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General Optical Council

Public perceptions research

April 2022

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Project details

Title	Public Perceptions Research 2022
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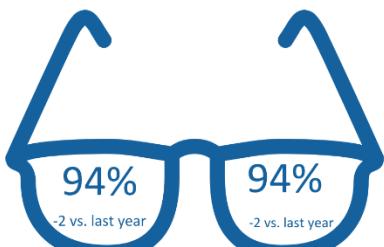
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Executive summary

Based on a UK representative sample of 2,236 interviews which were completed online between 2nd January until 18th March 2022, the headline messages for the General Optical Council are summarised below.

Public Perceptions Research 2022 – Key Messages



Were satisfied with optometrist during their last sight test

Were satisfied with their last opticians visit overall



87%

-10 vs. last year

Were satisfied with the protections that were in place during their last optician visit to protect them from coronavirus



+4 vs. last year

Would go first to an optician/optometrist with an emergency eye problem, the second most common choice after a GP (35%)

There is higher confidence in receiving a high standard of care from an optometrist than all professions, with dispensing opticians in line with dentists



Optometrist
93% confident



Dispensing optician
86% confident



Pharmacist 89%
Dentist 87%
GP 84%



74% of the population had a sight test in the last two years, in line with what we saw last year.

(Wording has changed from 2021 when it was visited an optician)



13% of all respondents indicate that they have ever experienced a situation where something has gone wrong with the care/service they received from an optician/optometrist practice, back at levels seen in 2019.



42% of respondents would be open to having part of their sight test done remotely using advanced technology/AI



The main barriers to considering a remote sight test using advanced technology/AI:
46% Concerns about accuracy
45% Prefer to see someone face to face



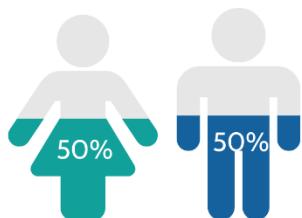
52% would be likely to choose a computer service in which a computer diagnoses eye conditions, such as glaucoma (without the need for an optometrist)

General Optical Council

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Public Perceptions Research 2022 - Demographic profile

Gender

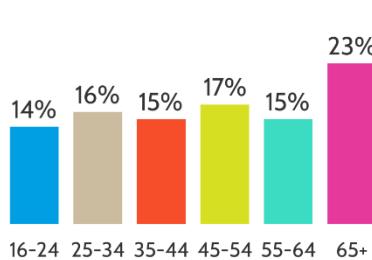


Sexuality



92% Heterosexual
3% bisexual
2% Gay/lesbian
1% other
2% prefer not to say

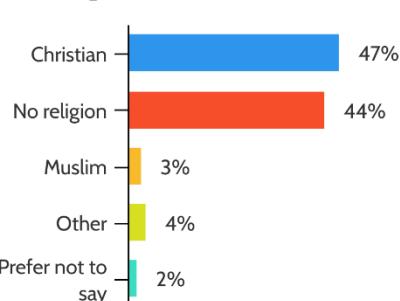
Age



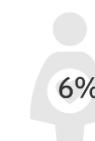
Region



Religion



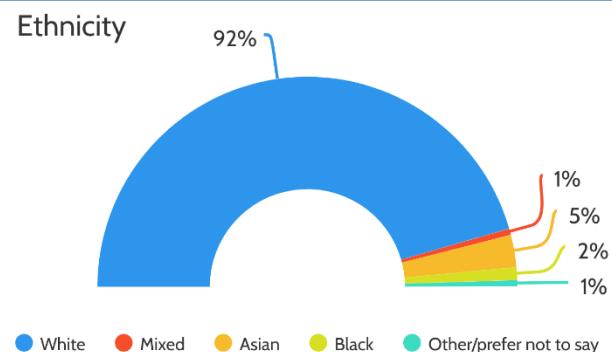
Ethnicity



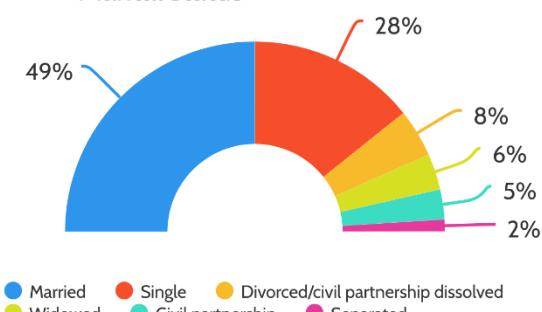
6% Pregnant, or on maternity leave



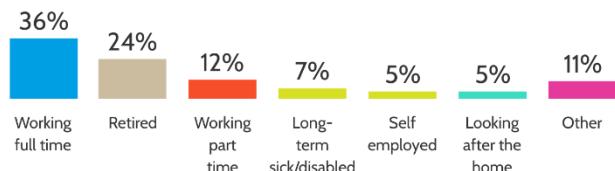
15% are performing the role of a carer



Marital status



Working status



Perceptions and service experiences

Our mission is...

to protect the public by upholding high standards in the optical professions

Our vision is...

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

Key findings

The mission of the General Optical Council (GOC) is to protect and promote the health and safety of the public by upholding high standards in the optical profession. This regulatory function is being delivered across a sector that the public continue to view in a highly positive manner:

- **Public satisfaction levels** - The high level of public satisfaction with optometrists who carry out eye tests that has been evident in previous iterations of this research, has been sustained into 2022. More than nine in ten individuals (94%) who have had a sight test / eye examination within the last two years state that they were satisfied with the optometrist who carried out that sight test. However, this is a slight fall from the figure of 96% recorded in 2019 and 2021, when this question was asked to those who had visited an opticians in the previous two years.
- **Satisfaction with the overall experience** - Echoing the satisfaction levels for the optometrist who carried out the sight test, 94% of those who had a sight test / eye examination during the last two years were satisfied with the overall experience of the opticians / optometrist practice. This also marks a fall from 96% in 2021, but a return to the figure of 94% reported in 2019, although the question in these two years was asked to those who had *visited an optician* in the past two years.

- **Public confidence in optometrists and dispensing opticians** - Public confidence in the professions that the GOC regulates remains strong. Nine in ten respondents (93%) are either fairly or very confident in the standard of care that is provided by optometrists, although a lower proportion (86%) express the same level of confidence in dispensing opticians. The confidence in optometrists is higher than confidence in other healthcare professionals, while confidence in dispensing opticians is at a similar level. Analysis by nation shows minimal variations in these strong perceptions.
- **Perceptions of opticians / optometrist practices** - Perceptions of opticians / optometrist practices as healthcare providers have seen some improvements in the last year, with an increasing proportion likely to attend an opticians / optometrist practice as their first port of call if they woke up with an eye problem. This figure has risen from 30% in 2021 to 34% in 2022. However, an increasing proportion state that they see opticians / optometrist practices primarily as retailers (rising from 12% in 2021 to 19% in 2022), indicating the need for further work on promoting the view of these practices as healthcare providers.
- **Negative experiences when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice** - There has been a slight increase in the incidence of something going wrong with care/service received by patients at an opticians / optometrist practice since 2021. 13% report experiencing such an event compared to 10% in 2021. However, the proportion who received an apology has increased from 42% to 58%. This indicates that the Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians are increasingly being upheld, perhaps in response to the findings of the 2021 study.
- **Openness to new optical healthcare technologies** - The results also find that there is an openness to using remote technologies as part of their optical healthcare. 42% state that they would consider undertaking their sight test / eye examination remotely, however 20% don't know if they would use such a service, indicating a need for greater education on how these services would run. An even greater proportion, 52%, state they would be likely to choose a service in which a computer diagnosed an eye condition without an optometrist being involved. Openness to these technologies varies between groups within the respondents, however this option is particularly well received by those who have previously experienced difficulties with their visits to opticians / optometrist practices.

Research objectives and methodology

Research background and objectives

The GOC is the regulator for the optical professions in the UK. The mission of the GOC is to protect the public by upholding high standards in the optical professions. The GOC currently registers around 30,000 optometrists, dispensing opticians, student opticians and optical businesses. As part of the organisation's research programme which seeks to help understand the views and experiences of members of the public across the UK, a new wave of public perceptions research was commissioned with M·E·L Research in early 2021. This study was the sixth iteration of this research, which was first carried out in 2015.

The key objectives of the 2022 public perceptions survey were to:

- conduct a survey with a robust and representative sample of the UK adult population (16+) including a mix of both patients and non-patients
- measure and track trends in perceptions and levels of awareness over time, comparing results to previous years
- collect new data on who answered the survey, including protected characteristics such as religion, marital status, and disability status

Methodology

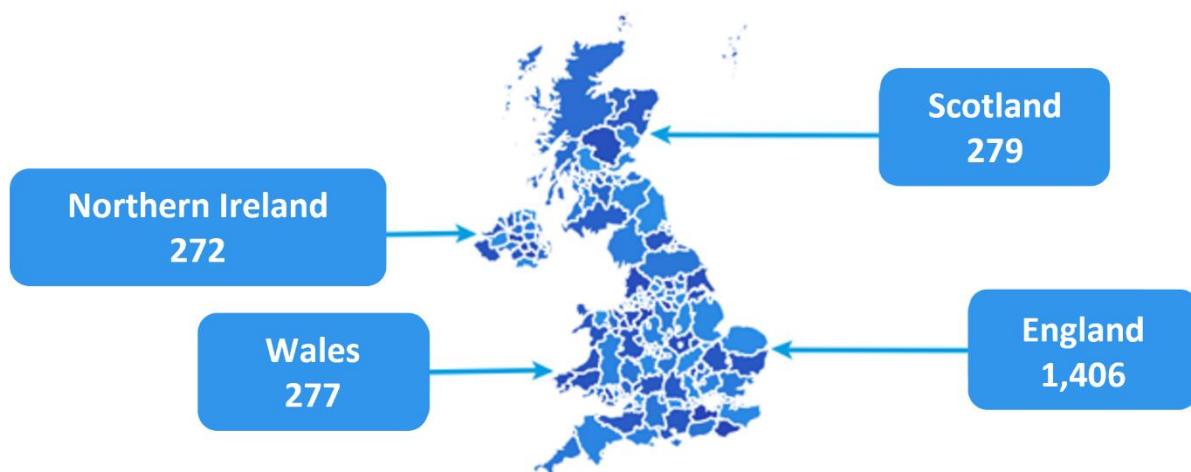
The 2022 survey was redesigned jointly by M·E·L Research and the GOC to ensure that the survey content remained aligned with the GOC's strategic objectives and so that it reflected the practical experiences the public will have had of using eyecare services throughout 2021 and 2022.

A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix B. Interlocking quotas were set to ensure a representative sample was achieved based on gender and age within each UK nation. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were over-sampled to ensure that confident statistical analysis could be undertaken by nation. The survey was hosted online and distributed to a UK consumer panel, which includes members of the public who have signed up to take part in online research on a wide number of topics. This approach replicates the approach used in

the last wave of this research delivered in 2021. Earlier waves prior to 2019 used a mixture of telephone and online techniques.

In total 2,236 interviews were completed, exceeding the 2,000-interview target set. The distribution of these interviews per nation is shown in the figure below.

Figure 1: Sample achievement by nation



A full sample profile by nation can be found in Appendix A. Prior to the application of weighting, the survey included:



1,777 who are either glasses or contact lens wearers (79%)

1,660 who've had a sight test in the past two years (74%)

The 2022 dataset also includes further information on the online panel members. These variables are:

- Age, gender, region (included in panel demographics)
- Gender reassignment, sexuality, disability, pregnancy, ethnicity, marital status, those with carer responsibilities, religion, working status (asked in a follow up survey, whereby those who had completed the survey were invited to complete further questions on EDI data. 1,556 respondents completed this follow up survey).

As the online survey was undertaken with a sample of the public, all results are subject to sampling tolerances. For example, when interpreting the results to a survey question which all respondents answered, where 50% responded with a particular answer, there is a 95% chance that this result will vary by no more than +/- 2.07 percentage points had the result been obtained from the entire UK population (16+). Sampling tolerances are higher for the smaller subgroup populations such as Northern Ireland, Scotland, and Wales. Each of these nations has a 95% confidence interval level of +/- 5.9 percentage points, with England having a 95% confidence interval level of +/- 2.61 percentage points.

Analysis and reporting

Weights have been applied to the returned data to ensure that certain subgroups are not over or under-represented within the data, and that the data is as close to the demographic profile of the UK as possible in terms of gender and age. Weighting adjusts the proportions of certain groups within a sample to match more closely to the proportions in the target population. Minor weighting corrections were applied by age and gender within each nation.

When setting the survey quotas, it was decided that the nations of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should be over-sampled to allow for confident data analysis at a nation-specific level and to allow confident analysis between countries. To be consistent with the approach used in 2019, the data has not been weighted to adjust the number of responses by UK nation to be truly representative of the UK.

Statistical tests

To provide further insight into the results, we have carried out sub-group analysis by different demographics and some other variables (e.g., when their last sight test / eye examination was and current use of glasses and contact lenses). The results for these sub-groups have been presented only where they are statistically significant (at the 95% confidence level) and if the base sizes are 30 or more. Where there is a statistically significant difference between groups, this has been noted in the report as a “significant” difference.

Presentation of data

Throughout this report, those who took part in the survey are referred to as ‘respondents’. For this report, those who reported having a sight test / eye examination in the last two years

are referred to as 'patients'. Those who reported having a sight test / eye examination more than two years ago or never are referred to as 'non-patients'.

The question was updated this year to reflect the difference between optometrists and dispensing opticians, the two distinct optical professions the GOC regulates. This was done by splitting out certain questions into different codes or including both codes in the answer to not impact on trended data.

Owing to the rounding of numbers, percentages displayed on graphs may not always add up to 100% and may differ slightly to the text. The figures provided in the text should always be used as the authoritative results. Where shifts are shown, these have been calculated on the figures rounded to the nearest whole number.

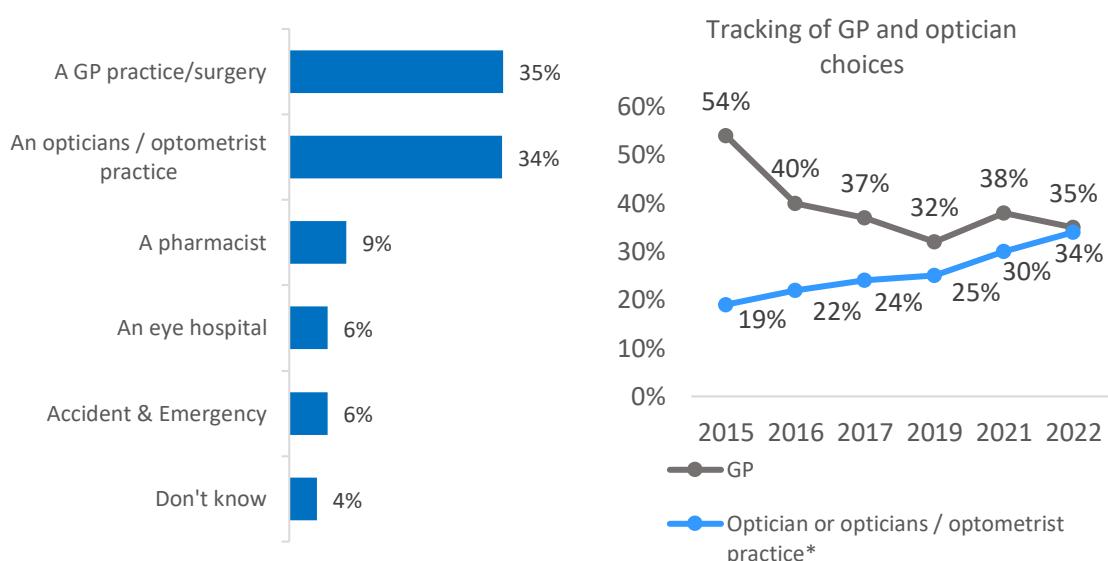
Public perceptions of opticians / optometrist practices

The role of opticians in treating eye problems

The proportion of respondents who state that they would first speak to an opticians or optometrist practice if they woke up with an eye problem has continued to grow year on year, having risen from 30% in 2021, to 34% in 2022. This figure has been steadily growing since 2015, when 19% reported they would go to an opticians first. However, it should be noted that in 2022, the wording of this option was altered from “optician” to “An opticians / optometrist practice”, which may have impacted on the proportion who selected it.

As the proportion who would first go to an opticians / optometrist practice with an eye problem has increased, there has been a concurrent decline in the proportion who would first go to a GP since 2015, when 54% reported that they would do so. Although this figure saw a slight spike in 2021, when it rose to 38%, it has since started falling again, and if it were to continue this direction, the proportion who would go to an opticians / optometrist practice first would likely overtake the proportion who would first go to a GP practice/surgery in the coming years.

Figure 2: If you woke up tomorrow with an eye problem, such as something in your eye, a red eye or blurred vision, where would you go or who would you speak to first? (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 2022 (2,234) / 2021 (2,087) / 2019 (2,000) / 2017 (3,025) / 2016 (3,252) / 2015 (2,250)

*Answer option changed from “An optician” to “An opticians / optometrist practice” in 2022

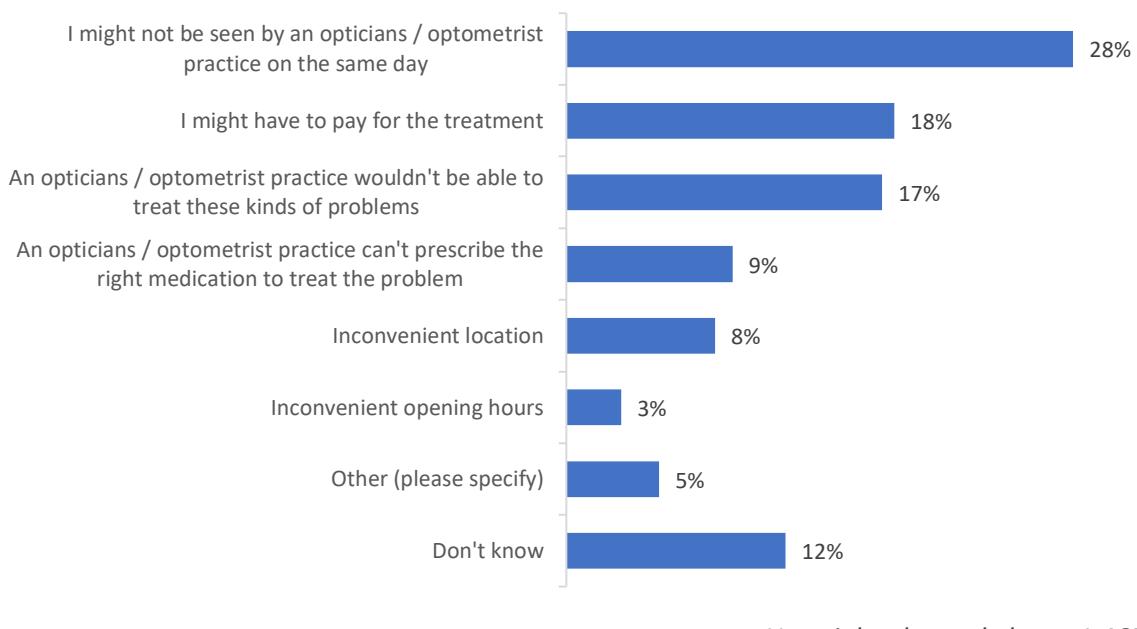
Among patients (those who have had a sight test / eye examination in the last two years), the proportion who would go to an opticians / optometrist practice first if encountering an eye problem is significantly higher (39%) than the proportion of non-patients (22%) who would do so. Patients are also less likely to go to a GP practice (32%) first than an opticians / optometrist practice, while non-patients are significantly more likely (41%) to go to a GP practice first than an opticians / optometrist practice.

At the nation level, respondents in Scotland (51%), Northern Ireland (45%) and Wales (42%) are significantly more likely than those in the overall sample to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first, while respondents in England are less likely to (27%).

Female respondents (37%) are significantly more likely than male (32%) to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first, as are older respondents, with those aged 65+ (39%), 55-64 (35%) and 45-54 (36%) significantly more likely to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first than those aged 16-24 (27%). White respondents (38%) are significantly more likely than ethnic minority respondents (16%) to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first, with ethnic minority respondents more likely to go to either a GP practice (44%) or eye hospital (17%) than an opticians / optometrist practice. Glasses or contact lenses wearers are significantly more likely to go to an opticians / optometrist practice (38%) than those who aren't (21%).

Among those who choose not to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first, the most common reason given is that they might not be seen on the same day (28%). Meanwhile 18% express concern that they might have to pay for the treatment, and 17% that the opticians / optometrist practice wouldn't be able to treat these kinds of problems.

Figure 3: Why would you choose not to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first in this situation? (Those who did not select an opticians / optometrist practice for advice on an eye problem)



Unweighted sample base: 1,465

This continues the trend from 2019 and 2021, when not being seen by an opticians / optometrist practice on the same day was also the most given reason for not attending an opticians / optometrist practice first, reported by 24% and 28% of respondents in each year respectively.

Among patients, the primary reason for not considering an opticians / optometrist practice is the potential of not being seen on the same day (29%), with the second greatest concern for this group being that they might not be able to treat the problem (20%). For non-patients, the two most common reasons for not considering an opticians / optometrist practice are that they may not be seen on the same day (24%) and that they may need to pay for the treatment (23%).

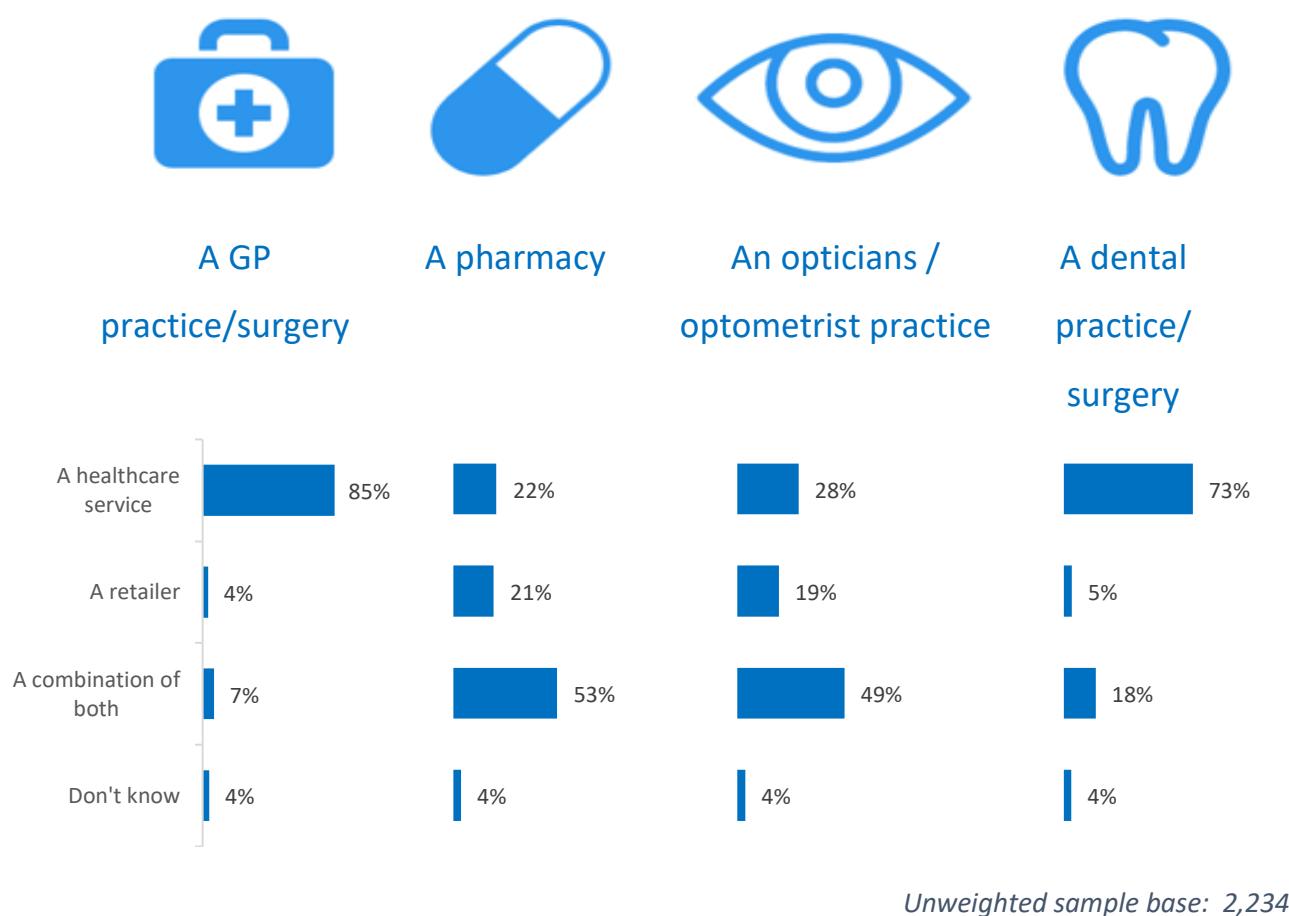
Needing to pay for the treatment is a significantly greater concern for respondents aged 16-24 (27%) and 25-34 (26%) than those aged 45-54 (13%), 55-64% (15%) and 65+ (7%). Meanwhile, older respondents are more likely to state that not being seen by a practitioner on the same day is a reason for not seeing an opticians / optometrist practice. This is significantly more likely to be expressed by those age 65+ (36%), 55-64 (33%) or 45-54 (30%) than those age 16-24 (20%) or 25-34 (21%).

Healthcare service or retailer?

Just under half (49%) of respondents perceive an opticians / optometrist practice to be both a healthcare service and a retailer, with 28% considering them to be solely a healthcare service. 19% consider them to be solely a retailer, a rise from 12% in 2021. However, it should be noted that the wording of the question has changed since 2021, when respondents were shown the option “An optician” rather than “An opticians / optometrist practice”. This alteration in the wording may have contributed to this increase.

The perception of an opticians / optometrist practice is similar to that of pharmacists, who are perceived as a healthcare service by 22% of respondents, and a combination of both by 53%. Meanwhile GPs are perceived as solely healthcare services by 85% of respondents, and dentists by 73%.

Figure 4: When you think about the following, do you think of them primarily as a healthcare service, a retailer, or a combination of both? (All respondents)



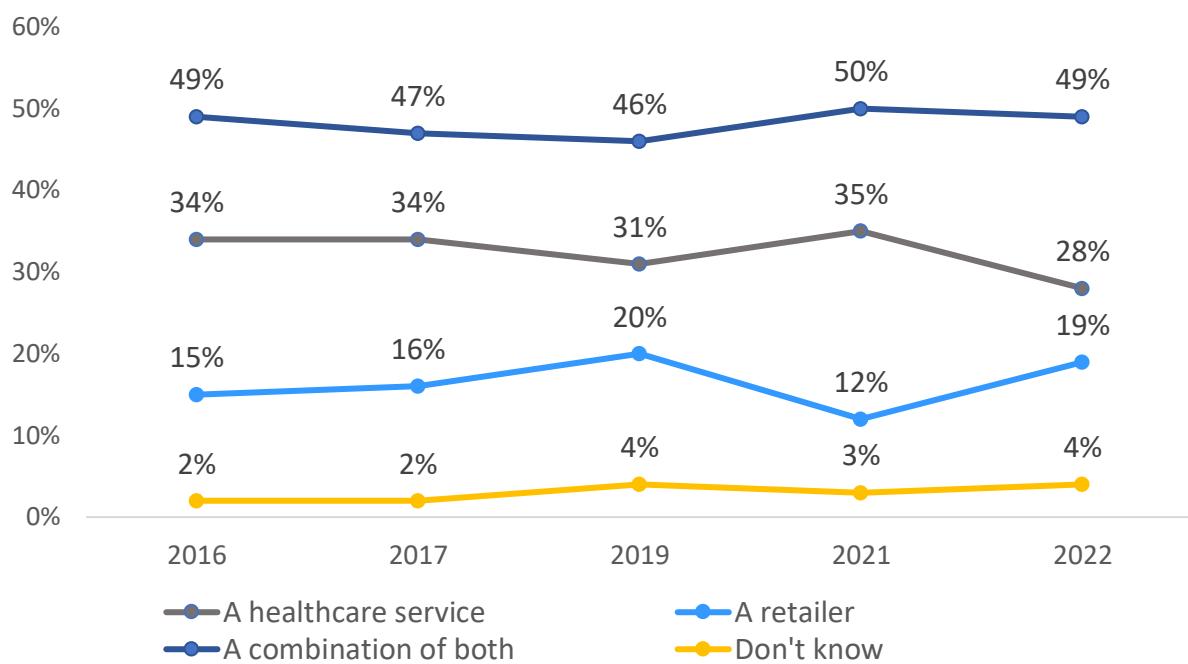
Despite being less likely to go to an opticians or optometrist practice if they woke up with an eye problem, respondents aged 16-24 are significantly more likely (38%) than the overall sample to state that they see them as a healthcare practice. Meanwhile glasses or contact lens wearers (51%) are significantly more likely than non-wearers (42%) to see an opticians / optometrist practice as a combination of both healthcare service and retailer.

Deeper analysis reveals that a significantly greater proportion of male respondents than females consider an opticians / optometrist practice to be a retailer (24% cf. 15%). White respondents are significantly less likely than those from ethnic minorities to consider an opticians / optometrist practice to be primarily healthcare providers (26% cf. 33%). However, an equal proportion of white and ethnic minority respondents consider them to be primarily retailers (19% cf. 19%).

Non-patients are significantly less likely to see an opticians / optometrist practice as primarily healthcare providers than patients (those who have attended a sight test / eye examination in the past two years) (24% cf. 30%). However, the difference between these two groups in their perception of opticians / optometrist practices as retailers is more marginal (18% of patients cf. 22% of non-patients).

Since 2016, respondents have most commonly stated that they see an optician as a mix of both healthcare service and retailer. The proportion who sees them as primarily a healthcare service has dropped in 2022, but this may again be due to the change in wording to refer to “an opticians / optometrist practice”.

Figure 5: Tracking of how an optician or an opticians / optometrist practice are perceived 2016-2022 (All respondents)*



Unweighted sample base: 2022 (2,236) / 2021 (2,087) / 2019 (2,000) / 2017 (3,025) / 2016 (3,252)

*Answer option changed from “An optician” to “An opticians / optometrist practice” in 2022

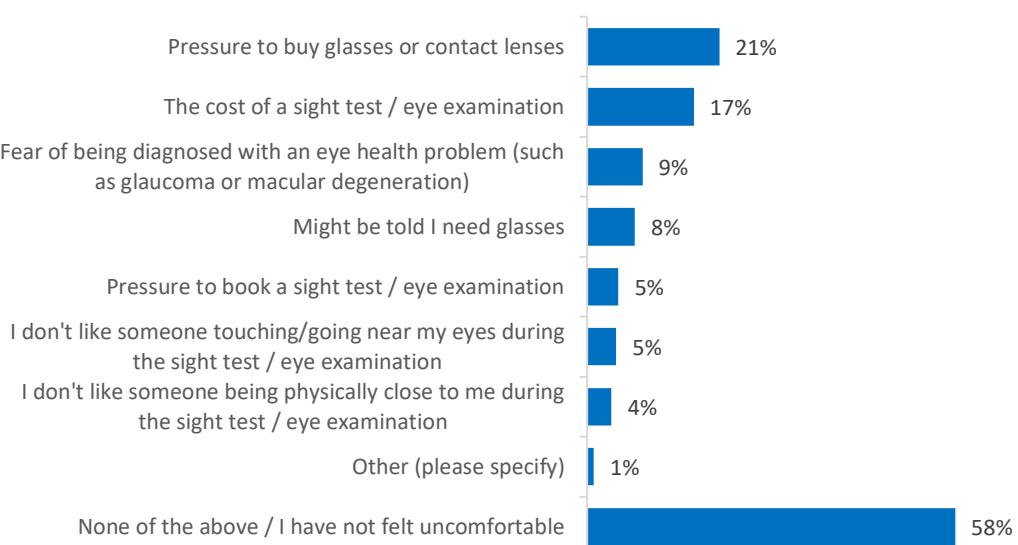
Using the services provided by an opticians / optometrist practice

Discomfort about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice

Almost six in ten (58%) respondents state that they have never felt uncomfortable visiting an opticians / optometrist practice. The most common reason for feeling uncomfortable about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice is the pressure to buy glasses or contacts, expressed by 21% of all respondents. The cost of a sight test / eye examination is a reason for discomfort for 17%, and fear of being diagnosed with an eye health problem for 9%. These were also the top three causes of discomfort in 2021, when they were reported by 20%, 13%, and 10% of respondents respectively. Meanwhile, the proportion of respondents who have never felt uncomfortable visiting an opticians / optometrist practice has fallen slightly from 60% in 2021, however it should be noted that this question was only asked about “an opticians” in previous years, rather than “an opticians / optometrist practice” this year.

4% state that they don’t like someone being physically close to them, like the 5% who indicated this in 2020 and 6% in 2019. This would seem to suggest that this has not been affected significantly by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 5: Have you ever felt uncomfortable about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice for any of the following reasons? (All respondents)



Unweighted sample base: 2,236

There is significant variation in these responses by several demographic characteristics. Respondents in Scotland (68%) are significantly more likely than others across the sample to state that they have not felt uncomfortable about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice. They are also significantly less likely to state that the cost of a sight test / eye examination makes them uncomfortable (10%). Similarly, male respondents are significantly more likely than female to say that they have not felt uncomfortable about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice (62% cf. 54%). They are also less likely than female respondents to state that they are concerned about the cost of a sight test / eye examination (12% cf. 22%).

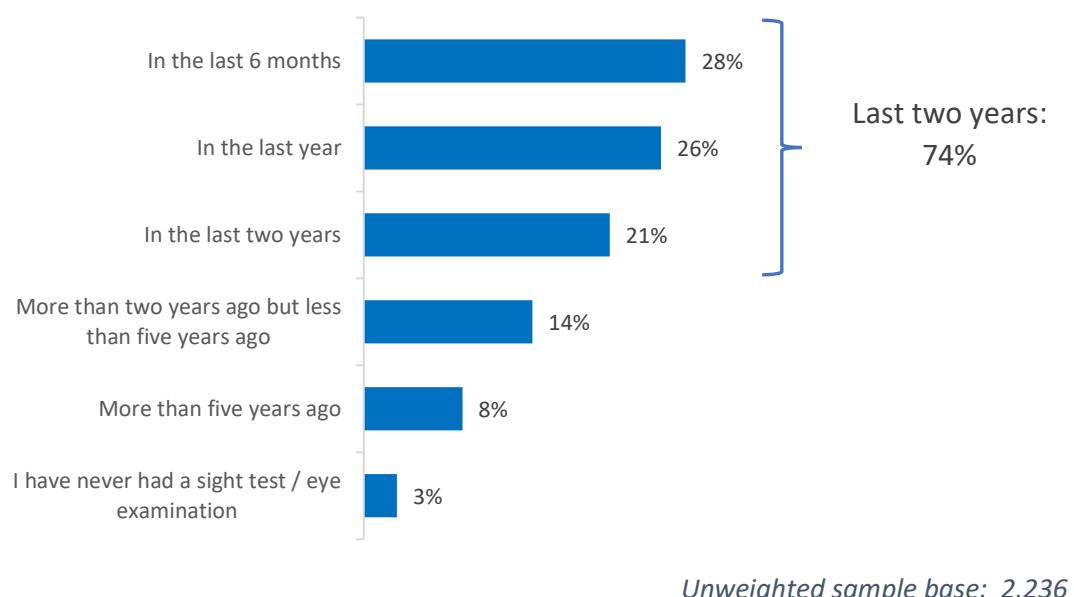
Ethnic minority respondents are significantly less likely than white respondents to state that they have not felt comfortable visiting an opticians / optometrist practice (39% cf. 64%). Ethnic minority respondents are significantly more likely to report that a number of factors make them uncomfortable about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice than white respondents. These include the pressure to purchase contact lenses / glasses (30% cf. 20%), the cost of a sight test / eye examination (28% cf. 14%), the possibility that they could be told they need glasses (17% cf. 5%). Respondents with a disability are slightly less likely to have never experienced discomfort at an opticians / optometrist practice (58% cf. 63%), but significantly more likely to state that they don't like someone being physically close to them (8% cf. 2%). This may suggest adjustments aren't always being made to accommodate the needs of those with disabilities when attending an opticians / optometrist practice, or that they feel more vulnerable because of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By age, older respondents were more likely to feel comfortable when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice. (Agreement with the statement "I have not felt uncomfortable" was higher by age - 65+ year olds (76%), 55-64 year olds (69%), 45-54 year olds (65%) significantly more likely to agree than 25-34 year olds (43%), and 16-24 year olds (31%)). Younger respondents are particularly likely to be concerned about the cost of the sight test / eye examination, with 30% or 16-24 year olds and 30% of 25-34 year olds expressing concern about this, a significantly higher number than the other age groups. They are also significantly more likely than other age groups to be concerned that they might be told they need glasses (18% of 16-24 year olds and 15% of 25-34 year olds).

Last reported visit for a sight test / eye examination

Just under three quarters of respondents have had a sight test or eye examination in the past two years (74%). This is similar to the proportion who reported that they had visited an optician in the past two years in 2021 (75%), however the question asked in 2021 didn't specify whether a sight test or eye examination took place, so some of these 75% may have only visited for other purposes. This comparison should therefore be treated with caution.

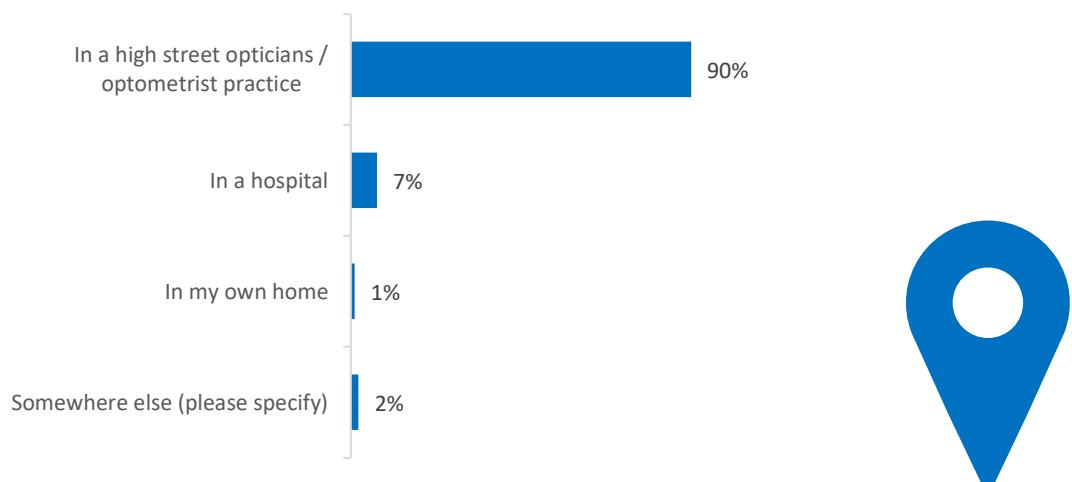
Figure 6: When was the last time you had a sight test / eye examination? (All respondents)



Glasses or contact lens wearers (83%) were significantly more likely than non-wearers (39%) to have had a sight test / eye examination in the past two years. Respondents aged 65+ were also significantly more likely than the overall sample to have done so (85%).

Nine in ten respondents who had had a sight test / eye examination did so in a high street opticians / optometrist practice, with a further 7% having it in a hospital. However, ethnic minority respondents were significantly less likely than white respondents to have had their last sight test / eye examination in a high street practice (82% cf. 91%), and significantly more likely to have had it in a hospital (16% cf. 5%).

Figure 8: Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination where was this...? (All respondents)

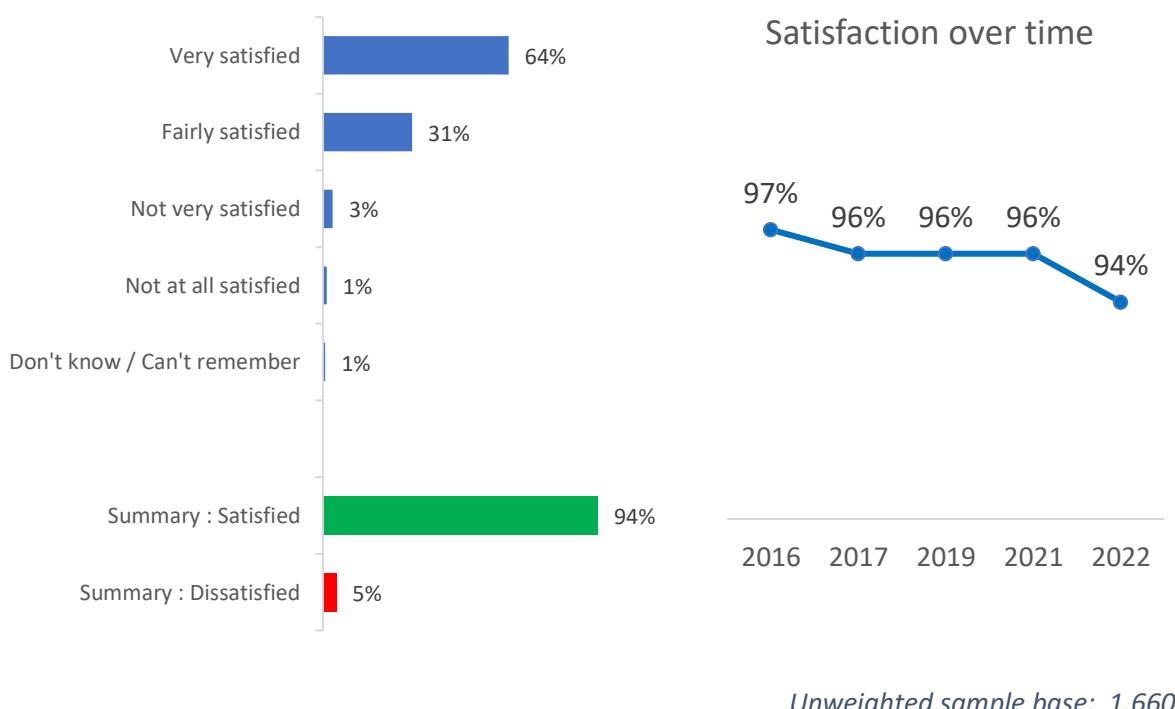


Unweighted sample base: 2,172

Satisfaction with sight test / eye examination

Satisfaction with the optometrist remains high, with 94% of those who had a sight test / eye examination in the past two years satisfied with the optometrist who carried out their sight tests. However, this is a small but statistically significant drop from the 96% who reported this level of satisfaction in 2021 and is the first time since the survey was first run in 2016 that it has dropped below this level. It must be noted however that the question wording changed in 2022. In previous years, the question asked about satisfaction with the “The optician” who carried out the sight test / eye examination, whereas in 2022 it asked about “The optometrist”. This could have had an impact on the results at the question; it’s also worth keeping in mind that the sight test / examination experience will have also been impacted by COVID-19 protocols. Only 5% of those who had a sight test / eye examination in the last two years indicated any level of dissatisfaction with the optometrist who carried out their sight test / eye examination.

Figure 9: Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination, how satisfied or otherwise were you with the following? The optometrist / optician** who carried out your sight test / eye examination (All those who have had a sight test / eye examination within the last two years)*



*Question wording changed in 2022 from “Thinking of the last time you saw an optician...” to
“Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination...”

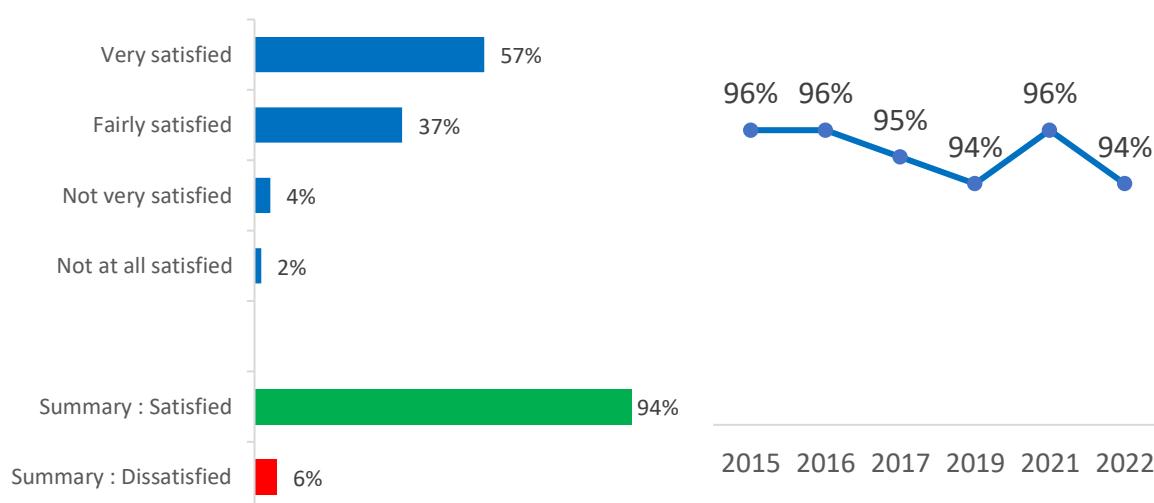
**Answer option changed from “The optician” to “The optometrist” in 2022

Satisfaction was significantly higher in Northern Ireland (98%) than in Scotland (93%) and Wales (92%), but not significantly higher than satisfaction in England (95%). By age, older respondents tended to report higher levels of satisfaction. Those aged 55-64 (97%) and 65+ (97%) were significantly more satisfied than those aged 16-24 (90%), 25-34 (92%) and 35-44 (91%).

Satisfaction was highest among those who had a sight test / eye examination in the last six months (95%) or last year (95%), and lower among those who had a sight test / eye examination in the last two years (92%), however these differences were not statistically significant.

Satisfaction with the overall experience at an opticians / optometrist practice remains high, with 94% of those respondents who have had a sight test / eye examination in the past two years being fairly or very satisfied. However, this marks a small drop from the level of satisfaction reported in 2021 (96%), and a return to the level of satisfaction reported in 2019 (94%).

Figure 10: Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination, how satisfied or otherwise were you with the following? Your overall experience of the opticians / optometrist practice** (All those who have had a sight test / eye examination within the last two years)*



Unweighted sample base: 1,660

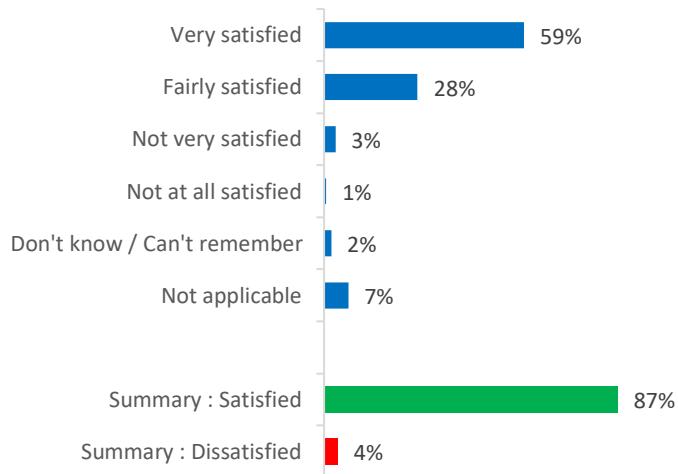
*Question wording changed in 2022 from “Thinking of the last time you saw an optician...” to
“Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination...”

**Answer option changed from “The optician” to “The opticians / optometrist practice” in 2022

By nation the level of satisfaction was fairly consistent, with no significant variation in the reported satisfaction (Wales: 91%, Scotland: 93%, Northern Ireland: 94%, England: 94%).

Respondents were also asked about their satisfaction with the protections in place to keep them safe from coronavirus. The satisfaction with this aspect of their visit appears to be below that of other areas, with 87% reporting that they were satisfied. In 2021, this question was asked only to those who had visited an optician in the previous six months – of these 97% reported that they were satisfied. However, it should be noted that 7% stated that this was not applicable to their visit.

Figure 11: Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination, how satisfied or otherwise were you with the following? The protections in place to keep you safe from coronavirus (All those who have had a sight test / eye examination within the last two years)

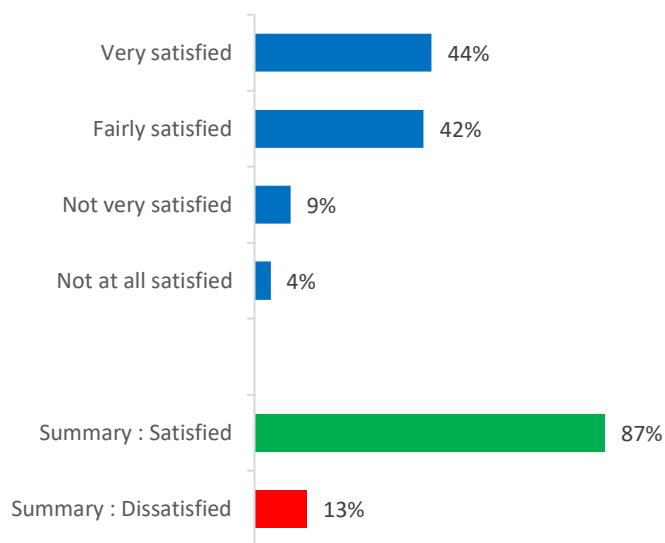


Unweighted sample base: 1,660

In addition, older respondents, who could potentially be at more risk if they contract COVID-19, are more likely to state that they were satisfied with the protections in place. 92% of those aged 65+ and 90% of those aged 55-64 were satisfied, significantly more than those aged 16-24 (74%), 25-34 (83%) and 35-44 (83%).

Nearly nine in ten (87%) respondents who had had a sight test / eye examination within the last two years were satisfied with the experience of buying glasses or contact lenses.

Figure 12: Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination, how satisfied or otherwise were you with the following? The experience of buying glasses or contact lenses (All those who had a sight test / eye examination within the last two years)



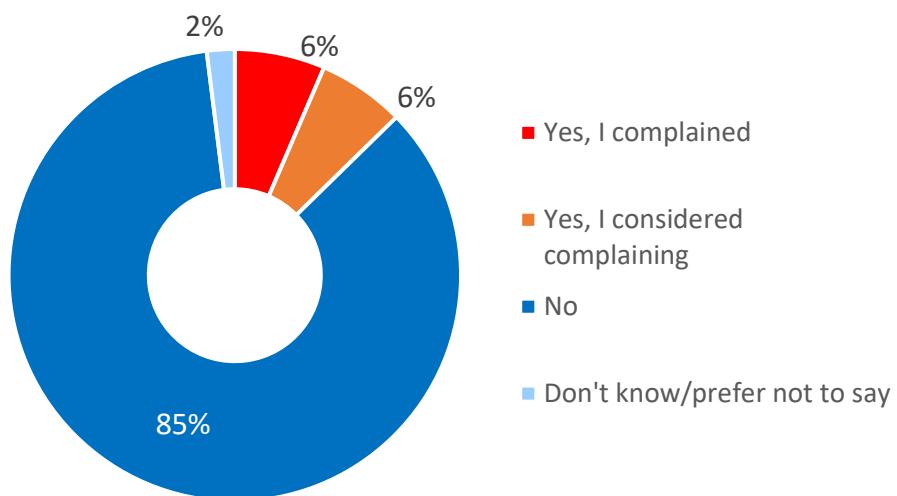
Unweighted sample base: 1,660

There was significant variation in satisfaction by age, with significantly fewer of those aged 16-24 reporting that they are satisfied (78%) than those aged 25-34 (86%), 35-44 (88%), 45-54 (87%), 55-64 (89%) and 65+ (91%).

Adverse experiences and complaints

Those who had ever had a sight test / eye examination were asked about whether they had ever complained about an experience when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice. In 2022, 85% reported that they had never complained, with 6% stating that they had complained and a further 6% that they considered doing so.

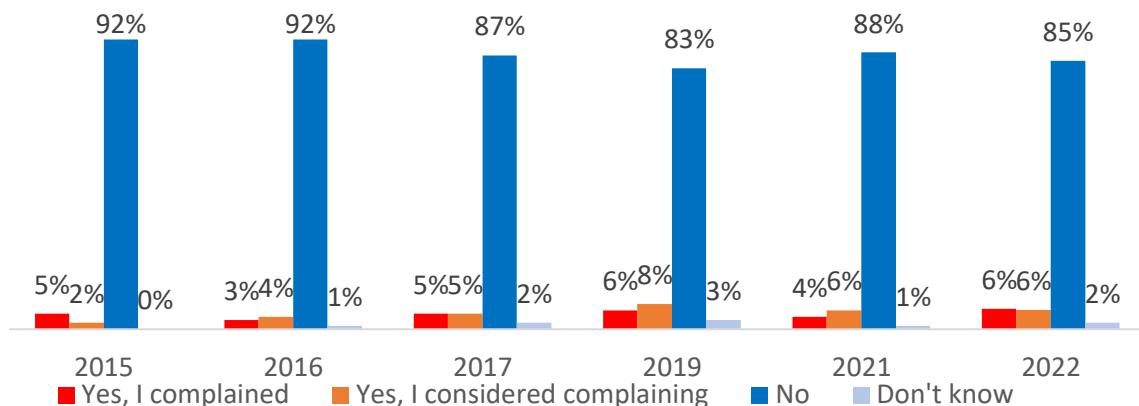
Figure 13: Have you ever complained or considered complaining about an experience when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice? (All those who have ever had a sight test / eye examination)



Unweighted sample base: 2,172

The proportion who had complained has risen from 4% to 6% since 2021, marking a small but significant increase, and a return to the prevalence of complaints reported in 2019 (6%). It should be noted that in 2021 and the years prior, this question was asked about visiting “An optician” whereas in 2022 it asked about visiting “An opticians / optometrist practice”.

Figure 14: Complaint incidence over time (All those who have ever visited an optician / had a sight test / eye examination**)*



Unweighted sample base: 2022 (2,172), 2021 (2,014) / 2019 (1,886) / 2017 (2,895) / 2016 (2,983) / 2015 (1,994)

*Question wording referred to visiting “An optician” up until 2021, and was changed to refer to “An opticians / optometrist practice” in 2022

**In 2022, the question wording was changed to “When was the last time you had a sight test / eye examination?”, whereas in 2015-2021 this was asked in the following way “When was the last time you saw an optician?”

By age, respondents were similarly likely to have complained (between 5% and 8% for each age banding), however younger respondents were more likely to have considered complaining. 9% of those aged 16-24 and 11% of those aged 25-34 considered complaining, significantly higher than the 2% of those aged 65+ who reported that they considered complaining. Similarly, white (7%) and ethnic minority (7%) respondents were similarly likely to have complained, but ethnic minority respondents were significantly more likely to have considered complaining (12%) than white respondents (5%). As were respondents who are pregnant, on maternity leave or returning from maternity leave (15%) compared to those who aren’t (6%). This may indicate that these respondents don’t feel empowered to or lack the avenues through which they can make complaints.

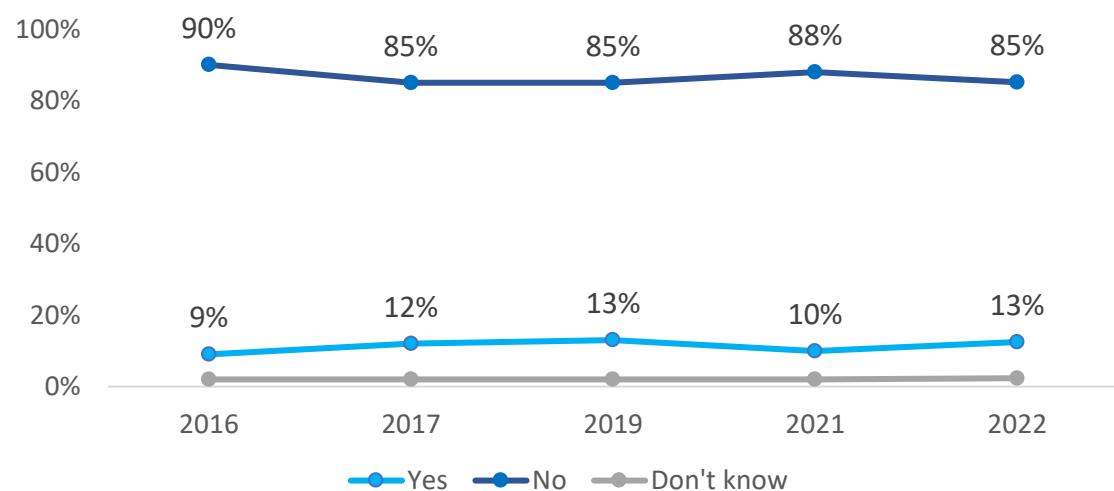
Meanwhile, glasses or contact lens wearers were more likely than non-wearers to both have complained (7% cf. 2%) and to have considered complaining (7% cf. 4%), indicating that level of service for those who require glasses or contact lenses is not as high as for those who don’t, who likely access fewer of the services available at an opticians / optometrist practice. Carers

are also significantly more likely to have complained than non-carers (6%) and more commonly considered complaining (10% cf. 4%).

The Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians and Standards for Optical Students requires optical professionals to be candid to patients and customers when something goes wrong and to provide an apology. In this context, questions were included to quantify how frequently something goes wrong for patients and whether they receive an apology when this happens.

13% report that something went wrong with the care/service they received when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice, marking a return to the figure reported in 2019 (13%), after it fell to 10% in 2021. However, it should be noted that the question wording changed in 2022 to reference “the care received when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice”, whereas in previous years it asked about the “care/service received from an optician”. This wording change may have had an impact on the proportion reporting that they experienced a situation where something has gone wrong.

*Figure 15: Have you ever experienced a situation where something has gone wrong with the care/service you received when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice? * (All those who have ever visited an optician or had a sight test / eye examination**)*



Unweighted sample base: 2022 (2,172) / 2021 (2,014) / 2019 (1,886) / 2017 (2,895) / 2016 (2,983)

*In 2022 this question referenced “the care received when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice”, whereas in previous years it asked about the “care/service received from an optician”

**In 2022, the question wording was changed to “When was the last time you had a sight test / eye examination?”, whereas in 2016-2021 this was asked in the following way “When was the last time you saw an optician?”

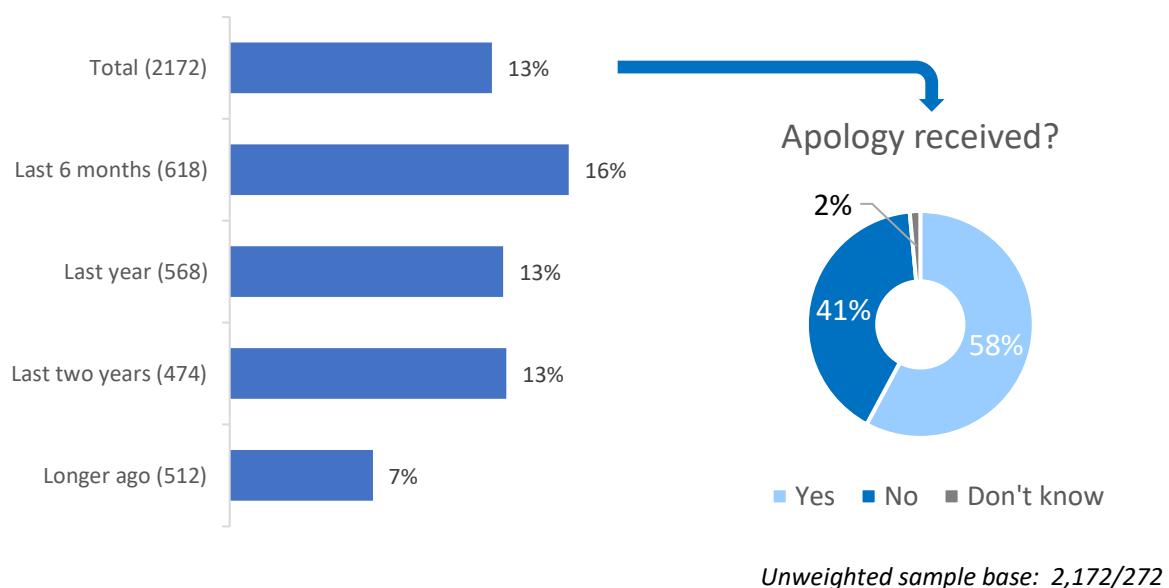
Respondents in England (13%), Wales (13%) and Scotland (13%) are equally likely to report that something went wrong with the care/service they received when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice. However, those in Northern Ireland were significantly less likely than the overall sample to state that this had happened (8%).

Analysis of subgroups reveals that those who consider themselves to have a disability were significantly more likely (16%) than those who don't (10%) to report that something went wrong during their visit. This may suggest that not all opticians / optometrist practices have the facilities and processes required to provide a suitable level of service to customers with disabilities. Those who wear glasses or contact lenses were also significantly more likely (14%) than those who don't (4%) to report that something went wrong during their visit, as were those who perform the role of a carer (18% cf. 10%).

Those who have visited an opticians / optometrist practice in the last six months were most likely to state that something had gone wrong with the care/service they received (16%), although this figure is not significantly higher than the proportion who attended in the last year (13%) or last two years (13%).

Figure 16: Have you ever experienced a situation where something has gone wrong with the care/service when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice? (All those who have ever had a sight test / eye examination)

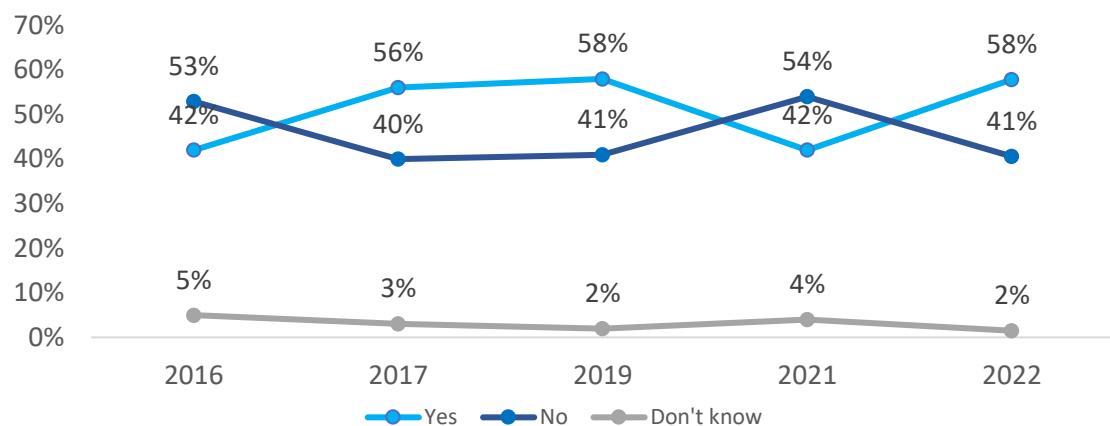
Did you receive an apology from the opticians / optometrist practice as a result? (All those who have experienced a situation where something has gone wrong)



Among those who had something go wrong with the care/service they received, approaching six in ten (58%) said that they received an apology. Those who had a sight test / eye examination in the last six months (62%) or last year (65%) more commonly received an apology than those who attended in the last two years (54%) or longer ago (37%). Male respondents (64%) were significantly more likely to have received an apology than female respondents (51%).

The proportion who received an apology has returned to the levels reported in 2017 and 2019 (56% and 58% respectively), after falling to 42% in 2021. This may indicate that action has been taken amongst practitioners in response to the levels reported in 2021. It should be noted when considering this data that the question wording changed slightly from “Did you receive an apology from the opticians” in the years up to and including 2021, and from 2022 was worded “Did you receive an apology from the opticians / optometrist practice”. It was also asked in 2022 to those for whom something had gone wrong “when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice”, whereas in previous years it was asked to those where something had gone wrong “with the care/service received from an optician”. This change may have an impact on the data at this question.

Figure 17: Did you receive an apology from the opticians / optometrist practice as a result?
(All those who experienced something going wrong)*



Unweighted sample base: 2022 (272) / 2021 (209) / 2019 (249) / 2017 (356) / 2016 (254)

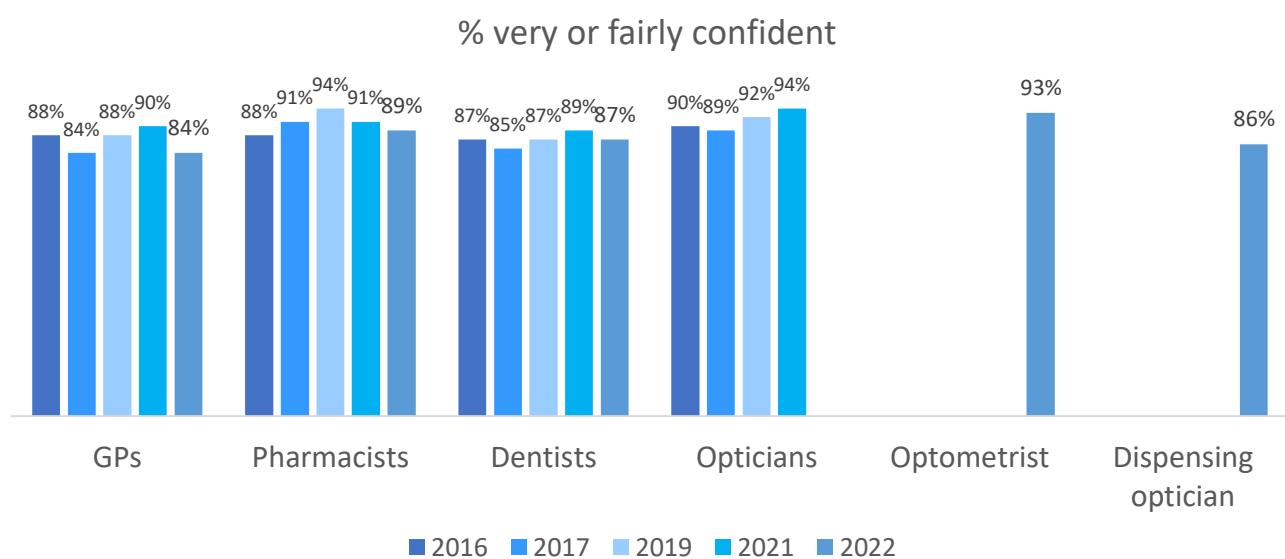
*In 2022 this question asked whether an apology was received from the opticians / optometrist practice, whereas in previous years it asked if an apology was received from the opticians. It should also be noted that there were alterations at the previous question which asked whether something had gone wrong “with the care/service received from an optician” until 2021, and “when visiting and opticians / optometrist practice” from 2022, which may impact on who saw this question and the data provided at this question

Trust and confidence

There is a significant difference in the level of confidence that is reported in optometrists (93%) and dispensing opticians (86%), highlighting the difference in how these two groups are perceived. Further research into why this difference exists may be helpful to understand how confidence in dispensing opticians can be raised. Positively, the level of confidence reported in optometrists is significantly higher than that for GPs (84%), dentists (87%) and pharmacists (89%).

Tracking trends year on year, confidence in GPs, pharmacists and dentists have all fallen since 2021. However, in previous years, the confidence in optical professionals was only asked as a single option “opticians”, whereas in 2022 it has been separated into optometrists and dispensing opticians. The answers in 2022 cannot therefore be compared directly against those in previous years, however it is of note that in 2021, respondents expressed a higher level of confidence in opticians (94%) than in the other listed professions.

Figure 18: How confident or otherwise are you of receiving a high standard of care from each of the following healthcare professions? (All respondents)



All respondents 2022 (2,236) / 2021 (2,087) / 2019 (2,000) / 2016 (3,252) / 2015 (2,250)

**Answer option “Opticians” asked in 2015-2021, “Optometrist” and “Dispensing optician” asked only in 2022.*

Confidence in optometrists is higher among older age groups, with 16-24 year olds (90%), 25-24 year olds (88%) and 35-44 year olds (90%) all expressing a significantly lower level of confidence in optometrists than 45-54 year olds (96%), 55-64 year olds (96%) and those aged 65+ (97%). A similar trend occurs when looking at the confidence in dispensing opticians, in whom 79% of 16-24 year olds and 79% of 25-34 year olds express confidence, compared to 89% of 45-54 year olds, 92% of 55-64 year olds and 92% of those aged 65+. The younger age groups also have less confidence in the other healthcare professions asked about.

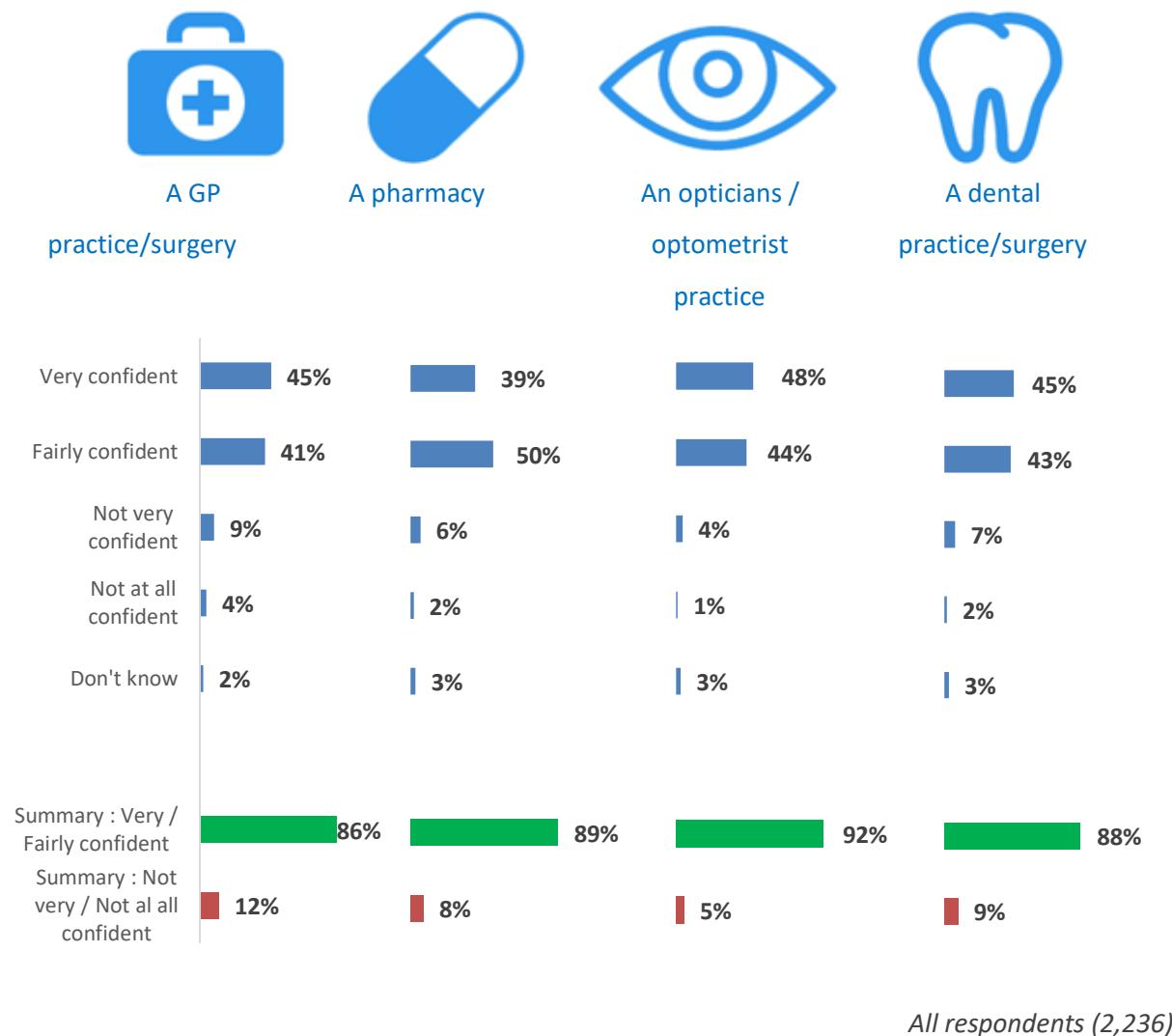
Among those who are pregnant, on maternity leave or returning from maternity leave, 81% are confident in optometrists and 75% in dispensing opticians, compared to 94% and 87% of those who aren't pregnant, on maternity leave or returning from maternity leave.

Confidence in optometrists is similar for white (94%) and ethnic minority (92%) respondents, however there is a greater variation between the two groups when looking at their confidence in dispensing opticians (88% and 83% respectively). However, neither of these differences are statistically significant at the 95% confidence level.

Respondents who wear glasses have significantly higher confidence than non-wearers in optometrists (95% cf. 86%) and dispensing opticians (89% cf. 76%). However, those who have had something go wrong in their visit to an opticians / optometrist practice report a lower level of confidence in optometrists (88%) and dispensing opticians (74%) than those who haven't (96% and 91% respectively).

When looking at the standard of care that respondents expect to receive from healthcare services, confidence levels are also higher in opticians / optometrist practices (92%) than they are in a GP practice/surgery (86%), dental practice/surgery (88%), and a pharmacy (89%).

Figure 19: How confident or otherwise are you of receiving a high standard of care from each of the following healthcare services? (All respondents)



Confidence in opticians / optometrist practices is again significantly higher in older age groups. 94% of respondents aged 45-54, 95% of those aged 55-64 and 96% of respondents aged 65+ are confident in these practices, compared to 86% of 16-24 year olds and 88% of 25-34 year olds. Those who are pregnant, on maternity leave or returning from maternity leave also report a significantly lower level of confidence (84%) than those who aren't (94%). White respondents report a significantly higher confidence (94%) than ethnic minority respondents (88%). Glasses / contact lens wearers are significantly more likely (94%) to be confident in opticians / optometrist practices than non-wearers (85%).

Changes in technology

Just over four in ten individuals (42%) would consider using remote sight test / eye examination technologies if the option was available to them, with only slightly fewer than this not open to using such services (38%). Meanwhile, 20% state that they don't know, highlighting the need for further education on how these services could be offered, and the benefits they can provide.

Figure 20: As with other areas of life, advanced technology and artificial intelligence are being used more and more to deliver healthcare. The use of these is starting to revolutionise the work of optometrists and dispensing opticians. Some opticians / optometrist practices are offering to carry out part of a patient's sight test / eye examination remotely (e.g., testing vision on a computer/smart phone in their own home). If this option was available when you next needed your sight test / eye examination would you consider using it? (All respondents)



All respondents (2,236)

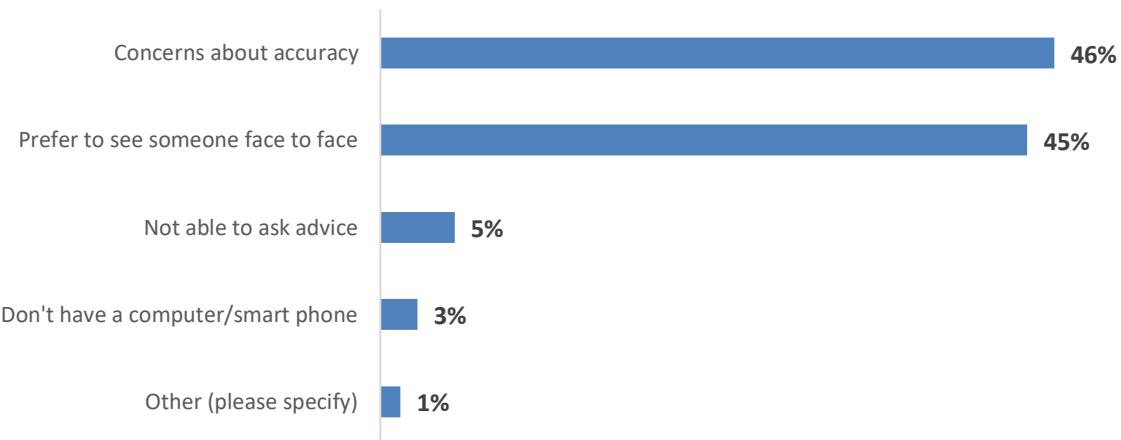
By nation, 50% of respondents in Northern Ireland would consider remote sight test / eye examinations, a significantly higher proportion than in the other home nations. Male respondents (45%) are also significantly more likely to consider than female (39%). Meanwhile, ethnic minority respondents (59%) are significantly more likely to consider than white respondents (38%). Carers (53%) are also more likely to consider them than non-carers (37%), and those who don't wear glasses or contact lenses are significantly more likely to consider these services (46%) than those who do (40%).

Younger respondents are most likely to consider remote services, with 49% of 16-24 year olds, 52% of 25-34 year olds and 48% of 35-44 year olds stating that they would consider these.

These are all higher than the 50% of 45-54 year olds, 36% of 55-64 year olds and 29% of respondents aged 65+ who would consider these services.

Concerns about accuracy (46%) and preferring to see someone face to face (45%) are the main reasons explaining why respondents would not use remote services. There is a notable difference in the prevalence of these two answers by age group. Younger respondents are more likely to have concerns about accuracy (54% of 16-24 year olds, 63% of 25-34 year olds and 58% of 35-44 year olds cf. 42% of 55-64 year olds and 32% of those aged 65+). Conversely, older respondents are more likely to state that they prefer to see someone face to face (59% of those aged 65+ and 53% of 55-64 year olds cf. 31% of 16-24 year olds, 27% of 25-34 year olds and 32% of 35-44%). This may highlight the role that opticians / optometrist practices play in providing an avenue for human interaction for groups who may be more socially isolated, as well as the varying levels of trust that different age groups have in technologies compared to humans.

*Figure 21: Which of the following reasons best explains why you would not use it?
(Respondents who would not use remote sight testing / eye examinations)*



Respondents who would not use remote sight testing / eye examinations (859)

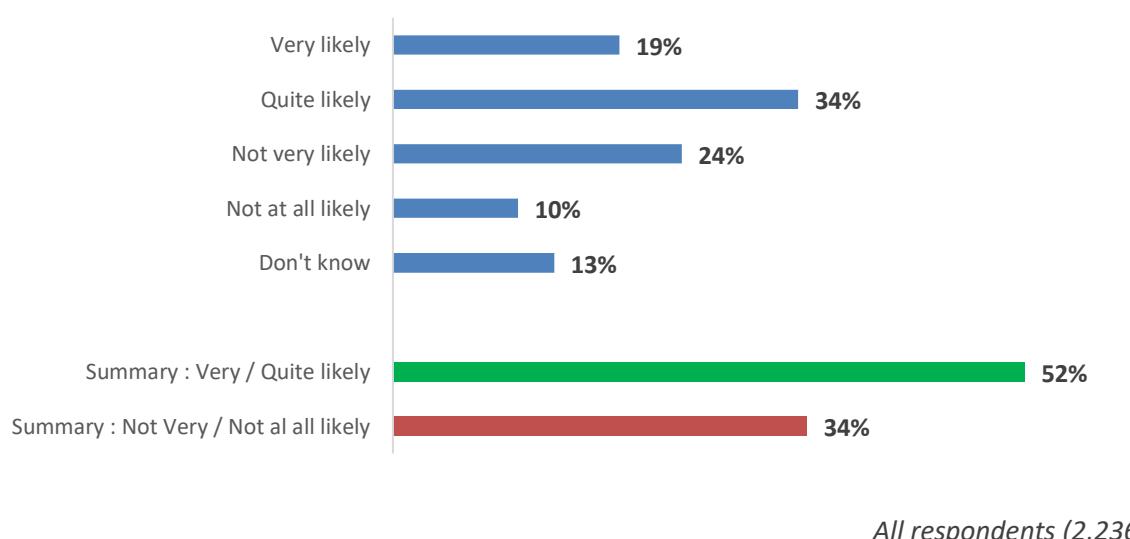
Other key variations can be seen at the national level, where respondents in Scotland are significantly less likely than in other nations to state that they have concerns about accuracy (36%). Female respondents are significantly more likely to have concerns about accuracy than male respondents (53% cf. 39%), but less likely to prefer to see someone face to face (39% cf. 52%). Meanwhile, ethnic minority respondents more commonly state that they have

concerns about accuracy (58%) than white respondents (43%), while white respondents are more likely to prefer to see someone face to face (48%) than ethnic minority respondents (33%). However, as this question was only asked of those who would not use remote sight testing / eye examinations, only a relatively small number of ethnic minority respondents saw this question (36), so the base size for this group is not large enough for the differences between ethnic minority and white respondents to be statistically significant.

Glasses / contact lens wearers are significantly more likely (46%) than non-wearers (37%) to prefer to see someone face to face. Those who have previously had an adverse experience are more likely to have concerns about accuracy (55%) than those who haven't (45%), perhaps due to their previous experience with opticians / optometrist practices where something has gone wrong – suggesting evidence of the need to boost trust in opticians / optometrist practices among this group.

Over half of respondents (52%) state that they would be likely to choose a service in which a computer diagnoses an eye condition without an optometrist being involved, and just over a third (34%) state that they would not be likely to do this. 13% don't know whether they would be likely to use these services, indicating the need for education on these types of services.

Figure 22: In the future, it might be possible for a computer to be able to diagnose an eye condition (such as glaucoma for example) without an optometrist being involved. How likely would you be to choose this service? (All respondents)



These services are significantly more likely to be chosen by respondents in Northern Ireland (62%) than the overall sample. Younger respondents of 16-24 (57%), 25-34 (63%) and 35-44

(60%) years of age are more likely to choose them than those aged 55-64 (46%) or 65+ (40%). Ethnic minority respondents are significantly more likely to choose them (78%) than white respondents (48%), and carers (62%) are significantly more likely to than non-carers (48%).

Those who have felt discomfort about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice are more likely (60%) than those who haven't (47%) to choose these remote services, as are those who have had an adverse experience (60%) than those who haven't (51%). This may indicate that remote services could be an avenue to improve the experience of optical services for those who currently lack trust in them.

Appendix A: Sample profile

Below is the sample collected prior to the application of weighting.

Country	Count	%
England	1,406	63%
Wales	277	12%
Scotland	279	12%
Northern Ireland	272	12%

Age	TOTAL	NORTHERN IRELAND			
		ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	IRELAND
16-24	316	202	33	40	41
	14.15%	14.37%	11.91%	14.34%	15.07%
25-34	363	233	39	46	45
	16.25%	16.57%	14.08%	16.49%	16.54%
35-44	347	226	37	40	44
	15.53%	16.07%	13.36%	14.34%	16.18%
45-54	367	230	44	46	47
	16.43%	16.36%	15.88%	16.49%	17.28%
55-64	339	205	48	44	42
	15.17%	14.58%	17.33%	15.77%	15.44%
65+	502	310	76	63	53
	22.47%	22.05%	27.44%	22.58%	19.49%
NORTHERN IRELAND					
Gender	TOTAL	ENGLAND	WALES	SCOTLAND	IRELAND
Male	1,093	691	138	132	132
	48.93%	49.15%	49.82%	47.31%	48.53%
Female	1,141	715	139	147	140
	51.07%	50.85%	50.18%	52.69%	51.47%

Appendix B: Questionnaire

General Optical Council Public Perceptions Research 2022.

This survey is about eye health and your use of opticians / optometrist practices. The questions are being asked by M.E.L Research <https://melresearch.co.uk/>, an independent research agency.

M.E.L Research fully comply with the Market Research Society Code of Conduct. The information you provide in this survey will be used for research purposes and your own responses will not be shared with anyone else. The M.E.L Research privacy policy which details how data is stored and used can be found here:

<https://melresearch.co.uk/page/privacypolicy>

The first two questions are about you.

QA Do you wear glasses or use contact lenses? Click all that apply

Yes - glasses

Yes - contact lenses

No

1. If you woke up tomorrow with an eye problem, such as something in your eye, a red eye or blurred vision, where would you go or who would you speak to first? *Please select one option only*

- A GP practice/surgery
- An eye hospital
- Accident & Emergency
- A pharmacy
- A walk-in clinic
- An opticians / optometrist practice
- Don't know
- Other *Please specify*

IF OPTOMETRIST CODED AT Q1 SKIP TO Q3

2. Why would you choose not to go to an opticians / optometrist practice first in this situation? *Please select one option only*

- An opticians / optometrist practice wouldn't be able to treat these kinds of problems
- I might have to pay for the treatment
- Inconvenient location
- Inconvenient opening hours
- I might not be seen by an opticians / optometrist practice on the same day
- An opticians / optometrist practice can't prescribe the right medication to treat the problem
- Other
- Don't know

3. Have you ever felt uncomfortable about visiting an opticians / optometrist practice for any of the following reasons?

Please select all that apply

- Pressure to buy glasses or contact lenses
- Might be told I need glasses
- Fear of being diagnosed with an eye health problem (such as glaucoma or macular degeneration)
- The cost of a sight test / eye examination
- Pressure to book a sight test / eye examination
- I don't like someone touching/going near my eyes during the sight test / eye examination
- I don't like someone being physically close to me during the sight test / eye examination
- Other
- None of the above / I have not felt uncomfortable

4. When was the last time you had a sight test / eye examination? *Please click one box only*

- In the last six months
- In the last year

- In the last two years
- More than two years ago but less than five years ago
- More than five years ago
- I have never had a sight test /eye examination -SKIP TO Q6

Q4b Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination where was this?
Please click one box only

- In a high street opticians / optometrist practice
- In a hospital
- In a care home
- In my own home
- Somewhere else (type in)

5. ASK IF Q4 = WITHIN LAST TWO YEARS (CODED 1-3)

Thinking of the last time you had a sight test / eye examination, how satisfied or otherwise were you with the following?

<i>Please click one box per row</i>	Very satisfied	Fairly satisfied	Not very satisfied	Not at all satisfied	Don't know / can't remember	Not applicable
The optometrist who carried out your sight test / eye examination	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The experience of buying glasses or contact lenses	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The protections in place to keep you safe from coronavirus	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Your overall experience of the opticians / optometrist practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>				

6. When you think about the following, do you think of them primarily as a healthcare service, a retailer, or a combination of both?

	A healthcare service	A retailer	A combination of both	Don't know
An opticians / optometrist practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A GP practice/surgery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A dental practice/surgery	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A pharmacy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

7. ASK IF Q4 = EVER VISITED AN OPTICIANS / OPTOMETRIST PRACTICE (CODES 1-5)

Have you ever complained or considered complaining about an experience when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice?

- Yes, I complained
- Yes, I considered complaining
- No
- Don't know
- Prefer not to say

8. ASK IF Q4 = EVER VISITED AN OPTICIANS / OPTOMETRIST PRACTICE (CODES 1-5)

Have you ever experienced a situation where something has gone wrong with the care/service you received when visiting an opticians / optometrist practice?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

9. ASK IF Q8 = YES

Did you receive an apology from the opticians / optometrist practice as a result?

- Yes
- No

Don't know

10. How confident or otherwise are you of receiving a high standard of care from each of the following healthcare professions?

	Very confident	Fairly confident	Not very confident	Not at all confident	Don't know
An optometrist (who carries out your sight test / eye examination)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A dispensing optician (this could be the person who advises on, fits, and supplies spectacles or low vision aids)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A GP	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A dentist	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A pharmacist	<input type="checkbox"/>				

11. How confident or otherwise are you of receiving a high standard of care from each of the following healthcare services?

	Very confident	Fairly confident	Not very confident	Not at all confident	Don't know
	<input type="checkbox"/>				
An opticians / optometrist practice	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A GP practice/surgery	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A dental practice/surgery	<input type="checkbox"/>				
A pharmacy	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Changes in technology

As with other areas of life, advanced technology and artificial intelligence are being used more and more to deliver healthcare. The use of these is starting to revolutionise the work of optometrists and dispensing opticians.

Q12 Some opticians / optometrist practices are offering to carry out part of a patient's sight test / eye examination remotely (e.g., testing vision on a computer/smart phone in their own home). If this option was available when you next needed your sight test / eye examination would you consider using it?

Yes

No

Don't know

Q12a – ASK IF SAID NO AT Q12

Which of the following reasons best explains why you would not use it?

- Concerns about accuracy
- Not able to ask advice
- Prefer to see someone face to face
- Don't have a computer/smart phone
- Other, please specify

Q13 In the future, it might be possible for a computer to be able to diagnose an eye condition (such as glaucoma for example) without an optometrist being involved.

How likely would you be to use this service?

- Very likely
- Quite likely
- Not very likely
- Not at all likely
- Don't know



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