

**BEFORE THE FITNESS TO PRACTISE COMMITTEE
OF THE GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL**

GENERAL OPTICAL COUNCIL

F(24)11

AND

ELIZABETH WILLIAMS (01-36542)

**DETERMINATION OF A SUBSTANTIVE REVIEW
01 MAY 2026**

Committee Members: Sarah Hamilton (Chair/Lay)
Victoria Smith (Lay)
Lisa Hill (Lay)
Kalpana Theophilus (Optometrist)
Peena Govind (Optometrist)

Legal adviser: Asharaf Khan

GOC Presenting Officer: Hugo Lodge

Registrant: Not present and unrepresented

Registrant representative: N/A

Hearings Officer: Arjeta Shabani

Outcome: Erasure

Proof of service

The Committee considered whether the Notice of Hearing had been properly served upon the Registrant in accordance with section 23A of the Opticians Act 1989 and Rule 61 of the General Optical Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2013. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.

The Committee had regard to the service bundle and noted that the Notice of Hearing was dated 24 March 2026 in respect of a hearing listed for 1 May 2026. The Committee was satisfied that this provided the Registrant with more than the required minimum period of 28 days' notice.

The Committee further noted that the Notice of Hearing was sent to the Registrant by both post and email to her registered contact details and that it contained the required information as to the date, time and nature of the hearing.

The Committee also had regard to the email dated 30 March 2026 from the Registrant, sent from her registered email address, in which she acknowledged receipt of the Notice and confirmed that she would not be attending the hearing. The Committee considered that this demonstrated that the Registrant had received actual notice of the proceedings.

In those circumstances, the Committee was satisfied that the Notice of Hearing had been properly served and that all reasonable efforts had been made to notify the Registrant of the hearing.

Proceeding in the absence of the Registrant

The Committee then considered whether it would be appropriate to proceed in the absence of the Registrant in accordance with Rule 22 of the General Optical Council (Fitness to Practise) Rules 2013. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.

On behalf of the Council, Mr Hugo Lodge submitted that the Committee should proceed in the Registrant's absence. He referred the Committee to the Registrant's email dated 30 March 2026, in which she confirmed that she had nothing further to add and would not be attending the hearing. He submitted that this demonstrated a clear and voluntary decision not to attend and not to engage with the proceedings. He further submitted that there was no indication that the Registrant would attend on

any future date and that an adjournment would serve no useful purpose and would result in unnecessary delay. He also submitted that there was no identifiable prejudice to the Registrant in proceeding, particularly in circumstances where she had chosen not to make any submissions.

The Legal Adviser advised the Committee that it had a discretion to proceed in the absence of the Registrant, which must be exercised with care and with fairness as the overriding consideration. The Committee was advised to balance the interests of the Registrant with the public interest in the expeditious disposal of the case and to consider factors including whether the Registrant had been properly served, whether her absence was voluntary, whether she had sought an adjournment, whether an adjournment would be likely to secure her attendance, and the wider public interest.

In reaching its decision, the Committee was satisfied that the Registrant had been properly served and had received actual notice of the hearing. The Committee noted that the Registrant had expressly confirmed that she would not be attending and had provided no reason for her absence. The Committee was therefore satisfied that her absence was voluntary.

The Committee further noted that there had been no request for an adjournment and no indication that the Registrant would attend on any future date. It concluded that an adjournment would not serve any useful purpose and would result only in delay.

The Committee also had regard to the public interest in proceeding with the hearing, particularly given that this was a substantive review of an existing order which was due to expire in the near future.

In all the circumstances, the Committee determined that it was fair and in the public interest to proceed in the absence of the Registrant.

DETERMINATION

Background

The Registrant is an optometrist whose fitness to practise was considered at substantive hearings held between 16–18 September 2024 and 12–16 May 2025. On that occasion, the Fitness to Practise Committee determined that the Registrant's fitness to practise was impaired by reason of misconduct.

The misconduct arose from multiple and serious clinical failings affecting six patients over a period of approximately four months. These failings included, amongst other matters, a failure to conduct clinically indicated examinations, including dilated fundus examinations and visual field testing; a failure to obtain and record adequate clinical histories; inadequate record-keeping; a failure to provide appropriate safety-netting advice; and failures to make timely and appropriate referrals, including an urgent referral which resulted in a patient subsequently attending Accident and Emergency. The Committee found that these failings represented serious departures from the standards expected of a reasonably competent optometrist and resulted in both actual and potential harm to patients.

The Committee at the substantive hearing concluded that the Registrant's fitness to practise was impaired on both public protection and public interest grounds.

As a result, the Registrant's registration was suspended for a period of 12 months. The purpose of that suspension was to allow the Registrant an opportunity to develop insight into her misconduct, undertake remediation, and demonstrate that she was safe to return to practice.

The suspension order is due to expire on 12 June 2026.

Findings regarding impairment

The Committee heard submissions from Mr Lodge on behalf of the Council. The Registrant was not present and was not represented. The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser.

On behalf of the Council, Mr Lodge reminded the Committee of the background to the case. He submitted that the substantive Committee had found the Registrant's fitness to practise impaired by reason of misconduct arising from multiple serious clinical failings across six patients over a period of approximately four months. These failings included failures to carry out essential clinical examinations, including dilated examinations and visual field testing; failures to obtain and record adequate clinical histories; failures to provide appropriate safety-netting advice; and failures to make timely referrals, including an urgent referral which resulted in a patient attending Accident and Emergency. He submitted that these failings were serious, wide-ranging, and represented significant departures from the standards expected of a reasonably competent optometrist, resulting in both actual and potential harm to patients.

In relation to current impairment, Mr Lodge submitted that there had been no material change since the substantive hearing. He emphasised that the Registrant had provided no reflective statement, no evidence of remediation, no evidence of continuing professional development, and no evidence of maintaining or improving her clinical skills. He submitted that the Registrant had not practised since 2022 and had previously indicated that she did not intend to return to practice. He further submitted that insight remained limited, noting that at the substantive hearing the Registrant had attributed her failings in part to external factors such as workload and IT difficulties rather than fully accepting clinical responsibility. He submitted that, in the absence of meaningful insight and remediation, there remained a real and ongoing risk of repetition and therefore a risk of harm to patients. He invited the Committee to find that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired on both public protection and public interest grounds.

The Registrant did not attend the hearing and did not provide any submissions or evidence for the Committee's consideration.

The Legal Adviser advised the Committee that this was a substantive review of an existing suspension order and that its task was to determine the Registrant's current fitness to practise. The Committee was reminded that this is a forward-looking exercise and that it should consider what, if anything, had changed since the substantive hearing. The Committee was advised that it should consider whether the misconduct identified was capable of remediation, whether it had in fact been remedied, and whether it was likely to be repeated. The Committee was further advised to consider both the personal component of impairment, relating to the Registrant's current conduct and risk, and the wider public interest.

The Committee first considered the nature and seriousness of the original misconduct. It noted that the misconduct involved multiple serious clinical failings across six patients over a relatively short period. These failings concerned fundamental aspects of optometric practice and breaches of several standards of practice and were neither isolated nor minor. The Committee noted that the substantive Committee had found that the Registrant's conduct fell far below the standards expected of a reasonably competent optometrist and had resulted in both actual and potential harm, including an instance of actual harm where a patient was required to attend Accident and Emergency. The Committee considered that this remained a significant and important factor in its assessment of current impairment.

The Committee then considered whether there had been any material change in the Registrant's position since the substantive hearing. It found that there had been no such change. The Committee noted that the Registrant had not engaged with these proceedings and had indicated in her email dated 30 March 2026 that she had

nothing further to add. The Committee also noted that the Registrant had not provided any evidence of reflection, remediation, or continuing professional development.

The Committee attached significant weight to the fact that the substantive Committee had imposed a period of suspension to allow the Registrant a clear opportunity to develop insight, undertake remediation, and demonstrate that she was safe to return to practice. The Committee noted that the previous Committee had expressly identified that a future reviewing panel would be assisted by a reflective statement, evidence of remediation, testimonials, and evidence of maintaining clinical skills. The Committee found that the Registrant had not taken that opportunity and had not provided any of the material identified as necessary by the previous committee.

The Committee also had regard to the Registrant's earlier statements, including her acknowledgment of deficiencies in her clinical record-keeping, her lack of confidence in her ability to practise safely, and her difficulties with clinical systems. While the Committee accepted that these statements demonstrated some limited insight at the time, it found that there had been no further development of that insight. In particular, there was no evidence that the Registrant had taken any steps to address those deficiencies or to improve her clinical practice.

The Committee further noted that the Registrant had previously indicated that she did not wish to return to practice and had not worked as an optometrist since 2022. The Committee considered that, in the absence of any evidence of skills maintenance or remediation, this prolonged period out of practice further reinforced the risk to patients.

In light of all of the above, the Committee concluded that, although the misconduct was capable of remediation, it had not been remedied. The Committee found that there had been no meaningful engagement, no evidence of remediation, and no development of insight since the substantive hearing. The Committee therefore concluded that the concerns identified by the substantive Committee remain unaddressed.

The Committee went on to consider the risk of repetition. In the absence of any evidence of remediation or progress, and given the nature and extent of the original failings, the Committee concluded that there remains a real and ongoing risk that the Registrant would repeat the misconduct if permitted to return to practice. The Committee therefore found that there remains a risk of harm to patients.

The Committee therefore found that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired on public protection grounds.

The Committee then considered the wider public interest. It took into account the seriousness and breadth of the original misconduct, the fact that it involved multiple patients and included actual harm, the complete absence of remediation, and the Registrant's continued disengagement from the regulatory process. The Committee considered that a reasonable and informed member of the public would expect a finding of impairment in circumstances where serious clinical failings have not been addressed and where the Registrant has failed to engage with the process designed to protect the public.

The Committee concluded that public confidence in the profession, and in the regulatory process, would be undermined if a finding of impairment were not made. The Committee therefore also found that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired on public interest grounds.

Accordingly, the Committee found that the fitness of Elizabeth Williams to practise as an optometrist is impaired.

Sanction

The Committee heard submissions from Mr Lodge on behalf of the Council. The Registrant was not present and did not make any submissions.

On behalf of the Council, Mr Lodge submitted that all sanctions were available to the Committee. He referred to the possibility of a further period of suspension as a cautious and more lenient option, which could provide the Registrant with a final opportunity to re-engage and undertake remediation. However, he noted that the Registrant had not practised since 2022, had not engaged meaningfully with the regulatory process, and had provided no indication that she intended to return to practice or to remediate.

Mr Lodge submitted that a conditions of practice order would not be appropriate, as there was no evidence that the Registrant would comply with any conditions or engage with the process. He further submitted that, although erasure had not been imposed at the substantive hearing and was not formally sought, the Registrant's continued lack of engagement and absence of remediation meant that erasure was now within the range of proportionate outcomes.

The Committee accepted the advice of the Legal Adviser. The Legal Adviser advised the Committee that the purpose of any sanction is not to punish the Registrant, but to protect the public, maintain public confidence in the profession, and uphold proper standards of conduct and behaviour. The Committee was advised that any sanction must be proportionate and represent the least restrictive measure necessary to achieve those objectives. The Committee was further advised to have regard to the General Optical Council's Indicative Sanctions Guidance ("the Guidance"), to consider any aggravating and mitigating features, and to assess the available sanctions in ascending order of seriousness, giving reasons for rejecting lesser sanctions. The Committee was reminded that, as this was a review hearing, its task was to consider the Registrant's current position, including her level of engagement, insight, remediation, and the risk of repetition, and to determine whether there remained a realistic prospect of remediation.

The Committee had regard to the Guidance and applied it to the facts of the case and its findings on impairment.

The Committee first considered the aggravating and mitigating features.

In terms of aggravating features, the Committee identified the seriousness and breadth of the original misconduct, which involved multiple clinical failings affecting six patients over a relatively short period and included both actual and potential harm. The Committee also identified the continuing absence of meaningful insight, the complete lack of remediation, and the Registrant's failure to engage with the regulatory process. The Committee noted that, although the Registrant had sent a brief email in March 2026, she had indicated that she had nothing further to add and had not provided any evidence of reflection, remediation, or steps taken to address the concerns. The Committee therefore concluded that there had been no meaningful engagement beyond that limited communication since the substantive hearing.

The Committee also took into account the prolonged period during which the Registrant has not practised, having been out of clinical practice since 2022, and the absence of any evidence that she has maintained or updated her clinical skills.

The Committee considered whether there were any mitigating features. It noted that some limited insight had been identified at the substantive hearing. However, the Committee found that there had been no development of that insight and no evidence of remediation since that time. In the absence of any updated material, the Committee concluded that there was little current material which could properly be treated as mitigation at this review stage.

The Committee then considered the available sanctions in ascending order of seriousness.

The Committee first considered whether to take no further action. In light of its finding that the Registrant's fitness to practise remains impaired, and given the ongoing risk to patient safety, the Committee determined that taking no action would be wholly insufficient to protect the public or maintain public confidence in the profession.

The Committee next considered whether a financial penalty would be appropriate. The Committee had regard to the Guidance, which indicates that such a sanction is generally suitable for cases at the lower end of seriousness where there is no ongoing risk to the public and where the Registrant has demonstrated insight and remediation. The Committee found that those circumstances did not apply in this case and concluded that a financial penalty would be insufficient.

The Committee then considered whether a conditions of practice order would be appropriate. The Committee recognised that the concerns in this case are, in principle, capable of remediation. However, the Committee noted that there has been no meaningful engagement from the Registrant, no evidence of insight, and no indication that she would be willing or able to comply with any conditions imposed. The Committee was not satisfied that workable, measurable, and enforceable conditions could be formulated in circumstances where there is no evidence of cooperation. The Committee therefore concluded that a conditions of practice order would not be appropriate.

The Committee then considered whether to impose a further period of suspension. The Committee recognised that suspension may be appropriate where there remains a realistic prospect that the Registrant will develop insight and remediate her misconduct. The Committee carefully considered whether to extend the suspension to provide a further opportunity for the Registrant to engage and remediate.

In doing so, the Committee took into account that the Registrant has already been subject to a 12-month suspension order, during which she was given clear guidance as to the steps required to demonstrate insight and remediation. The Committee noted that the Registrant has not taken that opportunity and has not provided any of the material identified by the previous Committee as necessary to assist a reviewing Committee.

The Committee recognised that the substantive Committee had determined that the Registrant's misconduct was not, at that time, fundamentally incompatible with continued registration and had imposed a suspension order to provide an opportunity for remediation. However, the Committee considered that the position has materially changed. A full period of suspension has now elapsed without any evidence of engagement, insight, or remediation. In those circumstances, the Committee concluded that the Registrant has failed to take the opportunity afforded to her and that the concerns identified by the substantive Committee remain entirely unaddressed.

The Committee also considered whether there remains a realistic prospect that the Registrant will remediate her misconduct if given further time. It noted that the Registrant has not practised for a significant period, has not undertaken any retraining or skills maintenance, and has provided no indication that she intends to return to practice or to engage with the regulatory process. The Committee concluded that, in the absence of any evidence of engagement or willingness to remediate over a sustained period, there is no realistic prospect that the Registrant will remediate her misconduct within a reasonable timeframe.

The Committee therefore determined that a further period of suspension would not serve a useful purpose. It concluded that extending the suspension would be likely to result in a future Committee being placed in the same position, with no additional evidence of remediation or engagement.

The Committee therefore went on to consider whether erasure is necessary.

The Committee had regard to the Guidance, which indicates that erasure may be appropriate where there is a persistent lack of insight, remediation, or engagement, and where the Committee cannot be satisfied that the Registrant is safe to return to practice.

The Committee found that the Registrant has demonstrated a persistent lack of engagement, has failed to develop insight, and has not undertaken any remediation. The Committee concluded that the Registrant has not demonstrated that she is safe to return to practice and that the risk to patients remains.

The Committee also considered the wider public interest. It concluded that public confidence in the profession, and in the regulatory process, would be undermined if a registrant who has committed serious clinical failings and has failed to take any steps to address those failings were permitted to remain on the register.

The Committee acknowledged that erasure is the most serious sanction. However, in light of the absence of remediation, the lack of engagement, and the absence of any realistic prospect of improvement, the Committee concluded that no lesser sanction would be sufficient to meet the overarching objective.

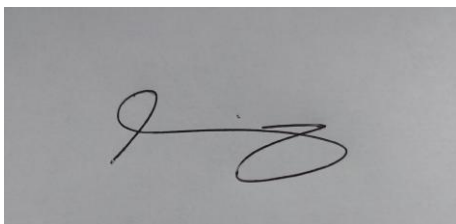
The Committee was satisfied that erasure, although the most serious sanction, is proportionate in all the circumstances and represents the only measure capable of adequately protecting the public and maintaining confidence in the profession.

In all the circumstances, the Committee determined that erasure is the only sanction which is sufficient to protect the public, maintain public confidence in the profession, and uphold proper standards.

The Committee therefore directs that the Registrant's name be erased from the register.

The Committee noted that, in accordance with the relevant statutory provisions, the erasure order will take effect at the expiry of the appeal period.

Chairman of the Committee: Sarah Hamilton



Signature

Date: 01 May 2026

Registrant: Elizabeth Williams

Signaturenot present

Date: 01 May 2026

FURTHER INFORMATION
Transcript
A full transcript of the hearing will be made available for purchase in due course.
Appeal
Any appeal against an order of the Committee must be lodged with the relevant court within 28 days of the service of this notification. If no appeal is lodged, the order will take effect at the end of that period. The relevant court is shown at section 23G(4)(a)-(c) of the Opticians Act 1989 (as amended).
Professional Standards Authority
<p>This decision will be reported to the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) under the provisions of section 29 of the NHS Reform and Healthcare Professions Act 2002. PSA may refer this case to the High Court of Justice in England and Wales, the Court of Session in Scotland or the High Court of Justice in Northern Ireland as appropriate if they decide that a decision has been insufficient to protect the public and/or should not have been made, and if they consider that referral is desirable for the protection of the public.</p> <p>Where a registrant can appeal against a decision, the Authority has 40 days beginning with the day which is the last day in which you can appeal. Where a registrant cannot appeal against the outcome of a hearing, the Authority's appeal period is 56 days beginning with the day in which notification of the decision was served on you. PSA will notify you promptly of a decision to refer. A letter will be sent by recorded delivery to your registered address (unless PSA has been notified by the GOC of a change of address).</p> <p>Further information about the PSA can be obtained from its website at www.professionalstandards.org.uk or by telephone on 020 7389 8030.</p>
Effect of orders for suspension or erasure
To practise or carry on business as an optometrist or dispensing optician, to take or use a description which implies registration or entitlement to undertake any activity which the law restricts to a registered person, may amount to a criminal offence once an entry in the register has been suspended or erased.
Contact
If you require any further information, please contact the Council's Hearings Manager at Level 29, One Canada Square, London, E14 5AA or by telephone, on

020 7580 3898.