



GOC Draft Strategic Plan 2020-2027

About us

The General Optical Council (GOC) is the UK-wide regulator for optometrists and dispensing opticians, and for optical businesses. We exist to protect the public by raising standards in the optical professions.

Our strategy for 2020-27 describes what we plan to do over the next six years to achieve our vision of being recognised for delivering world class regulation and excellent customer service.

Our mission is...

to protect the public by continuously raising standards in the optical professions

Our vision is...

to be recognised for delivering world class regulation and excellent customer service

Our values

The interests of the general public are at the heart of all we do, and we aspire to the timeless seven (Nolan) public sector principles of public life (selflessness, integrity, objectivity, accountability, openness, honesty and leadership).

Our values underpin the way we work with each other, and with the public, our registrants and partner organisations:

We act with **integrity**

We pursue **excellence**

We **respect** other people and ideas

We show **empathy**

We behave **fairly**

Looking back

Over the past five years we supported our registrants to deliver excellent eye care and to continuously improve, through:

Publishing revised **standards of practice** for optometrists and dispensing opticians and introducing standards for optical students.

Introducing a **duty of candour, guidance on consent** and supporting “**speaking up**” to underpin a culture of continuous improvement.

Publishing new **standards for optical businesses**, formalising our expectations and ensuring that they complement the standards for individual registrants.

Approving **new, innovative education provision** including four-year optometry masters’ programmes and laying the foundations for broader reform by launching and taking some key decisions regarding the Education Strategic Review (ESR).

Introducing new processes for dealing with **applications for registration** from both within and outside Europe.

Completing **two successful cycles of Continuing Education and Training (CET) and re-validation** with most registrants successfully re-registering and with an encouraging growth of reflective practice.

Improving **MyGOC** and **MyCET**, making them much more accessible and user friendly in response to feedback from registrants.

Applying new **acceptance criteria** for fitness to practise cases that ensure we only investigate those cases where there is a genuine fitness to practise concern.

Funding the **Optical Consumer Complaints Service** to deal with more low-level complaints that need resolution.

Providing new, improved **hearings facilities** following the relocation of our offices to the Old Bailey.

We have achieved this because of:

The energy and commitment of our focused and talented **staff**.

Sound advice from members of our **advisory committees** (Standards, Education, Registration and Companies).

The use of **expert advisory groups** on particular topics.

A newly established **business forum**.

Wider input from registrants through a new **consultation platform**.

Collaborating with **other regulators** to deliver greater efficiency and impact.

New challenges and opportunities

We are proud of what we have achieved but recognise there is more to do.

External influences that will affect our work include:

An **ageing population** and **new treatments** are driving greater demand for eye care services across the UK. One indicator of this is that ophthalmology now represents more than eight per cent of all NHS outpatient attendances in England, the highest of any of the recorded specialities.¹ However, the capacity to provide ophthalmology services has not grown quickly enough to meet demand, meaning that meeting patient needs is a real and current challenge.

Technological development that is changing the way optical professionals work, with optical coherence tomography (OCT) machines increasingly available in community practices and new developments in remote consultations and use of artificial intelligence.

Increasingly **multi-disciplinary approaches** to patient care across the NHS and commissioned services.

Growth in **online and remote provision** of services and a **workforce** that seeks ever greater flexibility in their working hours and practices.

There are some things we have started that need to be completed and embedded:

Redefining the **education requirements for new registrants** for the next decade and beyond through our Education Strategic Review (ESR) is an enormously important and complex piece of work that will enable us to maintain public protection as the roles of registrants evolve. Decisions on some key elements of the new system have now been taken (with plans to shift to the new system by 2024).

We are also planning significant changes to the **training and professional development** required for continuing registration and these will come into effect in 2022.

There are some things we know we can do better:

¹ This data is available in the NHS Digital publication *Hospital Outpatient Activity 2018-19*:
<https://digital.nhs.uk/data-and-information/publications/statistical/hospital-outpatient-activity/2018-19>

Completing **fitness to practise** cases more quickly is a key priority. We have a full programme of work to address this multi-faceted challenge and are excited by early signs of success. But this is a long-term project that will require continued focus.

Our communication with complainants, witnesses, registrants and providers is something we know we must improve. We need to put our customers centre stage and ensure that we are focused on the need to deliver benefits for patients and the wider public. This person-centred approach will include a more collaborative approach to regulation, with a greater emphasis on 'co-creation'. In doing so, we will promote a more positive, rounded perception of the GOC.

Sharing information and learning from our work, appropriately and more effectively (with registrants, across teams and with other regulators) can prevent public harm and reduce costs. We have begun this work in some areas but need to do more.

We have made some advances but need to go further in making our information more **accessible**, using modern technology and communicating in ways that the receivers of information from us prefer.

There are some big opportunities also:

Government has embarked upon a programme of regulatory reform to align the regulation underpinning different regulators as far as is feasible. It has said that it will prioritise regulation to strengthen governance and give greater flexibility in relation to fitness to practise proceedings, but it is also planning to go further and consider registration and education functions. Importantly for the GOC, they have also agreed to consider business regulation.

We have committed to greater collaborative working with **healthcare regulators**, not just to improve synergy and cost effectiveness, but to ensure that by working together we achieve the greatest impact possible on public safety.

Looking forward

To achieve our ambition of delivering and being seen to deliver world-class regulation for the benefit of the public, we need to address current weaknesses and maximise opportunities for change. Our priorities are organised under three overarching strategic objectives: delivering world-class regulatory practice; transforming customer service and building a process of continuous improvement.

For each year of the strategic plan we will publish a business plan setting out the specific milestones, outputs and outcomes that we plan to deliver. We will also

formally evaluate progress against the strategic plan after three years and consider whether we need to revise our priorities to reflect developments in the interim.

World-class regulatory practice

- **We will reform business regulation**, beginning with a review of our overarching regulatory approach and the balance between regulation of business and individuals. We will seek to better protect the public by introducing a comprehensive, simpler and more effective system of business regulation that covers all UK businesses providing eye care services and/or supplying spectacles or contact lenses where this must involve registered practitioners, and which promotes rather than hinders the growth of these businesses. As part of this work we will consider what powers are necessary to ensure compliance with our business standards, including the merit of seeking inspection powers in line with some other professional regulators.

We will revise our standards for individuals – optometrists, dispensing opticians and students – in order to ensure continued public protection, taking opportunities to harmonise standards across the different healthcare professions likely to work together as part of multi-disciplinary teams. As part of this work, we will continue to issue additional guidance as and when needed.

We will implement the new education standards, outcomes and quality assurance procedures that flow from the ESR, aiming to transition to new arrangements for early adopters by 2022. We will share the learning from the early adopters to support the remaining providers to transition by 2024.

We will introduce new continuing professional development (CPD) requirements with a continued focus on re-validation but with more flexibility for registrants to reflect on their own learning needs and to undertake learning in line with their own career goals, including specialisation if appropriate. We will aim to phase in the reforms over the next three years, prioritising the shift to our *Standards of practice for optometrists and dispensing opticians* underpinning the new CPD system.

We will implement new legislation, once this is enacted, to establish a unitary board and will consult on how to exercise new powers that the board will have to set rules in all parts of our regulatory activity. Wherever possible we will do this jointly with other regulators to develop greater coherence and to benefit from one-another's different experiences. Will also ensure that we gain appropriate expert input, building on our recently established Advisory Panel, which brings together all our advisory committees.

Customer Service

We will develop a customer service strategy to make it easier for members of the public and the professions to work with us. This will include developing our relationships with internal and external stakeholders and working in partnership with specialist organisations where appropriate.

We will address our long-standing issues with timeliness in fitness to practise, taking advantage of the opportunities new legislation will provide and utilising opportunities for developing new rules and approaches jointly with other regulators.

We will review and modernise all our processes applying 'lean' methodologies where appropriate to make best use of resources, maximise efficiency and ensure value for money.

We will develop a learning culture to ensure that risks, issues and good practice identified through our regulatory work are fed back into all parts of the organisation. For example, learning from our fitness to practise cases, whether they progress to a hearing or not, can be better used to inform standards and guidance and to shape continuing training provision. We will also share this learning proactively with practitioners and their representative bodies in order to prevent public harm, including through a new *Learning the Lessons* bulletin.

Continuous improvement

We will complete the investment in our IT infrastructure. IT forms the foundations for everything we do and over the last two years we have made significant investment in IT to improve the GOC's infrastructure, resilience and security. We will complete this journey in 2020, giving the GOC a business platform centred on the cloud-based Microsoft Office 365 suite. From this our Customer Relationship Management (CRM) systems will be developed to deliver working practice improvements and efficiencies, ensuring that we continue to keep information safe and secure and that our staff's time is focused on value-added activities.

We will develop and implement a people plan to make the GOC a great place to work. The GOC's IT will enable its staff to work in an agile and flexible way, providing staff with a more positive work life balance. This will be supported by the ongoing work to modernise our HR policies, with continued well-being initiatives and learning, training and development programmes to recruit and retain our talented staff. Looking further ahead, the break in our office lease in 2025 will enable us to identify the best environment and location from which our staff can carry out our functions for the benefit of our registrants, patients and the general public.

We will deliver and embed our efficiency programme to maximise value for money and fund the new things we want to do without asking for more funds from our registrants. This will include seeking process improvements across the organisation, ensuring we reach the financial break-even point by 2021-22 and continue to operate within our annual income thereafter.

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI)

Our EDI strategy for 2020-27 will focus on the same strategic priorities to ensure that there is complete alignment of our goals. We will also nominate an EDI lead who will work with the Senior Management Team to ensure that this work has sufficient profile and priority across the organisation.

All projects will have an EDI strand and we will ensure that thinking about EDI is incorporated right from the very beginning, whether we are developing or revising policies and processes, or implementing legislation. This will involve carrying out and publishing impact assessments to ensure that we consider the impacts of our proposals on the full range of our stakeholders and potential stakeholders.

We will continue to publish EDI data on an annual basis and at the same time, will report on performance against our EDI strategy. In the meantime, we have set out below our initial thinking on the ways in which our EDI strategy will dovetail with the delivery of our three strategic priorities.

World-class regulatory practice

In our reform of business regulation, we will consider what EDI information should be collected from businesses as part of the registration process. We will also take steps to raise awareness among customers with disabilities of what they can reasonably expect from their eye-care provider.

In revising our standards for individual practitioners, we will review our expectations in relation to the way registrants meet their own EDI obligations.

In implementing new education standards, outcomes and quality assurance procedures we will continue to conduct impact assessments and will incorporate a new section on EDI in our provider handbook.

In our introduction of new CET requirements and the associated development of MyCET we will review the way we deal with exceptional circumstances, often related to maternity, illness or disability.

Improving customer service

In reviewing and modernising our processes, we will explore why it is that some groups of registrants are more likely than others to progress to formal

proceedings when a complaint is raised with us and take further action as appropriate.

In developing our customer engagement strategy, we will consider the needs of all our customers, particularly those who may be more vulnerable, and provide appropriate mechanisms to engage them.

In our development of a learning culture, we will ensure that we are able to capture and share learning for those with protected characteristics, focusing on intersectionality as well as registrants as a whole.

Continuous improvement

In completing the investment in our IT infrastructure, we will ensure accessibility of our new web-site, with a primary focus on those with sight impairment and we will continue the work we have begun to capture more and better equalities data for a wider range of characteristics and processes.

In delivering and embedding our efficiency programme, we will maximise our chances of success and avoid wasted costs by ensuring that those requiring reasonable adjustments to participate in our processes are given the right support at the right time.

In developing and implementing our people plan, we will implement our EDI Leadership Plan and other recommendations arising from our EDI Review.

What will success look like?

We will measure our success through the following high-level outcomes:

- In aspiring to be world-class we should be rated highly by the **Professional Standards Authority (PSA)**. We will aim to meet all of the PSA standards but will not let this get in the way of trying new and innovative approaches to regulation.
- **Public confidence** in the professions we regulate is already strong and we expect this to be maintained if we are continuously raising standards. By protecting the public, we are also protecting the reputation of the optical professions. We have instigated an annual public perceptions survey and will continue this throughout the period of this plan.
- We should also retain the **confidence of the optical professions** and we will measure this through an annual registrants' survey and regular stakeholder survey, looking, for example, at the extent to which we are seen as transparent, inclusive and fair.

- We expect **customer satisfaction** with the GOC to increase if we deliver on our customer engagement strategy. We do not have a robust baseline and will prioritise the development of this in year one, with registrants as well as patients and the general public considered customers for this purpose.

These high-level outcomes will be underpinned by a range of output measures set out in our more annual business plans. These will be aligned to the measures used by the PSA and importantly, the things that matter to patients and the wider public, and to our customers and stakeholders more generally.