

COUNCIL

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PUBLIC

Draft Strategic Plan 2010-15

Who we are:

1.1 The General Optical Council (GOC) is an independent organisation accountable to Parliament for the regulation of optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses in the UK. The GOC draws its powers from an Act of Parliament - the Opticians Act 1989 (amended 2005).

1.2 The GOC is one of 13 organisations in the UK known as health and social care regulators. We each safeguard the public by regulating the health and social care professions. Together we are reviewed by the Council for Health Regulatory Excellence and compared with each other to achieve excellence.

1.3 The GOC is governed by an independently appointed board of 12 people who serve for up to four years at a time. Six members are eye care professionals – either optometrists or dispensing opticians and six are lay (including an independently appointed lay chair).

What we do:

1.4 We protect, promote and maintain the health and safety of the public by:

- setting standards for optical education, training, performance and behaviour;
- approving the qualifications that lead to registration with the GOC;
- publishing a register of dispensing opticians, optometrists, students and optical businesses in the UK; and
- investigating and acting on concerns that a registrant is not fit to: practise, train as an optician, or carry on business as an optometrist or dispensing optician.

How we work:

1.5 Our work is built on six main values. We aim for all our work to be:

- *Proportionate*: targeting the issues of greatest risk to public safety;
- *Accountable*: involving stakeholders and partners;
- *Consistent*: working with others to make sure our work is fair;
- *Transparent*: explaining our decisions wherever possible;
- *Targeted*: focusing our efforts where there is most public benefit; and
- *Well organised*: providing value for money, high standards of customer service and promoting equality and diversity in all our work.

Where we are now

1.6 A newly constituted GOC was established from 1 April 2009.

1.7 Our new Council's approach incorporates modern standards of governance as well as the successes of its predecessors. Council's priorities are to: provide new leadership for optical regulation; ensure effective engagement with our stakeholders, particularly patients and the public in all that we do and measuring and assuring delivery of our objectives.

Building on success

1.8 Over the last five years the GOC has achieved significant modernisation of our core functions – in the interests of greater public protection through fair and proportionate regulation. These include:

- (i) Strengthening the professional training required of optical professionals: the introduction of a statutory scheme for continuing education and training (CET) of dispensing opticians and optometrists. CET is linked to the maintenance of entry-standard competences required for registration. An innovative online system allows verification of all registrants' achievements of the minimum CET requirement every three years.
- (ii) Stronger focus on the current and future requirements of the public by separating the executive and non-executive functions of the Council and creating space for the Council itself to focus on strategy and holding the executive to account for delivery. The formulation in 2005 of a Scheme of Delegation setting out which statutory activities the governing Council delegates to the GOC's five statutory committees or to the Registrar.
- (iii) More independent mechanisms for establishing whether professionals remain fit to practise; establishing a more independent Fitness to Practise Committee and Registration Appeals Committees to hear cases against dispensing opticians, optometrists, student opticians and bodies corporate whose fitness to practise, train or carry on business is brought into question.
- (iv) Better protection of the public when purchasing contact lenses on the web; changes to legislation to enable the UK public to benefit safely from the supply of contact lenses via the Internet.
- (v) Protecting the public by registering student opticians to hold them to account for their conduct while training.
- (vi) Ensuring that patients and the public are able to gain redress when things go wrong by making it compulsory for GOC registrants to have professional indemnity insurance.
- (vii) Making sure that the public are able to get advice and help when they are not satisfied with the customer service they have received from opticians by taking on the commissioning and management of the independent Optical Consumer Complaints Service (OCCS).
- (viii) Understanding the issues that are of concern to the public, patients and the professionals who serve them through the establishment of a Stakeholder Engagement Strategy and Consultation Framework.

(ix) An Equality and Diversity Scheme and Action Plan to ensure we are reflective of society in general.

(x) Creation of a modern governance framework, with clear separation of the Council's strategic role from the operational responsibilities of the Registrar and staff and the advisory role of the statutory committees. Council members no longer sit on the statutory committees which are chaired by senior executives.

(xi) Managing the costs of regulation so helping to keep the costs to patients at a manageable level, by continued cost effective use of the GOC's resources.

Where we want to be.

1.9 Our mission is to be recognised as a modern and innovative healthcare regulator.

1.10 Over the next five years we will concentrate on three strategic priorities: -

Continue to modernise our core functions and put in place systems for improvement to become more efficient and more effective;

What success will look like in five years' time:

- Improving our success rates in achieving enhanced key performance indicators (KPIs) particularly for the registration and fitness to practise functions.
- Evidence to show we have improved the way we work by achieving efficiency gains.

Develop the regulatory framework to support UK eye-care in delivering safe, high quality care which meets society's needs and expectations;

What success will look like in five years' time:

- The GOC leading the regulation of the UK optical professions, in the protection, promotion and maintenance of the health and safety of the public.
- Identification of and action on, the key consumer/patient risks and opportunities that new developments can bring for the protection, promotion and maintenance of the health and safety of the public.

Promote a wider understanding of our role and engage stakeholders in our work.

What success will look like in five years' time:

- Raised stakeholder support for and collaboration in our work.

How we will get there

1.11 The performance of the Registrar and senior team will be measured against annual Business Plans designed to deliver our three strategic priorities over the five year period commencing 1 April 2010. The operational activities and the resources to achieve each of the Council three strategic priorities are defined in the 2010/11 Business Plan and supporting budget.

