

What is Orthoptics?

Orthoptics quite simply means “**straight**¹ eyes” originating from the Greek words “orth” and “optics”. More specifically, it is the study of visual development, **binocular**² vision (how the eyes work together as a pair), eye movements and eye co-ordination. Visual development can be assessed from birth and abnormalities are **diagnosed**³ in very early life.

Who are Orthoptists?

- Valuable hospital eye care team member working alongside consultant eye surgeons (**ophthalmologists**⁴), optometrists and nurses and, as part of teams with other health care professionals specialising in defects in children (i.e. **paediatric**⁵ defects) and stroke.
- Skilled uniquely in diagnostic techniques, clinical interpretation and non-surgical treatment of disorders including:
 - Children presenting with **misalignment**⁶ of the eyes (strabismus/squint).
 - Patients presenting with double vision (**diplopia**⁷).
 - Reduced vision (**amblyopia**⁸) and other visual disturbances.
- Orthoptists see patients of all ages: young children, some of whom may have learning and physical **disabilities**⁹; adult patients with double vision and other related visual symptoms which may be the gateway to the sign of serious general health problems including neurological disease such as stroke, multiple **sclerosis**¹⁰ or tumours. Even road traffic accidents and sports **injuries**¹¹ may require the expert opinion from an Orthoptist.
- Approximately, 5% of children have visual problems and will **require**¹² the expert skills of an Orthoptist.
- A detailed orthoptic examination helps to identify the underlying condition and allows decisions to be made on the appropriate **treatment**¹³ for individual cases.
- Treatment may range from improvement of visual loss by **patching**¹⁴ therapy or using glasses, prisms, exercises or surgery on the eye muscles to differentially diagnose the condition, relieve symptoms and monitor the progression of the condition in adults.
- Orthoptists can expand their role within the eye care team by the use of highly specialised equipment for the assessment and monitoring of eye disease such as:
 - Glaucoma (a condition of raised **pressure**¹⁵ within the eye);
 - Age-related macular degeneration (a condition involving **loss**¹⁶ of central and detailed vision);
 - Electro-diagnostic testing of visual function and eye movement
- Teaching, research and management.
- Patience, good **communication**¹⁷ skills, adaptability and powers of observation are essential traits in order to undertake a career in Orthoptics.