

## **Specsavers letters – Round 2!**

*AIO calls for Independents to determine their own future.*

Members of the Association for Independent Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians (AIO) have received further correspondence from Specsavers once again urging them to become part of the 'Specsavers family'. The letters have quite understandably caused a lot of animated exchanges over various Internet forums and social media. It is fair to say that these exchanges have, as before, been almost universally hostile to Specsavers approaches.

AIO members are fiercely determined not only to protect the Independent sector, but to promote it as a destination of choice for qualified Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians. Indeed, the Association believes that there are many practitioners employed in the multiples that have the ambition to own and run their own Independent practice.

AIO, as the only professional body that solely represents Independents, is working hard both to protect Independent practice and to promote it. As a linchpin for the former it has introduced the Independents' Code (IC) as the distinguishing mark for the delivery of excellent long term eye health care by Independents on the High Street. The Code is now live in practices across the country and being actively promoted within the local communities in which IC subscribers operate.

In terms of helping aspiring Independents to own their own practice, AIO is working with a number of external stakeholders and product and service suppliers to construct a facilitated route map to assist them to realise their ambition. This was kicked off with the inclusion of a special 'aspiring Independents' event at the AIO Conference in Cardiff in October and will be a feature at the 2017 Conference on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> October in Cambridge.

Peter Warren, Chairman of AIO commented: 'Whilst we are pleased to see that Specsavers have moderated the content of the letters they are sending to Independent practice owners, we are a little surprised they continue to do so against a backdrop of the considerable hostility the first set of letters caused. It is the job of AIO to get the message out that there is a not for profit professional body that is working to ensure there is a long term, sustainable and commercially attractive future for all those that value their independence.'

Specsavers have written to many Independents setting out one option for the future of their practice. AIO will now be writing to all Independents in the New Year setting out an alternative option that is geared not only to protect existing practices, but to attract new blood into the sector.'