Guests from the profession and industry, including representatives from sight loss charities, optical organisations, NHS England and other training institutions, were given guided tours of the facilities on the day to see first-hand all the centre has to offer.

Among the guests was Specsavers co-founder, Dame Mary Perkins, who said: "It's been great to see the fantastic training facilities that will not only benefit Specsavers

colleagues who are working towards a dispensing qualification, but also the profession as a whole. We're delighted to support the ABDO NRC and equip one of its clinical bays."

### NURTURING FUTURE TALENT

Jack Hawkins of Mainline Instruments was equally impressed, saying: "The NRC will be a benefit to the growth of our young and talented dispensing opticians of the future –



The mayor meets Carly and Gemma

as well as acting as a geographical and industrial centre for the optical community."

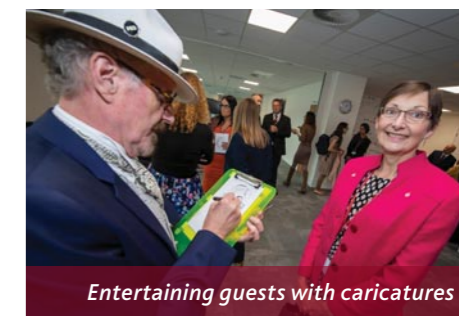
Indeed, the NRC has already hosted the first set of ABDO College summer examinations and is now preparing for the autumn retakes. The objective structured clinical examinations in minor eye conditions services were held at the facility in August, and the NRC team is looking forward to hosting the next ABDO extended services training days later this month.

As well as being a centre established by the profession for the profession, the NRC is available to local businesses and the wider optical industry to hire for large and small meetings and events.

National account manager at Thea Pharmaceuticals, Mary Jenvey, who attended the opening, said: "The centre has fantastic facilities, such as the state-of-the-art video slit lamp, which can be recorded and projected live around the building. There is a great lecture facility for up to 160 people and the location is ideal, being situated right in the centre of the country with easy access by car and rail. We look forward to using the excellent facilities to bring educational events to our customers."

Summing up the view of many, Peter Reeve, managing director of Stepper, said: "The NRC is a fabulous facility: well-thought out, planned and implemented. I am sure it will be a real asset to ABDO – and the team should be proud of it."

With the ceremonial unveiling of an engraved plaque by the mayor and the cutting of a specially-commissioned cake, the official opening of the ABDO NRC indeed proved a proud moment in the history of the Association.



Entertaining guests with caricatures

NRC: Teamwork