

## Editorial

### Orthoptic Education in NSW: New Beginnings

In 2014 the education of orthoptists at University of Sydney ceased after a long association with the Faculty of Health Sciences and its predecessors. This association began in 1973, with the School of Orthoptics being created in the New South Wales College of Paramedical Sciences, with Patricia Lance as its Head, a position she retained for the next 14 years. In 1975, the College was re-named the Cumberland College of Health Sciences (CCHS) and in 1978, CCHS moved west to Lidcombe in Sydney.

As one of the inaugural paramedical professions educated at the College, the orthoptics course also underwent significant development, with the creation of an Associate Diploma of Orthoptics in 1976, then a Diploma of Applied Science in 1981 and a Bachelor of Applied Science in 1989. The CCHS then became established as the Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Sydney in 1991. The course continued as a Bachelors program until 2006, when the combined Bachelor of Health Sciences, Master of Clinical Vision Science (BHlthSc/MClinVisSc) degree replaced it. In the meantime a Master of Orthoptics had commenced in 2004 and with the discontinuation of the BHlthSc/MClinVisSc in 2010, this became the sole education program for Orthoptics in New South Wales. The Master of Orthoptics had its last intake at the University of Sydney in 2013. During this period, the orthoptic programs have been led by four academics, initially Dr John Burne (1988-9) and then Mrs Neryla Jolly and Associate Professor Elaine Cornell variously held the position until 2010, when Associate Professor Kathryn Rose became Head of the then Discipline of Orthoptics.

To say that the ending of the association of orthoptic education with the University of Sydney was a time of pain and uncertainty for the profession, staff and students, is probably putting it mildly. However, fortunately the future now looks very bright. In 2014 the University of Technology Sydney (UTS) became interested in establishing an orthoptics course in the recently formed Graduate School of Health (GSH), with the enthusiastic support of the Head of GSH, Professor Shalom (Charlie) Benrimoj.

Staff from University of Sydney gradually transferred to UTS over 2014 and Kathryn Rose was appointed the first Australian Professor of Orthoptics in late 2014. This was followed by the massive pack-up and moving of accumulated equipment and other sundries to UTS in early 2015. These were located into the newly created orthoptic teaching spaces and clinics at

UTS. Looking back, collectively the staff cannot quite believe that this was all able to be done in such a short space of time; the establishment of a new course, the design and building of new teaching spaces, the re-location, and somewhere in the middle, concluding teaching the final cohort at University of Sydney and the recruitment of a new cohort of students, all in less than a year. Of course we did not do it alone, without the support and skill of existing staff at UTS and in the GSH in particular, this never would have been possible.

So why is the future looking so bright:

- Relocation to a university that has a focus on innovative teaching and practice-based learning, which aligns well with the aims of orthoptic education.
- 57 students enrolled, with three applications for every student place offered as a consequence of targeted marketing.
- New staff - an addition of five practitioner teachers and two tutors to the existing three full-time staff.
- Purpose-built orthoptic teaching and research spaces, including clinical simulation rooms with capacity to stream live patient examinations to teaching rooms.
- An injection of new ophthalmic and orthoptic equipment funded by UTS.
- Encouragement of strong links with the professions and industry, necessary to ensure that orthoptics remains relevant and up to date.
- Strong support from the ophthalmic equipment and pharmaceutical industries for the discipline, including a new Bayer education scholarship for a research student.
- The establishment of an Industry Advisory Board to assist the discipline in its education and research programs.

And that is just the start.

#### Kathryn Rose

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