



Zentralverband der
Augenoptiker und Optometristen

Press statement on the occasion of opti 2018

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Although the year 2018 is already two weeks old the opti in Munich still marks something like the official start for the ophthalmic opticians in Germany. As an international trade fair for optics and design it offers opticians and optometrists right at the beginning of the year the very latest range of eyewear frames, ophthalmic lens and contact lens innovations, low vision products, store fittings and technical equipment.

Economic data

The economic situation of German ophthalmic opticians at the turn of the year, however, cannot be concluded at this early stage. The official figures for 2017 will be available in March/April 2018 and will then be announced separately by the Association of Ophthalmic Opticians and Optometrists (ZVA).

Nevertheless a moderately positive development in one market segment already becomes apparent: Within the scope of the ERFAlight statistics the ZVA collects the business data of approx. 300 mainly medium-sized structured optics companies on a monthly basis. From this data cumulative sales for 2017 (excluding December) increased by 1.1 percent compared to the same period of 2016. On the other hand the sales of spectacles decreased by 1.2 percent.

Due to the fact that the large chain companies do not participate in the ERFAlight statistics these figures though should not be equated with the development of the industry as a whole. Experience has shown that their average key figures are higher which is why the overall average has to be revised upwards in the course of the upcoming official ZVA industry report for 2017.

With a total number of 11,800 ophthalmic optics companies in Germany (as of 2016) the ERFAlight statistics naturally does not depict the entire market – however, considering the sales stagnation from 2015 to 2016 in this segment a plus of 1.1 percent is clearly a positive indicator concerning the industry as a whole.

Skilled labor shortage

According to a representative survey carried out by the ZVA in March 2017 among business owners nearly one third of the companies were looking for personnel. Around 20 percent of respondents found the search for personnel problematic. It is often spoken in this context of shortage of skilled workers, but actually the Federal Employment Agency currently does not list the ophthalmic optician as a “bottleneck job”. The regional associations of the ZVA have also recently reported increasing numbers of trainees. Vocational school classes are now often overcrowded and the superordinate training centers are working at the capacity limit. According to figures published by the Federal Institute for Vocational Education and Training (BIBB) in November 2017, there were even 2,622 new trainee contracts in 2016 – that is the highest figure since 2001. These

trainees will enter the labor market in 2018 and thereby potentially cover the high demand for staff.

To ensure that the market although is not only staffed in terms of quantity the ZVA continues to promote quality assurance in its own profession. One result of this effort has been the development of a curriculum for the master craftsman examinations, incorporating optometric skills to match the existing master craftsman profile. In addition, the association is currently in the process of establishing a database of exam questions from which all committees conducting master craftsman examinations in the optician's trade will be able to retrieve material.

Political developments

In April 2017 the German parliament passed a law that obliges health insurance providers to cover the expenses for ophthalmic lenses and contact lenses in case of a short- or farsightedness of more than six dioptres or astigmatism of more than four dioptres.

The new legislation and its supplementary guideline are flawed in a crucial way, as they tie the subsidy for lenses to the prescription by an ophthalmologist. This has a direct bearing on the ability of ophthalmic opticians to perform eye tests, the core of the profession, and therefore on the scope of the ophthalmic optics profession in Germany. Even if this law only applies to the minority of ametropic persons, this restriction could not be accepted. Therefore, the association decided to join forces in order to raise awareness of what is at stake and to achieve a critical review by the German Ministry of Health. As a result the ministry requested clarification from the committee that concluded the supplementary guideline. In a letter dated 4 January 2018 the ministry finally challenged crucial parts of the guideline and declared it unlawful. The G-BA can now file a complaint against this decision within one month.

Note to Editors: A photo of ZVA-President Thomas Truckenbrod is available for editorial use of this press release for royalty-free use. It can be downloaded at www.zva.de/news/opti2018-zva-pressestatement. Picture note: ZVA/Magner

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