

Registrant Survey 2016

Volume Three: General Optical Council's role and
regulatory performance

The General Optical Council

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Enventure Research, an independent research agency, was commissioned by the General Optical Council (GOC) to undertake a registrant survey as part of its commitment to gain an up-to-date understanding of the views of its registrants in order to continue to support them in protecting patients and the public.

The survey which was carried out in the summer of 2016 focused on registrants' perceptions of the GOC - in terms of the services that they deliver and the role that they play in regulating the optical professions - as well as the experience of registrants in the workplace, looking at the challenges that they face and their views on the future of the optical professions.

In total, **4,139 survey responses** were received from 25,929 registrants who were invited to take part, representing a 16% response rate. The returned data was weighted to be representative of the GOC registrant population.

Following the survey, five focus groups and 23 in depth interviews were conducted as part of the qualitative research in order to explore some topics and issues in greater depth. The qualitative research was stratified across the UK to ensure representation, including both urban and rural locations. In total 57 participants took part in the qualitative research.

This report (Volume Three) covers the GOC's role and regulatory performance, looking at questions related to these topics asked in the survey and the related feedback from the focus groups and in depth interviews. The other two volumes cover the future of the optical professions (Volume One) and commercial pressures and raising concerns in the work place (Volume Two). These three volumes also make up a full report which is also available.

Perceptions of the GOC's role

The GOC wanted to understand more about how registrants perceive the GOC and its role. Survey respondents were shown a list of statements and asked the extent to which they agreed that each one represented the role of the organisation. The majority of survey respondents agreed the GOC's role was to protect patients and the public (94%), discipline optical professionals who fail to meet the standards of the profession (96%) and to drive high standards of patient care (93%). However, three quarters of respondents (73%) also agreed that the organisation's role was to represent the optical professions, which is not the role of the GOC.

In line with the survey findings, the majority of focus group and interview participants thought that the role of the GOC was to protect patients and the public, discipline optical professionals who fail to meet the standards of the profession and to drive high standards of patient care.

In relation to whether the GOC represents the profession, amongst focus group and interview participants, opinion was split, reflecting the survey findings. Some felt that if the GOC represented the profession this would lead to a conflict of interest in terms of fulfilling its other

roles and others said that the GOC needed to represent the profession to be effective in its role of protecting patients and the public.

Perceptions of how well the GOC is carrying out its role

A number of different statements were asked in the survey to assess how well registrants think the GOC is carrying out its role. The majority of respondents (83%) agreed that the GOC sets fair standards for the profession and two-thirds (68%) agreed that the organisation enables registrants to develop their roles for the benefit of patients.

However, there was less agreement amongst survey respondents that the GOC listens to the views of registrants (51%) and is fair when taking action through the fitness to practise process (48%).

A large proportion of survey respondents (40%) said they did not know if they agreed that the GOC is fair when taking action through the fitness to practise process, indicating that many registrants do not have much experience of the process or knowledge of how it works. Focus group and interview participants who had experience of the process felt that the GOC could do more to support registrants about whom a concern had been raised, given the effect it has on individuals.

Views on the GOC registration fee

All GOC registrants are required to pay an annual registration fee. Just over half (52%) of survey respondents agreed that the GOC charges reasonable registration fees. Many focus group and interview participants, however, did not feel that the registration fee was reasonable, as they struggled to see the value for money that the fee provides, and many suggested that the GOC could provide more information about how the fees are set and how the money is spent.

The GOC's Standards of Practice

The GOC's new Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians came into effect on 1 April 2016, replacing the previous Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants.

Overall, the majority (86%) of survey respondents were confident in their ability to meet the new standards, and only a handful were not aware of the revision (2%) or had not read them yet (7%). In terms of understanding the new standards, 42% rated their understanding as 'excellent' or 'very good' and a further 50% rated them as 'good'.

Only around a fifth (17%) said they had made changes to their practice following the introduction of the new standards. In terms of differences by country, those from England and Scotland were more likely to have changed their practice (both 17%) than respondents from Northern Ireland (10%) and Wales (9%).

Focus group and interview participants confirmed the survey results as they largely felt confident in their understanding of the standards and that the new standards reflected their everyday practice. A few participants provided examples of how their practice had changed,

for example, a requirement to have an optometrist on site when dispensing lenses and frames and the new standards regarding social media and record keeping.

I like them because it's pretty unambiguous what's expected of you. With the old ones, not everyone would see them the same way. (Dispensing Optician from Cardiff)

Registrant's experience of the Continuing Education and Training (CET) scheme

The GOC's Continuing Education and Training (CET) scheme ensures that all fully qualified registrants keep their skills and knowledge up-to-date. GOC registrants must undertake CET activities and earn a minimum number of points over a three year cycle in order to remain on the GOC register.

Overall there was a fairly even split as to whether survey respondents found the CET scheme challenging or not. Just over half, 51%, said they found the 2013-15 CET cycle either 'very' or 'quite' challenging, compared to 45% who said they found it 'not very' challenging or 'not at all challenging'.

The majority of respondents, almost two-thirds (65%), felt that their practice had improved as a result of undertaking CET in the last cycle (2013-15).

I like the interactive CET. Peer discussion is actually really good...They are really useful. (Optometrist from Edinburgh)

In line with the survey findings, there was a fairly even split between those who found achieving CET points challenging and those who found it easy. There was a suggestion that those working for some large chains found it easy to achieve points as they were given many opportunities by their employer, and those working for independents and as self-employed locums found it more challenging to find the time and opportunities to achieve CET. However, many focus group and interview participants felt there were benefits to undertaking CET such as keeping up-to-date with current good practice, learning new skills and plugging gaps in knowledge. The CET scheme was thought to be particularly beneficial for those who qualified some time ago as it helps to keep them up-to-date with current trends and practise.

In terms of the process for submitting CET points, the survey findings were positive, with nearly three quarters (74%) saying that they found it easy to submit and manage their CET records using the My CET area of the GOC website. The focus group and interview participants confirmed the survey results and said they found the CET system easy to use, however some suggested that the administrative side of recording and logging CET points could be improved as it can be time consuming and onerous.

It's becoming increasingly more difficult to get the points, particularly if you are running a business and having to juggle paperwork and also maintaining your qualifications. (Dispensing Optician from London)

Both survey respondents and focus group and interview participants were asked whether they thought the CET process could be improved. As focus group and interview participants

had also mentioned, the most common theme suggested by survey respondents was to simplify the system, speed up points allocation and focus less on reflection. Some participants also suggested that the GOC could do more to regulate the quality of CET on offer so that all courses, exercises and lectures that provide registrants with points are relevant, useful and insightful. A number of participants also said that they found interactive CET particularly useful and suggested that CET could focus more on interactive elements.

Sometimes the quality of things you do is very poor. You have the ability to comment about it in your feedback, but there's no acknowledgement that anyone has read it. Some of the information that's given is just plain wrong. (Optometrist from Manchester)

Views about the GOC's registration process

The GOC wanted to find out more about registrants' views of the registration process to help improve the service it offers. Overall the findings were very positive and respondents rated their experience of using the 'MyGOC' area of the website highly, with 92% saying it was 'excellent' or 'very good'.

The majority of respondents (93%) also rated their experience of the annual retention process as 'excellent' or 'very good'.

When completing the registration process, respondents are required to declare to the GOC any health problems, disciplinary matters or criminal convictions. Seven in ten (69%) said they were clear about what should be declared and when. Respondents suggested developing a handbook or dedicated webpage (20%) and providing a list of common examples, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) or case studies (12%) in order to make the declaration process clearer.

Nine in ten (90%) said they had accessed the online public register at least once in the past. The majority accessed it 'rarely' (43%) or 'sometimes' (33%). Only one in twelve (8%) said they accessed it 'often'. Usage of the online register seemed lower in Northern Ireland than in England, with 20% of respondents from Northern Ireland saying they accessed it 'often' or 'sometimes', compared to 43% from England.

How the GOC communicates with its registrants

The GOC was keen to understand whether the communications issued by the GOC are well received by its registrants. The majority (82%) of respondents thought the frequency of communication from the GOC was 'about right', but one in ten (11%) thought that it was not often enough. Respondents from Scotland were more likely to say it was 'about right' (85%) than those from England (81%).

When asked if respondents read the GOC eBulletin (a regular e-newsletter sent to all registrants), over three-quarters (78%) said they did, but for the majority this was scan reading (70%) rather than reading it in detail (8%). Of those who read the eBulletin, the majority (89%) said that they found it informative.

Registrants' views on the GOC's customer service

The GOC was keen to understand registrants' perception of the GOC's customer service and how those who had contacted the GOC to make a query or to request information in the last 12 months rated their customer service.

Almost six in ten (57%) agreed that the GOC provided good customer service to registrants. However, eight in ten (80%) of those who had a query or request for information in the last 12 months said it had been resolved and 82% said their query or request had been dealt with promptly.

1. Introduction: About This Research

The GOC commissioned Enventure Research to carry out the registrant survey in 2016. The research had two objectives. Firstly, to gain a better understanding of registrants' views and experiences of the GOC. This will help the GOC to assess its performance so that it can make improvements to how they operate and their customer service. Secondly, to understand the day to day experiences and challenges faced by GOC registrants working in clinical practice. This will enable the GOC to better engage with the profession and to gain more information about their needs for education and training and any pressures they may be under which may prevent them from meeting the standards set by the GOC.

This volume comprises the following topics covered in the survey, focus groups and in depth interviews:

- Perceptions of the GOC's role
- Perceptions of how well the GOC is carrying out its role
- Perceptions of the GOC registration fee
- Standards of Practice
- Continuing Education and Training (CET)
- Views about the registration process
- GOC communication
- GOC customer service

Volume One covers the future of the optical professions and Volume Two covers commercial pressures and raising concerns about poor practice.

For information about the methodology, interpretation of the findings and the profile of survey respondents and qualitative research participants please refer to the full report.

2. Perceptions of the GOC's role

Key findings

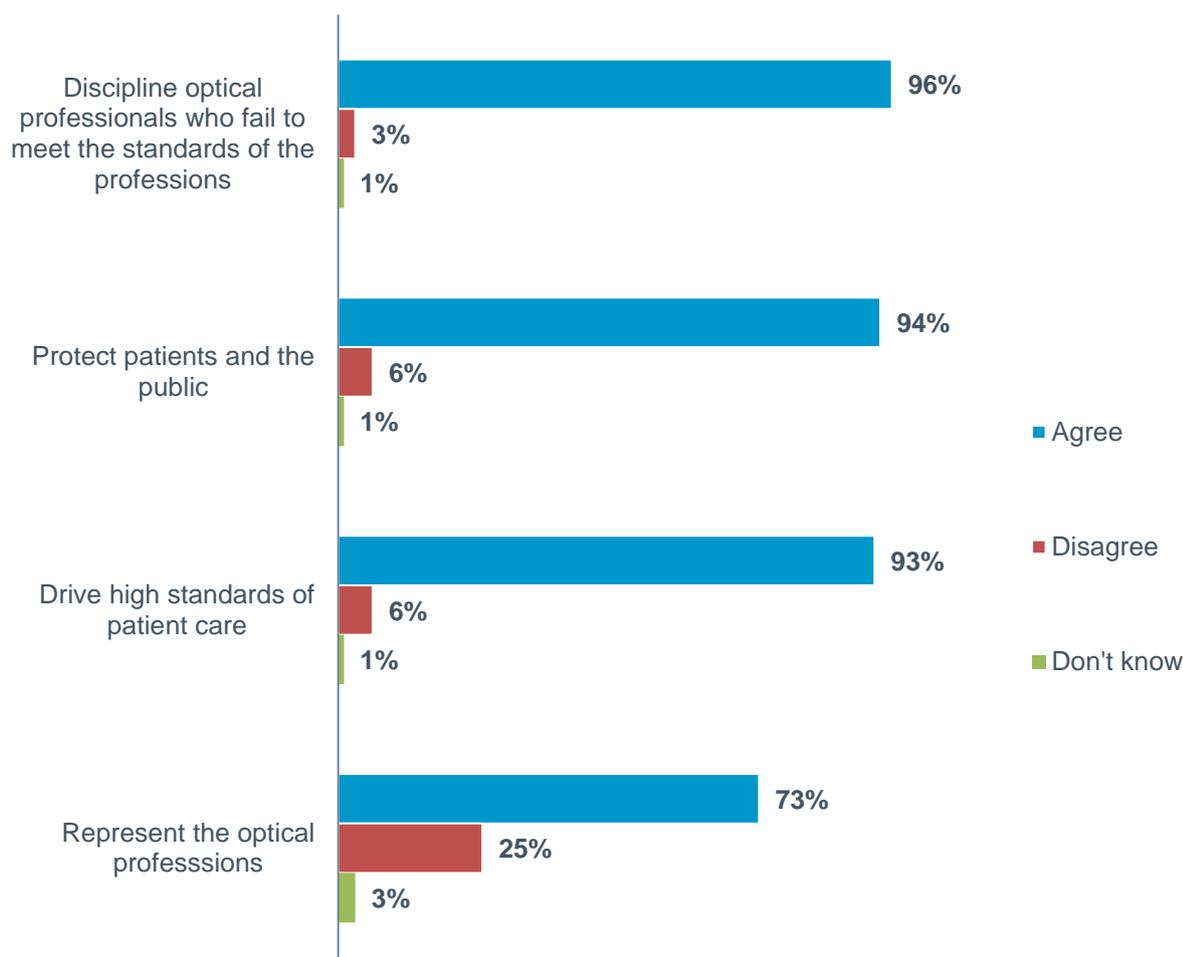
- Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with four statements in regards to the role of the GOC
- The majority of survey respondents agreed that the role of the GOC is to protect patients and the public (94%), discipline optical professionals who fail to meet the standards of the professions (96%) and to drive high standards of patient care (93%). This was reflected amongst focus group and interview participants
- There was less agreement in the survey that its role is to represent the optical professions (73%)
- Student dispensing opticians were most likely to agree that the GOC's role is to represent the optical professions (96%), as were those from the youngest age category (16-34 81%), those who had been on the GOC register for the shortest length of time (1-5 years 86%), females (80%) and respondents who worked for a chain (77%)
- Amongst focus group and interview participants, some felt that this should be a role of the GOC as that would enable it to fulfil its primary role of protecting the public, but others thought that this would lead to a conflict of interest with its other roles

The GOC wanted to better understand how their registrants perceived the role of the GOC. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed with the four statements outlined below.

The main / statutory role of the GOC is to protect patients and the public – 94% of respondents agreed with this. However, a slightly higher percentage, 96%, perceived the GOC’s role as disciplining registrants who fail to meet the standards of the profession and 93% said the GOC’s role was to drive high standards of patient care. Both of these are regulatory functions carried out by the GOC, but are not the GOC’s main / statutory role.

Representing the optical profession is not the role of the GOC, however nearly three quarters (73%) of the respondents thought that this was the GOC’s role.

Figure 1 – To what extent do you agree that the role of the GOC is to...?
Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to **agree that the role of the GOC is to represent the optical professions** (73% overall) included those who:

- Were student dispensing opticians (96%). By comparison 84% of dispensing opticians agreed
- Were female (80%) compared to male (59%)
- Were aged 16-34 (81%). Those aged 55 and above, by contrast, were less likely to agree (56%)
- Had been on the GOC register for less than five years (86%) compared to 73% overall
- Worked for a chain of opticians (77%) compared to those working for an independent optician (66%)

Focus group and interview feedback

How is the GOC perceived by registrants and how effective is the GOC in fulfilling its role?

In line with the survey findings, the majority of participants agreed that the role of the GOC is primarily to protect patients and the public and ensure high standards in the profession by issuing standards and taking action through the fitness to practise process when necessary.

My perception is that it is to protect the public, to ensure that we adhere to the standards that are laid down for us. (Dispensing Optician from Birmingham)

Most thought that it was effective in this role as it sets appropriate standards for the profession and takes appropriate action through the fitness to practise process when necessary so that patients are provided with good quality eye care.

To make the public safe, in that way it is effective. (Dispensing Optician from Port Glasgow)

However, participants felt the GOC could be more effective if it raised its public profile, particularly if more patients knew how to make a complaint when they had experienced poor care.

Not a lot of patients are aware of the GOC. If they have an issue they go to the practice. They don't even know that it exists. They are not aware that the GOC is there to protect them. (Optometrist from London)

Should the role of the GOC be to represent the optical professions?

In the survey, 73% of respondents thought that the role of the GOC was to represent the optical professions and, in line with this, some focus group and interview participants thought it was. On the question of whether this should be the role of the GOC or not, opinion was

split. Some participants thought that representing the professions came hand-in-hand with protecting the public and others felt this would lead to a conflict of interest, pointing out that there were other organisations whose role is to represent the professions, such as the Association of Dispensing Opticians and the Association of Optometrists.

In order to effectively protect the public, they have to represent the profession. I don't think you can have one without the other. (Dispensing Optician from Cardiff)

They are not meant to. There are other associations that represent us more than the GOC do. (Optometrist from Glasgow)

3. Perceptions of how well the GOC is carrying out its role

Key findings

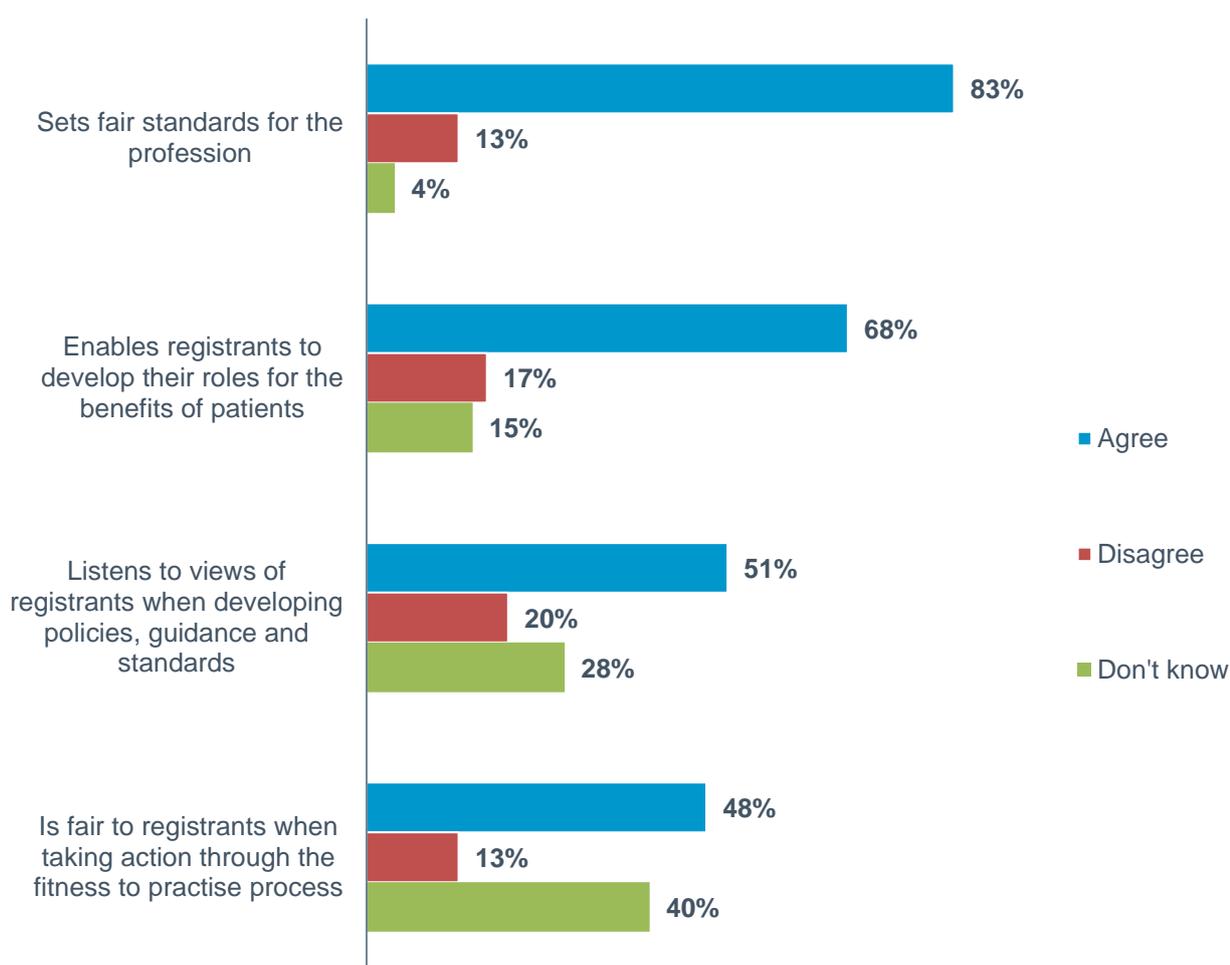
- Eight in ten survey respondents (83%) agreed that the GOC sets fair standards for the profession and two-thirds (68%) agreed that the organisation enables registrants to develop their roles for the benefit of patients
- There was less agreement amongst respondents that the GOC listens to the views of registrants (51%), and is fair when taking action through the fitness to practise process (48%)
- A large proportion of survey respondents (40%) did not know if they agreed that the GOC is fair when taking action through the fitness to practise process, indicating that many registrants do not have any experience or much knowledge of this process
- Respondents from England (49%) and Wales (49%) were more likely to agree that the GOC is fair when taking action through the fitness to practise process. By contrast, 40% of respondents from Scotland 42% from Northern Ireland agreed
- Focus group and interview participants who had experience of the fitness to practise process felt the GOC could do more to support registrants against whom a claim had been made
- Survey respondents from Northern Ireland were more likely to agree that the GOC listens to their views when developing policies, guidance and standards (62%) than respondents from other countries
- Focus group and interview participants felt that the GOC could do more to show it acts upon registrants' feedback

The GOC wished to know more about how registrants perceived the organisation in terms of how well it is carrying out its role, asking them what they thought about education for registrants, setting standards for the professions, fairness when taking action through the fitness to practise process, and listening to registrants when developing policies and guidance. Respondents were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements about the GOC.

Eight in ten (83%) respondents said they agreed that the GOC sets fair standards for the profession. Two-thirds (68%) agreed that the GOC enables registrants to develop their roles for the benefit of patients. Just over half of respondents (51%) agreed that the GOC listens to the views of registrants when developing policies, guidance and standards, and less than half (48%) said they agreed that the GOC is fair to registrants when taking action through the fitness to practise process. It should be noted, however, that four in ten respondents (40%) said they did not know if the GOC is fair in this regard, indicating that a large proportion of registrants did not have any experience or knowledge of how the fitness to practise process operates.

Figure 2 – To what extent do you agree that the GOC...

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to say they **agree that the GOC is fair to registrants when taking action through the fitness to practise process** (48% overall) included those who:

- Were student dispensing opticians (58%) and student optometrists (61%). By contrast only 42% of optometrists and 49% of dispensing opticians said they agreed
- Had been on the GOC register for less than five years (55%) compared to those who had been on it for 6-20 years (42%) and over 21 years (47%)
- Were from England (49%) and Wales (49%). By contrast, large proportions of respondents from Scotland (48%) and Northern Ireland (49%) said they did not know if they agreed
- Were working full-time (47%) or part-time (46%) compared to those who practiced as locums (40%)

Subgroups more likely to say they **agree that the GOC listens to the views of its registrants when developing policies, guidance and standards** (51% overall) included those who:

- Were student dispensing opticians (64%) and student optometrists (61%). By contrast only 47% of optometrists and 51% of dispensing opticians said they agreed
- Had been on the GOC register for less than five years (59%) compared to those who had been on it for 6-20 years (47%) and over 21 years (47%)
- Were from Northern Ireland (62%) compared to 51% overall
- Worked for a chain (55%) compared to an independent opticians (45%)
- Were working full-time (52%) or part-time (52%) compared to those who practiced as locums (42%)

Focus group and interview feedback

Fairness to registrants when taking action through the fitness to practise process

In line with the survey findings, many participants had little or no knowledge of the fitness to practise process and so felt unable to declare whether or not they felt the GOC was fair when taking action. However, some participants felt that the GOC could do more to support registrants going through the fitness to practise process, particularly as this can be a stressful time. Some participants knew registrants that had been through the process and commented on the impact it had upon them mentally and in some cases there was the perception that registrants were treated as if they were “guilty” before being proven “innocent”.

I think there's a massive hole in the GOC's sense of responsibility to treat registrants like members of the public. Providing support for us is really important. (Optometrist from Cardiff)

You're guilty until proven innocent. (Optometrist from Glasgow)

Does the GOC listen to the views of its registrants when developing policies, guidance and standards?

In the survey 51% agreed that the GOC listens to registrants when developing policies, guidance and standards. Most focus group and in depth interview participants agreed that they are often asked by the GOC to provide their views on policies, guidance and standards that are published by the GOC. Some provided examples of taking part in consultations such as developing the new standards of practice for GOC registrants.

However, there was a consensus amongst some participants that the GOC does not always listen to the views of registrants and that it could do more to take registrants' feedback and opinions into account. The majority of participants felt that it was important that the GOC listened to registrants so that it can fully understand the profession and the day to day real-life challenges they face, in order to be able to effectively regulate the sector.

Most participants were in favour of regular surveys and consultations, along with communication from the GOC about how registrants' feedback is being acted upon.

I think they probably do give a fair opportunity to registrants to have their say. I am just not convinced that they take all that information on board and act upon it. (Dispensing Optician from High Wycombe)

I would like to see afterwards what is being done. (Optometrist from Leeds)

4. Perception of the GOC registration fee

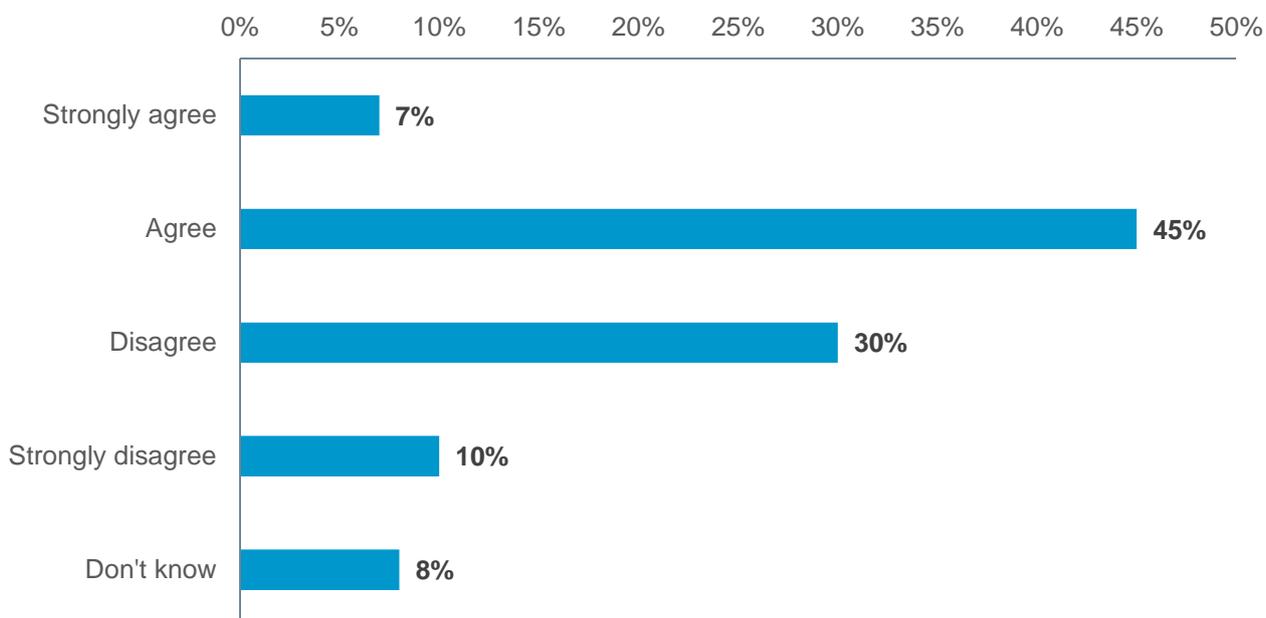
Key findings

- Just over half of survey respondents agreed that the GOC charges reasonable registration fees (52%)
- Student optometrists (71%) and student dispensing opticians (62%) were more likely to agree that the GOC charges reasonable fees than those who were fully qualified (54% of optometrists and 38% of dispensing opticians)
- Most focus group and interview participants did not feel the registration fee was reasonable as they struggled to see the value for money and many felt that the GOC could do more to communicate how the money is spent and to ensure affordability, particularly for those who pay the fee themselves and are newly qualified, or self-employed as locums

Overall, just over half (52%) of survey respondents agreed that the GOC charges reasonable fees (7% strongly agreed and 45% agreed). Four in ten (40%) disagreed (30% disagreed and 10% strongly disagreed).

Figure 3 – To what extent do you agree that the GOC charges registration fees that are reasonable?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to agree that the GOC charges registration fees that are reasonable (52% overall) included those who:

- Were student dispensing opticians (71%) and student optometrists (62%), compared to optometrists (54%) and dispensing opticians (38%)
- Had been on the register for less than five years (57%) compared to those who had been on it for 6-20 years (47%)
- Were from Scotland (58%). By comparison 52% from England, 49% from Wales and 46% from Northern Ireland agreed that the fees were reasonable

Focus group and interview feedback

Does the GOC charge reasonable and affordable registration fees?

Whilst a handful of participants simply accepted the fees were a payment they needed to make in order to be able to practise, particularly those who had them reimbursed by their employer, very few thought that the charges were reasonable, despite 52% in the survey agreeing that the GOC charges reasonable registration fees.

Many participants did not see what their fee provides them with, other than having their name on the register and access to the My CET website, and, as such, there is a perception that the fee is not good value for money.

Some participants felt the fees were particularly high when compared to those that people in other professions had to pay, such as the GMC and GDC, which are perceived to regulate more 'risky' professions and therefore should have higher fees than that of the GOC.

I don't get enough from it to warrant what I pay for it. (Dispensing Optician from Darlington)

I think it's quite expensive compared to other healthcare professionals and how much they have to pay. (Optometrist from London)

Some registrants had their fees reimbursed by their employer, for example, those who worked for large national chains and some who worked in independent practices. Those who paid the fee themselves without reimbursement included those who worked in hospitals, those in domiciliary roles, those who were self-employed locums and some who worked for independent practices. This group of participants largely felt that the fees were not affordable for everyone, particularly for those who are newly qualified, work part-time, or are a single parent. It was also felt that for those who are on career breaks or maternity leave, the cost of remaining on the register is high.

Last year I was on maternity leave for most of the year, so I looked into whether I could get reduced rates because I wasn't really working and it did not seem that flexible. (Optometrist from Belfast)

How the GOC could facilitate the fee paying process?

Some registrants suggested that the GOC could look into staged payments spaced out across the year, such as monthly direct debits, rather than requiring one payment at the start of the financial year. It was felt that this would make the registration fees more affordable for registrants and examples were provided of other registration bodies who offered this sort of payment plan.

I think you should be able to set up a monthly direct debit, or even quarterly. It might not be a lot to some people, but it is to others. (Optometrist from Cardiff)

Information about how the GOC sets the fee level

Some participants were aware of the GOC publishing information about how the fee level is set on its website and in its annual report. However there was a general consensus that there

could be more communication from the GOC in regards to this, particularly when there is a large increase in the fee. However, there was some acceptance that the cost of regulation could be high, particularly when there are so many registrants in the United Kingdom and a large volume of fitness to practise cases.

I don't think it is as transparent as it could be. (Dispensing Optician from Colwyn Bay)

I guess there are a lot of people who contribute to the running of the GOC who need to be paid. (Optometrist from Cardiff)

5. Standards of Practice

The new Standards of Practice for Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians and Standards for Optical Students came into effect on 1 April 2016, replacing the previous Code of Conduct for Individual Registrants. The GOC wanted to understand registrants' confidence in their ability to meet the new standards, as well as assess registrants' understanding of them and what impact the standards had on registrants' day to day practice.

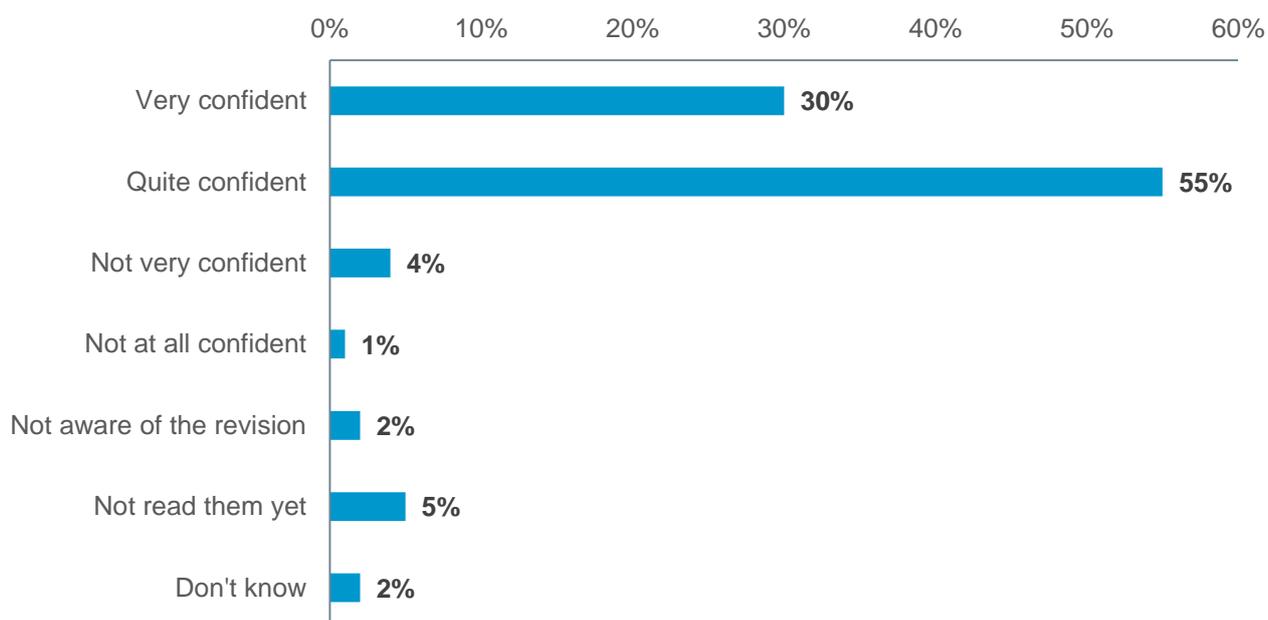
Key findings

- The majority (86%) of survey respondents were confident in their ability to meet the new standards and only a handful were not aware of the revision or had not read them yet (7%)
- A larger proportion of those who were confident in their ability to meet the standards were dispensing opticians (90%), from older age groups and from a White ethnic background (88%)
- Only four in ten (42%) survey respondents felt they had an 'excellent' or 'very good' understanding of the new standards and less than a fifth (17%) had changed their practice following the new standards' introduction
- Those from Northern Ireland were least likely to rate their understanding of the standards as 'excellent' or 'very good' (27%). By comparison 42% in England Wales and 44% rated their understanding as excellent or very good
- When asked if there were any standards that were unclear or unhelpful, focus group and interview participants mentioned the standards concerning duty of candour and consent were confusing and ambiguous
- Overall under a fifth (17%) said that they had changed their practice as a result of the introduction of the new standards
- Those from England and Scotland were more likely to say that their practice had changed following the introduction (17% each) compared to Wales (9%) and Northern Ireland (10%)
- Survey respondents who worked for a chain of opticians were more likely to rate their understanding of the new standards as 'excellent' or 'very good' (45%) and say that their practice had changed (23%), compared to those who worked for an independent opticians (37% 'excellent' or 'very good' understanding; 10% changed practice)
- The majority of focus group and interview participants felt that as the standards reflected their current everyday practice, they had not needed to make any changes. However, a few mentioned changes in their practice such as the need for an optometrist to be on site during dispensing, the new standard regarding social media posting and better record keeping

5.1 Confidence in ability to meet the new standards

Overall, the majority (86%) of survey respondents said they felt confident in their ability to meet the new standards. However, more than one in seven said they were not confident (5%), not been aware of the revision (2%), not read them yet (5%) or did not know (2%). Only a very small proportion (5%) of respondents did not feel confident and a further one in ten (9%) had either not been aware of the revision (2%), not read the new standards yet (5%) or did not know (2%).

Figure 4 – How confident are you in your ability to meet the new standards?
Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

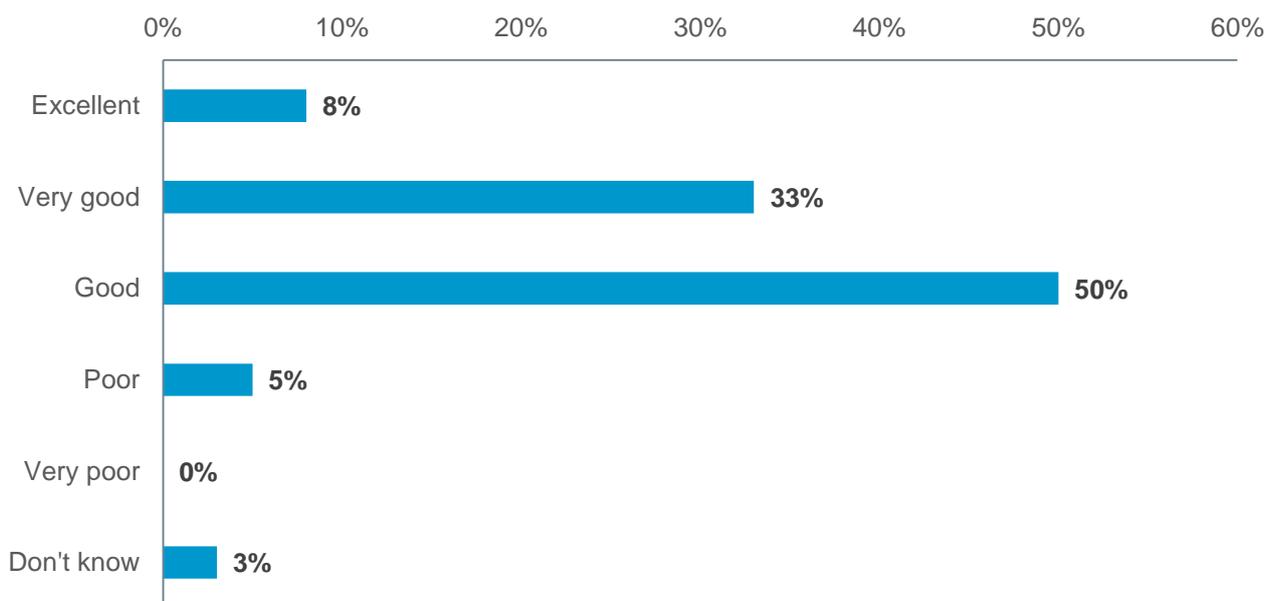
Subgroups more likely to say they were **confident in their ability to meet the new standards** (86% overall) included those who:

- Were dispensing opticians (90%) compared to optometrists (86%)
- Were from the older age groups, 35-54 and 55+ (88% for both), compared to the youngest age group (82%)
- Had been on the register for more than 21 years (89%) compared to those who had been on it for less than five years (83%)
- Were from a White ethnic background (88%) compared to those from a non-White background (81%)

5.2 Understanding of the revised standards

Respondents from the previous question who said they were aware of the new standards and had read them were asked to rate their understanding of them. Four in ten (41%) respondents said that their understanding was ‘excellent’ (8%) or ‘very good’ (33%). Although a small proportion said their understanding was ‘poor’ (5%), half of all respondents (50%) felt that their understanding was ‘good’.

**Figure 5 – How would you rate your understanding of the revised standards?
Base: Those who were aware of and had read the revised standards (3,870)**



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to say that their **understanding of the revised standards was ‘excellent’ or ‘very good’** (41% overall) included those who:

- Were from England (42%), Wales (42%) or Scotland (44%), compared to Northern Ireland (27%)
- Worked for a chain of opticians (45%) compared to an independent business (37%)
- Worked full-time (44%) compared to those who worked part-time (37%) or as a locum (37%)

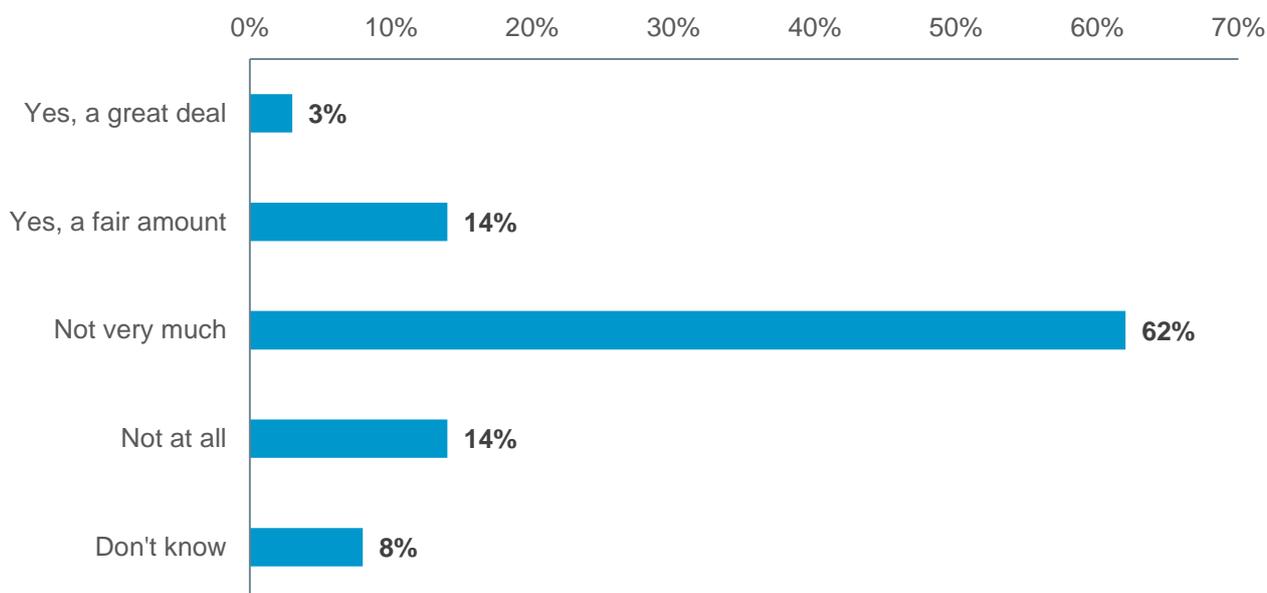
5.3 Changes to practice following introduction of new standards

Of those who were aware of the revised standards and had read them, the majority of respondents either felt that their practice had not changed very much (62%) or not at all (14%) following the introduction of the standards.

Less than a fifth (17%) felt that their practice had changed following the introduction of the new standards (3% a great deal; 14% a fair amount).

Figure 6 – Following the introduction of the new standards, have you changed how you practise on a day to day basis?

Base: Those who were aware of and had read the revised standards (3,870)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to say that their **practice had changed following the introduction of the new standards** (17% overall) included those who:

- Were from England (17%) and Scotland (17%), compared to Northern Ireland (10%) and Wales (9%)
- Were from a non-White ethnic background (22%) compared to those from a White background (15%)
- Worked for a chain of opticians (23%) compared to an independent business (10%)

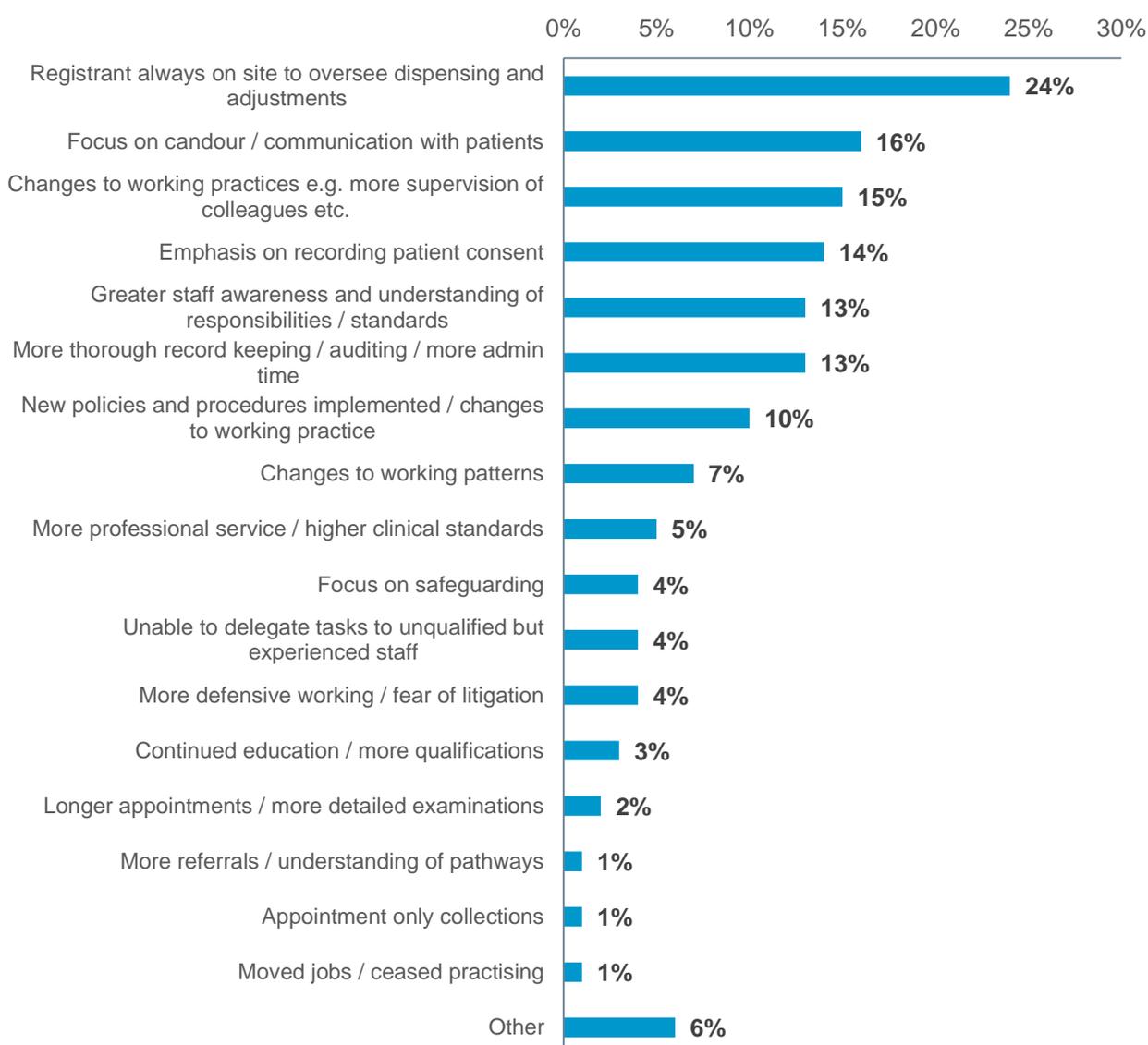
How registrants’ practice has changed since the new standards

Respondents (17%) who said that they had changed the way they practise on a day to day basis were asked to provide comments on how and why their practice had changed. When looking at the four most popular answers, it is interesting to note that these are in relation to areas that the GOC deliberately strengthened, such as supervision and the standards on duty of candour and consent.

A quarter (24%) said that they had changed their practice because they now needed to ensure that a registrant is always on site to oversee all dispensing and adjustments and 16% said they focus more on patient candour and communication with patients. A further 15% said there was more supervision, checks and disciplinary action when things go wrong, 14% said there was a greater emphasis on recording patient consent, 13% thought there was greater staff awareness and understanding of the responsibilities and standards and the same proportion reported more thorough record keeping and carrying out audits.

Figure 7 – How and why has your practice changed?

Base: Those who reported a change in practice (393)



Focus group and interview feedback

Awareness of the new Standards of Practice

All participants were aware of the new Standards of Practice, recalling communication received via email, letters and flyers, and having seen them when they had signed into the GOC website to manage their CET points. A few participants who worked for large chains also mentioned that the new standards had been actively promoted by their employer.

The majority of participants had positive impressions of the new standards, with some saying that they were clearly set out and were prescriptive and specific, which allowed registrants to understand what is expected of them.

I like them because it's pretty unambiguous what's expected of you. With the old ones, not everyone would see them the same way. (Dispensing Optician from Cardiff)

They are nicely set out. It's been put together in a nice booklet and felt accessible. (Optometrist from London)

Understanding of the new Standards of Practice

Most participants felt they had a good understanding of the new standards, generally because they reinforced current practice and most felt that they were common sense. However, when asked whether there were any standards that were unclear or unhelpful, some participants felt some of the standards were confusing, ambiguous, onerous, unrealistic, wordy, not written in plain English and sometimes open to interpretation.

When asked for specific examples, participants mentioned the standard regarding duty of candour, saying that it was confusing that if a mistake is made there should be an apology to the patient but no admission of liability, and the standard regarding consent, saying it was unclear whether this should be written or verbal and always asked. Some registrants mentioned that some chains issue their own set of standards based on the GOC's, but with their own interpretations which may then differ from business to business.

Duty of candour is the big one... we are not to admit liability but we've to say we are sorry. (Optometrist from Glasgow)

Sometimes it's hard because they are not specific and it's hard to sometimes interpret them... You have to obtain patient consent, but it doesn't actually go into what it means. (Optometrist from Bangor, Northern Ireland)

Changes made to everyday practice following the introduction of the new standards

The majority of participants indicated that the standards are referred to in everyday practice, in so far as they are adhered to. Most thought it would be unusual to refer to the standards often in daily practice and saw them as more for reference when required, such as for checking things that they do not often come across or for referring to when speaking to a manager or colleague who is not a GOC registrant.

Because they are guiding background, I wouldn't necessarily consult them on a day to day basis. If there was something that I felt I was unsure about, I may refer back.
(Dispensing Optician from Oadby)

As the majority of participants saw the new standards as positively reinforcing good practice which they already subscribed to, most had not made any specific changes to the way that they practise.

It felt more like a confirmation of what I was doing already. (Dispensing Optician from Colwyn Bay, Wales)

However, there were a few examples of changes in practice or their employer's policy which had come about as a result of the new standards' introduction, such as the requirement that optometrists were required to be on site when glasses and lenses are being dispensed. A few participants also mentioned that they were now more careful about record keeping and note taking as a result of the new standards and because of the perception that there is an increased risk of litigation from the public.

In my store if anyone is dispensing glasses I have to be on the premises. (Optometrist from Wrexham)

I think I'm much more conscious about record keeping and checking everything because it's so clearly written what is required there. And also because of the increasingly litigious nature of the public, so it's not just the standards that have made me change. (Optometrist from Cardiff)

6. Continuing Education and Training (CET)

The GOC wished to gain an in depth understanding of how CET is viewed by registrants in order to improve the CET system in the future. Please note that this set of questions was not asked to student optometrists or student dispensing opticians.

Key findings

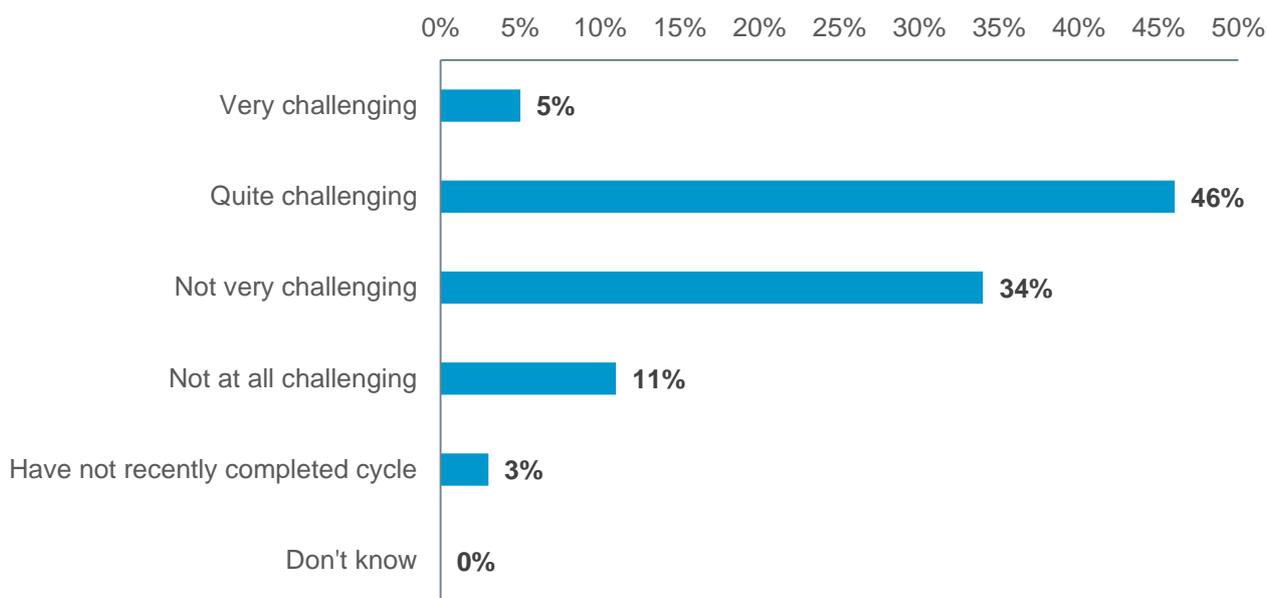
- Around half of survey respondents (51%) said they found it challenging to meet all of the GOC's requirements during the 2013-15 cycle
- Those who found it most challenging included dispensing opticians (66%), those aged 55 and above (57%), those who had been on the GOC register for more than 21 years (54%), those who worked for independent opticians (53%), those working as locums (57%) and those from England (52%)
- Focus group and interview participants who worked for national chains generally found it particularly easy to meet all the requirements as their employers provide ample opportunities to gain points
- However, participants who were self-employed, worked part-time or ran a business found it much more challenging, particularly when it came to finding the time and funding to do CET. Funding was also an issue mentioned by many dispensing opticians who felt it was unfair that they are expected to do the same amount of CET as optometrists but without the same level of funding available
- Almost two-thirds (65%) of survey respondents felt that their practice had recently improved as a result of undertaking CET in the 2013-15 period
- Optometrists were more likely to say that their practice had improved as a result of undertaking CET (69%) than dispensing opticians (57%)
- Most focus group and interview participants felt that there were benefits to undertaking CET, such as keeping up-to-date with current good practice, however most were unable to think of specific examples of how their practice had changed as a result of something they had learnt
- Three-quarters (74%) of survey respondents found it easy to manage and submit their CET records using the My CET area of the GOC website, a view shared by focus group and in depth interview participants
- Some focus group participants suggested that the administrative side of recording and logging CET points could be improved as it can sometimes be time consuming and onerous
- Some participants felt the GOC could do more to regulate the quality of some of the CET on offer so that all courses, exercises and lectures are relevant, useful and insightful and focus on more interactive CET

6.1 Meeting the GOC’s CET requirements

There was a clear divide between how challenging survey respondents found meeting all the CET requirements. Overall, just over half (51%) of respondents said that they found it ‘very’ or ‘quite’ challenging to meet all the GOC’s requirements during the 2013-15 CET cycle (5% ‘very’; 46% ‘quite’). Overall 45% said they did not find it very challenging or not at all challenging.

Figure 8 – If you have recently completed the 2013-15 CET cycle, how challenging was it to meet all the GOC’s requirements?

Base: Optometrists and dispensing opticians (3,312)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to say that they found it **challenging to meet all of the GOC’s CET requirements** (51% overall) included those who:

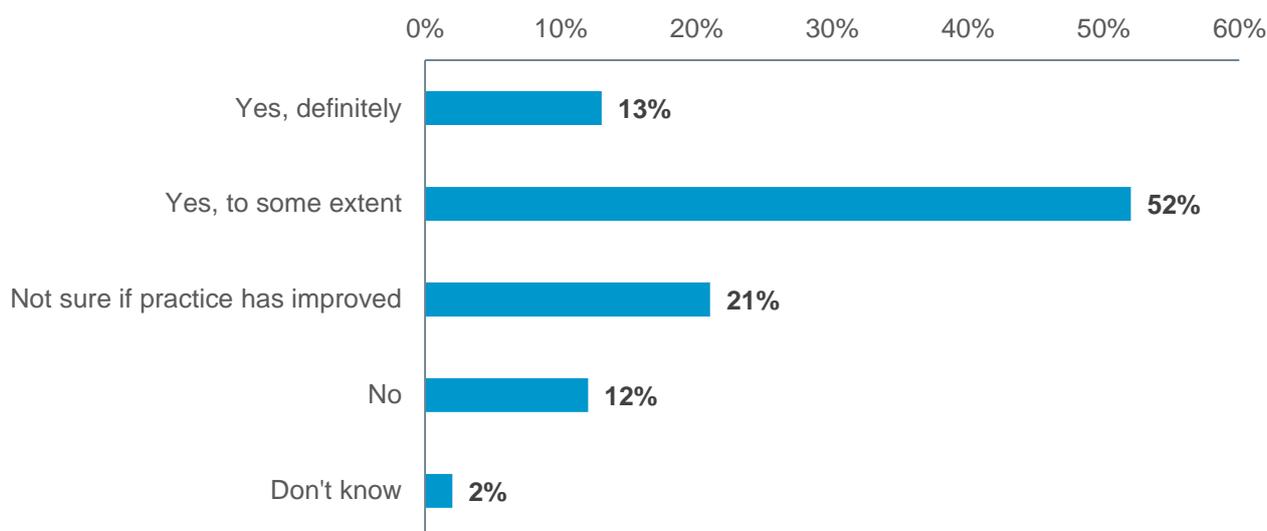
- Were dispensing opticians (66%), compared to optometrists (45%)
- Were aged 55 and over (57%), particularly compared to those aged 16-34 (44%)
- Had been on the GOC register for 6-20 years (54%) or more than 21 years (54%) compared to those who had been on it for less than five years (39%)
- Were from England (52%). By comparison only 42% of respondents from Scotland said they found it challenging
- Worked for an independent opticians (53%) compared to a chain (50%)
- Worked as a locum (57%) compared to those working full-time (50%) and part-time (53%)

6.2 Improvements in practice from undertaking CET

In the survey, the GOC was keen to understand whether registrants had improved their practice as a result of undertaking CET over the 2013-15 period. Two-thirds (65%) of respondents felt that their practice had improved (13% ‘definitely’; 52% ‘to some extent’). A further fifth (21%) were not sure if their practice had improved and one in ten (12%) felt that it had not.

Figure 9 – In your opinion, has your practice recently improved as a result of undertaking CET over the 2013-15 period?

Base: Those who had recently completed the CET cycle (3,224)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups most likely to say that their **practice had improved as a result of undertaking CET in the 2013-15 period** (65% overall) included those who:

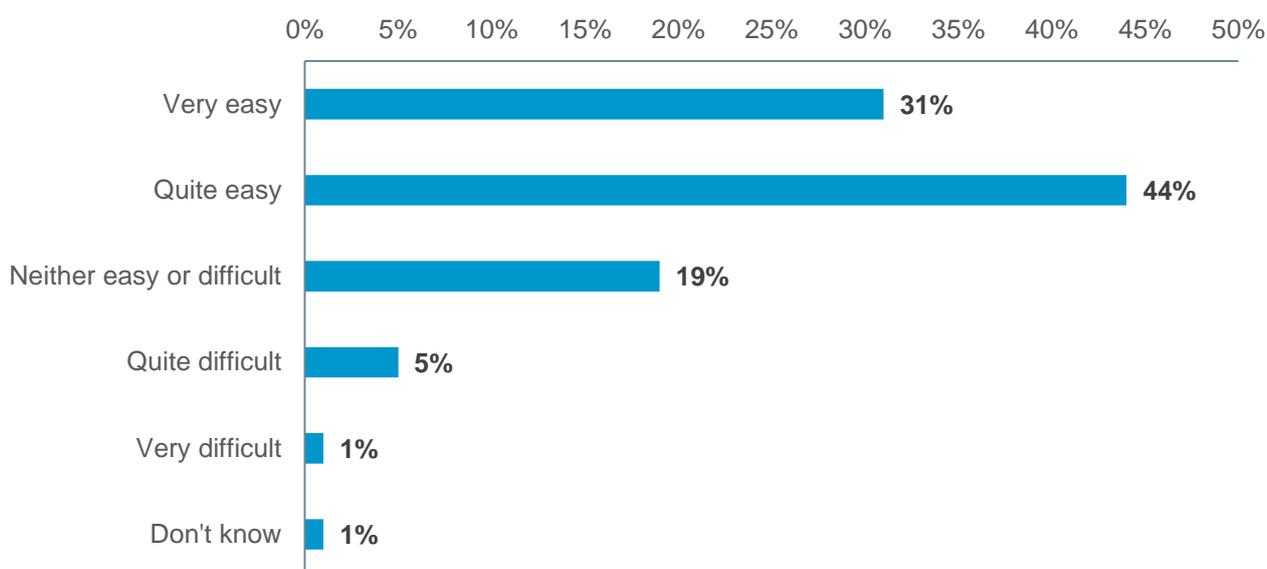
- Were optometrists (69%) compared to those who were dispensing opticians (57%)

6.3 Managing and submitting records using My CET area of website

Respondents who had recently completed the CET cycle were asked how easy they found using the My CET area to manage and submit their CET record. Three-quarters of respondents (74%) reported that it was ‘very’ or ‘quite’ easy (31% ‘very’; 44% ‘quite’). A fifth (19%) found it neither easy nor difficult. Only a very small proportion of respondents (6%) said that using the My CET area of the website was difficult (5% ‘quite’; 1% ‘very’).

Figure 10 – How did you find using the My CET area of the GOC’s website to manage and submit your CET record?

Base: Those who had recently completed the CET cycle (3,224)



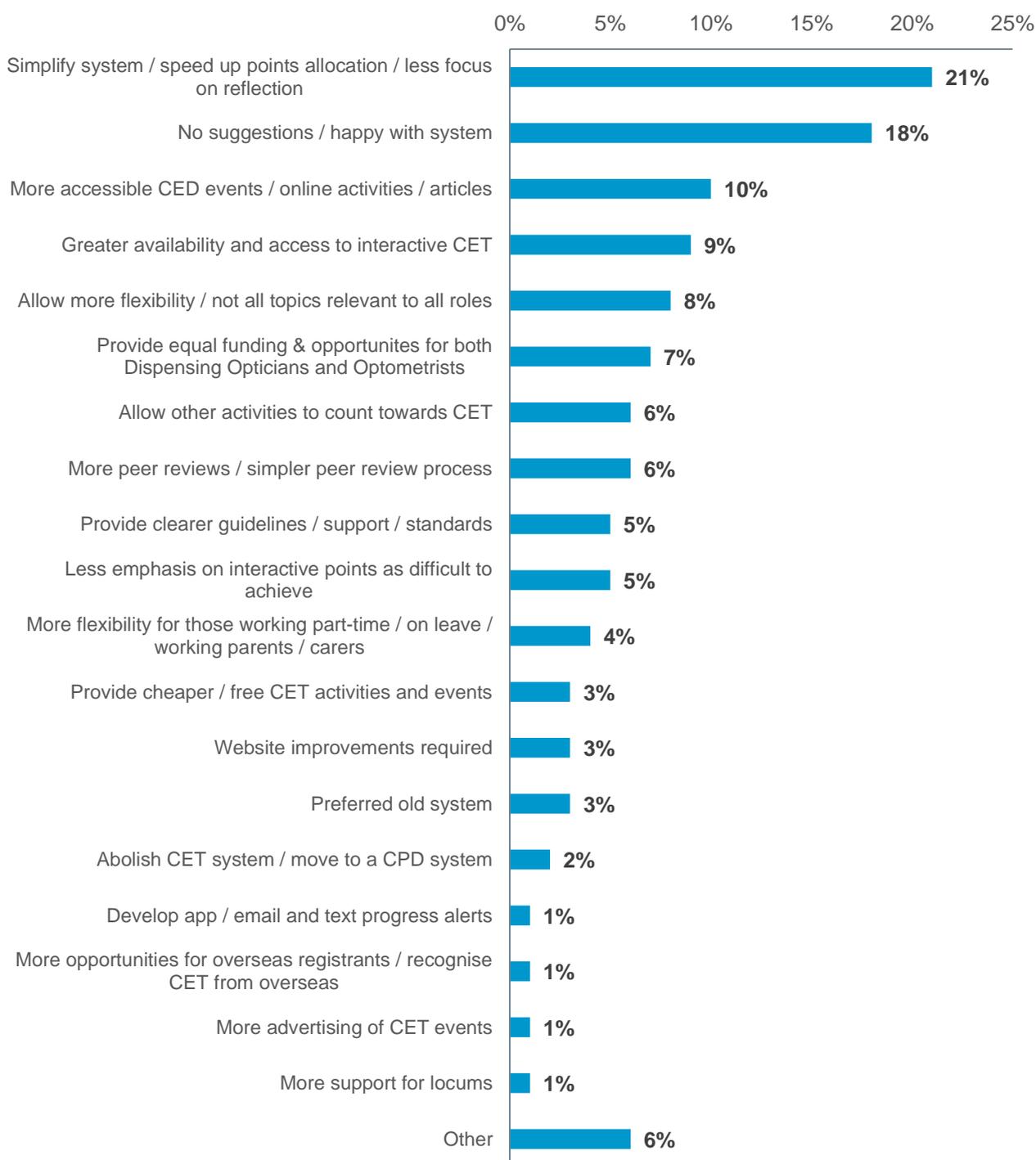
Subgroup analysis

Subgroups most likely to say that **using the My CET area of the website was easy** (74% overall) included those who:

- Were aged 16-34 (78%) compared to those aged 55 and above (66%)
- Had been on the GOC register for less than five years (80%). By comparison, 71% of those who had been on the register for more than 21 years found the My CET area of the website easy to use
- Worked for a chain of opticians (77%) compared to an independent opticians (72%)

Respondents were asked if they had any comments about how the system could be improved. Respondents could type their answers into an open box. Just over a fifth (21%) said they felt that the system could be simplified, focusing on speeding up the allocation of points and with less focus on reflection. Just under a fifth (18%) said they did not have any suggestions or were happy with the system how it is. Other suggestions included offering more accessible CET events, online activities and articles (10%), greater availability of interactive CET (9%) and a range of other responses as shown below.

**Figure 11 – Do you have any comments on how the CET system could be improved?
Base: Those who provided a comment (1,274)**



Focus group and in depth interview feedback

Feedback about the CET system

Many participants liked the CET system, finding it easy to use to track their CET progress. Participants saw the value of completing CET activities in that it enabled registrants to learn new skills, refresh current knowledge and skills and plug gaps in knowledge. This is of particular benefit for those who qualified some time ago and helps them to keep up-to-date with current trends and thinking in the industry.

It's good to have it all on the same website where it is easy to track...It's good to keep up-to-date with knowledge. (Dispensing Optician from Colwyn Bay, Wales)

Having Continuing Education and Training helps you maintain your clinical skills and knowledge. (Optometrist from Coleraine, Northern Ireland)

Changes in practice as a result of undertaking CET

The majority of participants believed that their professional practice had improved and that they were better at their profession as a result of undertaking CET. Most said that what they learnt from CET mostly affirmed what they knew already and could not think of specific examples. However, some participants recalled specific courses or sessions on useful or interesting topics that they had attended.

There was a good paediatrics session that I attended recently and that was very very useful. (Dispensing Optician from Oadby)

There was one about fitting glasses for young babies. That was informative. (Dispensing Optician from Port Glasgow)

Improvements to the CET process and system

When asked about improvements that could be made to the CET system, some participants mentioned that they were asked to describe what they learnt each time they logged in to accept their CET points. This made it an onerous and time consuming task for some, particularly when accepting many points at once, and it can be difficult for registrants to recall specific things they learnt some time after they undertaken the CET.

Participants felt the GOC could look to simplify the system in order to make it easier for registrants to accept their points, such as asking for feedback straight away. Some also questioned why they needed to provide all of the information and whether anyone read what they wrote.

I do find the online evaluation a little tedious... Doing the evaluation on the night of the lecture would be better because otherwise you are doing it some time afterwards. (Optometrist from Ballymena, Northern Ireland)

All the questions, filling them all out.... Sometimes that is a bit time consuming. If you have ten points at the same time to accept, you have to fill out nearly the same thing every time. (Optometrist from Wrexham)

Some participants also questioned the quality and relevance of some CET that is available, particularly in relation to magazine articles that at times feel as if they are simple comprehension exercises, courses that were seemingly based on poor factual information or lectures that were not relevant to registrants' day to day practice. These participants felt that the GOC could do more to regulate the quality of CET and this would minimise the risk of registrants seeing CET as a 'tick box' exercise rather than an opportunity to gain new knowledge and skills.

Some of the lectures at hospital that I have been to, they are of little or no relevance to my day to day work....The only reason I go these lectures is because it gets me my CET points. (Dispensing Optician from High Wycombe)

Sometimes the quality of things you do is very poor. You have the ability to comment about it in your feedback, but there's no acknowledgement that anyone has read it. Some of the information that's given is just plain wrong. (Optometrist from Manchester)

The majority of participants said that they preferred interactive CET, such as peer discussions and lectures as they found these more useful than other forms of CET. For these participants, there could be more of a focus on interactive CET as far as the GOC is concerned.

I like the interactive CET. Peer discussion is actually really good...They are really useful. (Optometrist from Edinburgh)

Some participants felt that it was quite easy to achieve the required number of CET points, particularly those who worked for large national chains who provide ample opportunities to gain points via conferences, peer review discussions and training days. However, participants who worked for independent practices or who were self-employed explained that they sometimes struggled to find the time to gain the number of required points, particularly if they manage a business or have other commitments and responsibilities. There was also a perception that there were not always enough interactive CET opportunities available all year and across the country, with a bias towards London and the South East of England.

My last employer used to hold employee days where we could gain up to 14 points in a day, by doing workshops. It made it very easy. (Dispensing Optician from Oadby)

It's becoming increasingly more difficult to get the points, particularly if you are running a business and having to juggle paperwork and also maintaining your qualifications. (Dispensing Optician from London)

Most of them are in London. It would be great if there were more scattered about. (Optometrist from Chepstow)

Many dispensing opticians also perceived there was an unfairness when it came to CET as optometrists were provided with funding to gain their points, whereas there was little or no funding available to dispensing opticians in the majority of cases.

I have to have the same amount of CET points as my optometrist colleagues who get CET grants and dispensing opticians get nothing. I think that is very unfair. (Dispensing Optician from Ballyclare, Northern Ireland)

7. Views about the registration process

Key findings

- Nine in ten (93%) survey respondents rated their experience of the annual retention process as 'excellent' or 'very good'
- Survey respondents who worked for a chain (95%) were more likely to highly rate their experience of the annual retention process than those who worked for an independent business (92%)
- The majority (92%) of survey respondents rated their experience of using the MyGOC area of the website as 'excellent' or 'very good'
- Seven in ten (69%) survey respondents said they were 'definitely' clear about what should be declared to the GOC and when in terms of their health, disciplinary matters and criminal convictions, and a further 28% were clear 'to some extent'
- Dispensing opticians were more likely than optometrists to be 'definitely' clear about what should be declared and when (75% compared to 69%), as were respondents aged 55 and above in comparison to the other age groups and those from a White ethnic background compared to those from a non-White background (71% compared to 66%)
- In order to make it clearer to registrants about what should be declared and when, suggestions included developing a handbook or dedicated webpage (20%) and providing a list of common examples, FAQs and case studies (12%)
- Nine in ten (90%) had accessed the public online register at least once. Four in ten (43%) said they rarely accessed it and a third (33%) said they accessed it sometimes. Only one in twelve (8%) said they often accessed it
- Dispensing opticians and student dispensing opticians (45% and 47%) were more likely to access the register 'often' or 'sometimes' than optometrists (41%), as were respondents from England (43%), particularly compared to respondents from Northern Ireland (20%) and those working for a chain (45%) compared to those who worked for an independent business (36%)

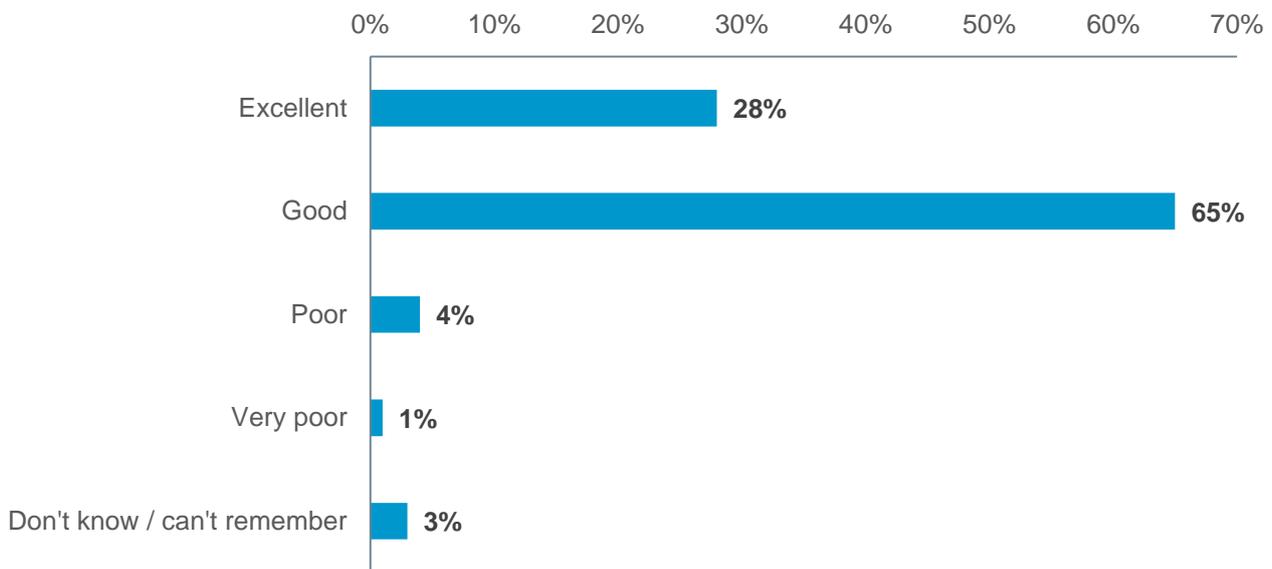
7.1 Experience of using the MyGOC area of website

The MyGOC area is used by registrants to update their details and complete their retention application. The GOC wanted to understand registrants’ experience of using the MyGOC area to help understand if any improvements could be made in the future.

Overall, the results were very positive with nine in ten (92%) respondents saying that their experience of using the MyGOC area was ‘excellent’ (28%) or ‘good’ (65%). Only 5% said their experience was ‘poor’ (4%) or ‘very poor’ (1%).

Figure 12 – How would you rate your experience of using the MyGOC area of the website?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to rate their experience of **using the MyGOC area of the website as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’** (92% overall) included those who:

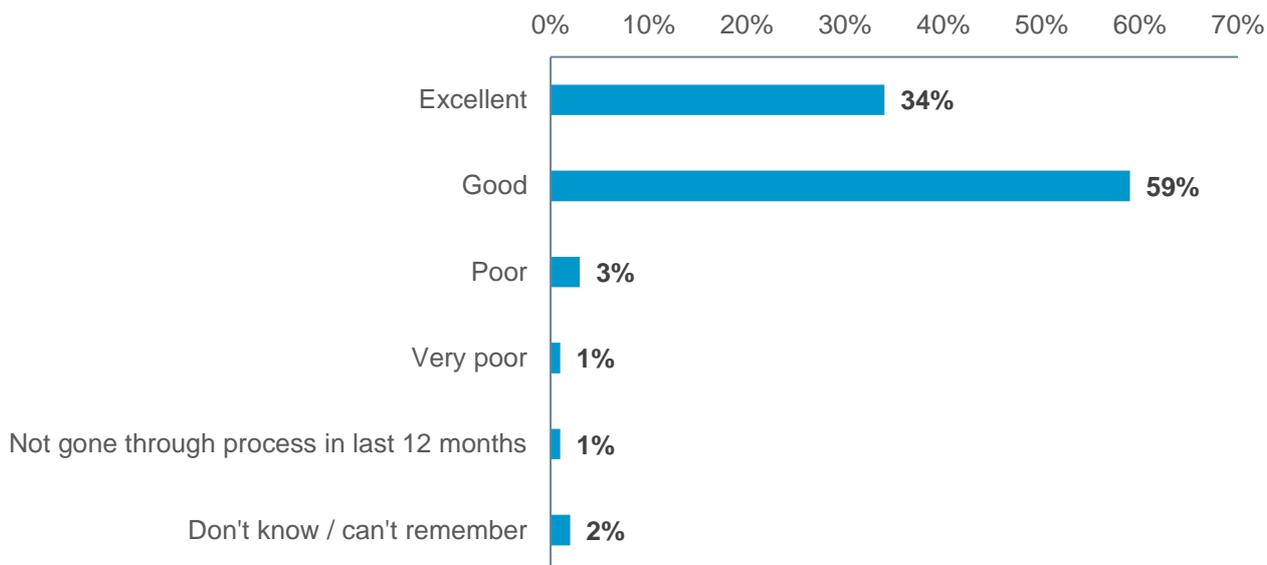
- Were optometrists (94%) and dispensing opticians (93%). By comparison, 82% of student optometrists and 90% of student dispensing opticians rated their experience as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’

7.2 Experience of the annual retention process

The GOC wanted to better understand registrants’ experience of the annual retention process. Overall, the results were positive with nine in ten (93%) respondents rating their experience of the annual retention process as ‘excellent’ (34%) or ‘very good’ (59%).

Figure 13 – If you have gone through the annual retention process in the last 12 months, how would you rate your experience?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups most likely to rate their **experience of the annual retention process as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’** (93% overall) included those who:

- Were optometrists (94%). By comparison, 91% of student optometrists rated their experience as ‘excellent’ or ‘good’
- Were aged 16-34 (94%) and 35-54 (94%) compared to those aged 55 and above (91%)
- Worked for a chain of opticians (95%) compared to an independent opticians (92%)

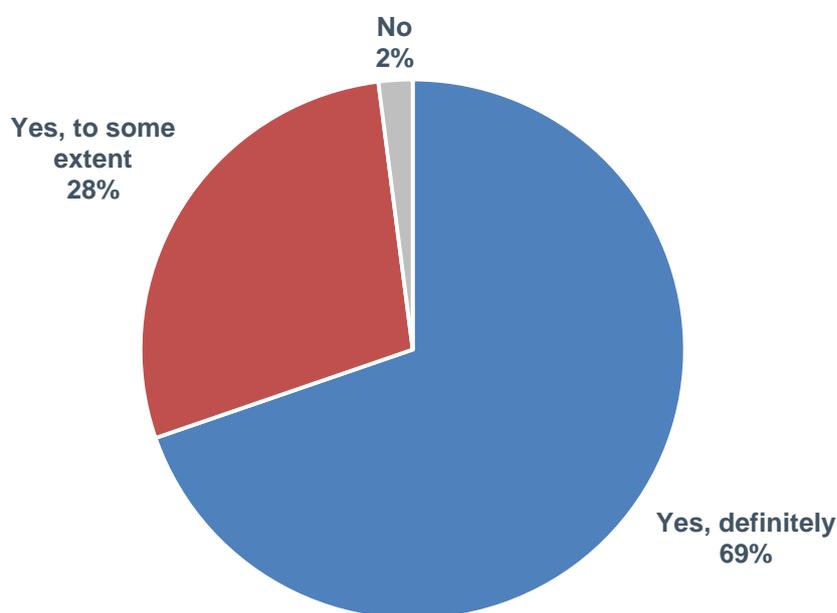
7.3 Clarity of what should be declared to the GOC and when

Registrants are required to make declarations to the GOC about their health, disciplinary matters and criminal convictions. The GOC was interested in understanding whether registrants were clear about what should be declared and when.

Seven in ten (69%) respondents said they were ‘definitely’ clear about what should be declared to the GOC and when regarding their health, disciplinary matters and criminal convictions and a further 28% said they were clear ‘to some extent’. Only 2% of respondents said they were not clear.

Figure 14 – Are you clear about what you should declare and when?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

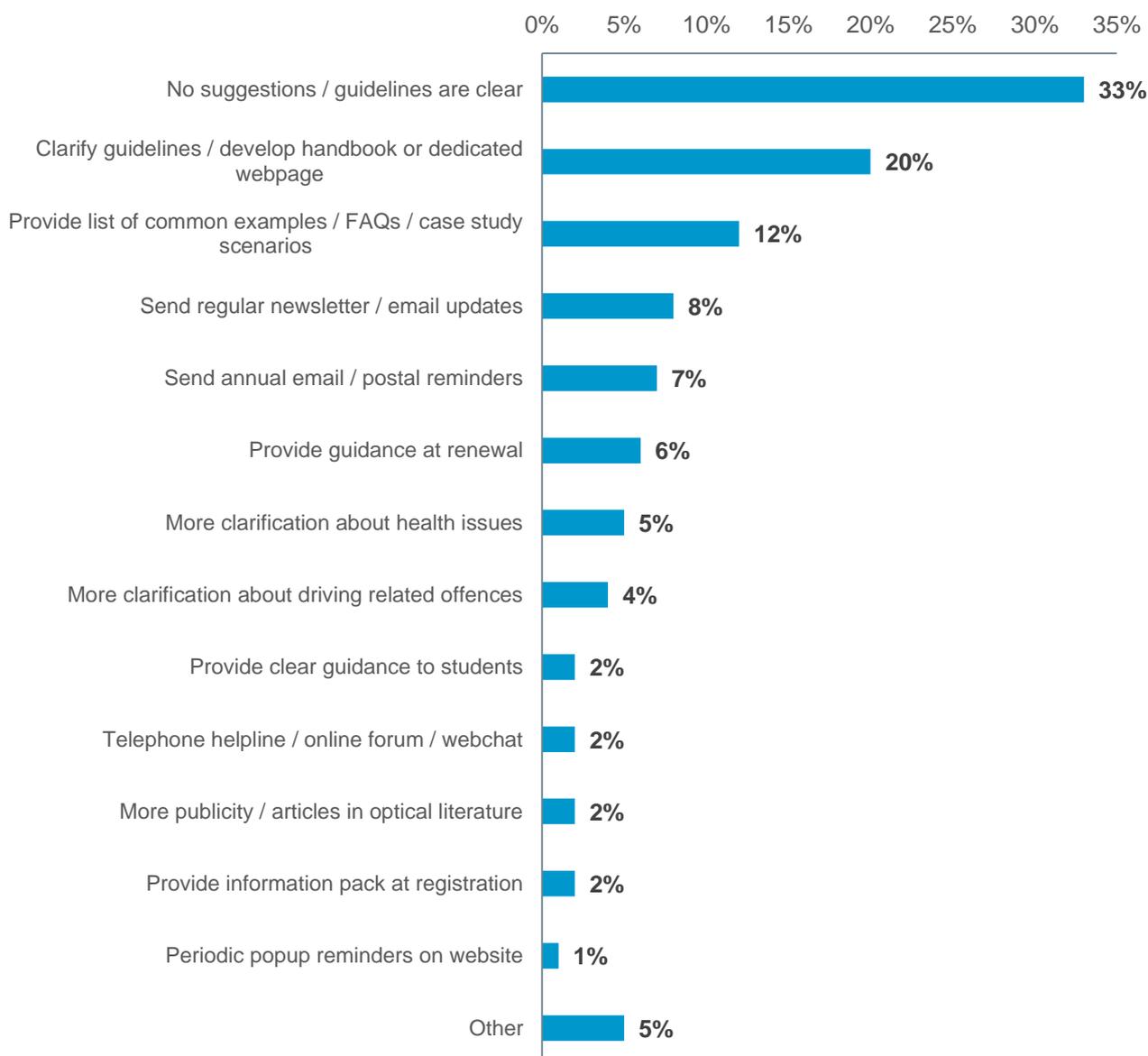
Subgroups most likely to say that they **were ‘definitely’ clear about what should be declared to the GOC and when** (69% overall) included those who:

- Were dispensing opticians (75%). By comparison 69% of optometrists were ‘definitely’ clear
- Were aged 55 and above (75%) compared to those aged 16-34 (65%)
- Were from White ethnic groups (71%) compared to those from non-White ethnic groups (66%)

Survey respondents were asked what the GOC could do to make it clearer to registrants what needs to be declared to the organisation and when. Respondents were able to type their responses into an open box. A third (33%) of respondents said they did not have any suggestions or that the guidelines were already clear enough and a fifth (20%) thought that the GOC could further clarify the guidelines and there were suggestions of developing a handbook or a webpage. One in eight (12%) made suggestions such as publishing common examples, a list of FAQs and case study scenarios. One in eight (12%) made suggestions such as publishing common examples, a list of FAQs and case study scenarios.

Figure 15 – What could the GOC do to make it clearer about what needs to be declared and when?

Base: Those who provided a comment (932)



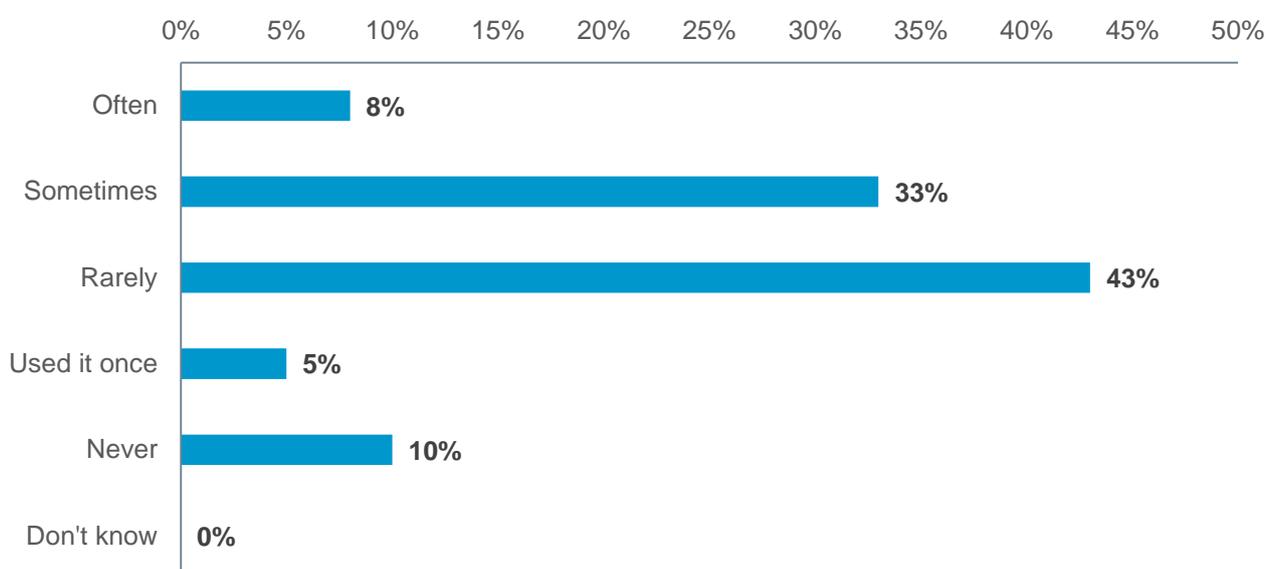
7.4 Frequency of accessing the public online register

The GOC currently hosts and maintains an online register of all registrants in the UK which is available publicly through the GOC website. The GOC was interested in knowing how often registrants access this online register.

Four in ten (41%) said that accessed the public online register ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’. Around half of respondents (48%) said that they ‘rarely’ used it or had used it once and a further one in ten (10%) said they had never used it.

Figure 16 – How often do you access the GOC public online register?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups most likely to say that they **used the GOC public online register ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’** (41% overall) included those who:

- Were dispensing opticians (45%) and student dispensing opticians (47%). By comparison 41% of optometrists and 31% of student optometrists used it ‘often’ or ‘sometimes’
- Were male (47%) compared to female (38%)
- Were aged 16-34 (43%) compared to those aged 35-54 (40%) and 55 and above (38%)
- Were from England (43%), particularly compared to Northern Ireland (20%)
- Worked for a chain (45%) compared to independent business (36%)

8. GOC Communication

Key findings

- Eight in ten (82%) survey respondents thought that the frequency of communication from the GOC was 'about right'
- Over three-quarters (78%) of respondents read the GOC eBulletin
- Optometrists and dispensing opticians (82% and 81%) were more likely to read it than student optometrists (72%) and student dispensing opticians (57%)
- Those who had been on the GOC register for 21 years or more (86%) and those working for an independent business were more likely to read it (83%), compared to those who had been on the register for less time and those working for a chain (76%)
- Nine in ten (89%) respondents said they found the eBulletin informative
- Student dispensing opticians and student optometrists (97% and 95%) were more likely to find the eBulletin informative than those who were fully qualified

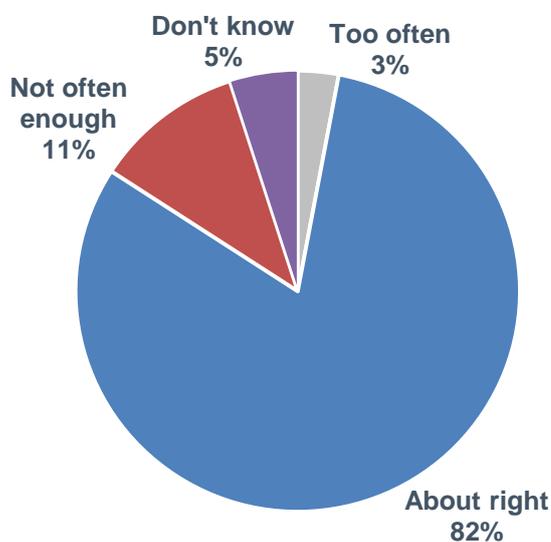
8.1 Frequency of communication

In order to determine how frequently the GOC should communicate with registrants, the survey asked respondents to describe how they felt about the frequency of current communication.

Eight in ten (82%) respondents said that the frequency of communication from the GOC was 'about right' and a further one in ten (11%) said it was 'not often enough'. Only 3% said that they felt that the GOC communicated with them too often.

Figure 17 – How would you describe the frequency that the GOC communicates with you?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



8.2 GOC eBulletin

The GOC sends an eBulletin to all registrants with a registered email address four times a year and was keen to understand whether registrants read it and if they found it informative.

Whilst the majority (78%) of respondents said that they read the GOC eBulletin, for most this was scan reading it (70%). One in twelve (8%) said they read it in detail and 16% said they did not read it. It seems the majority of registrants are sent the eBulletin however, as only 4% claimed to not receive it.

Of those who read the eBulletin, nine in ten (89%) said they found it either ‘very informative’ (8%) or ‘quite informative’ (81%). Around one in ten (11%) felt it was ‘not very informative’.

Figure 18 – Do you read the GOC eBulletin?

Base: All respondents (4,139)

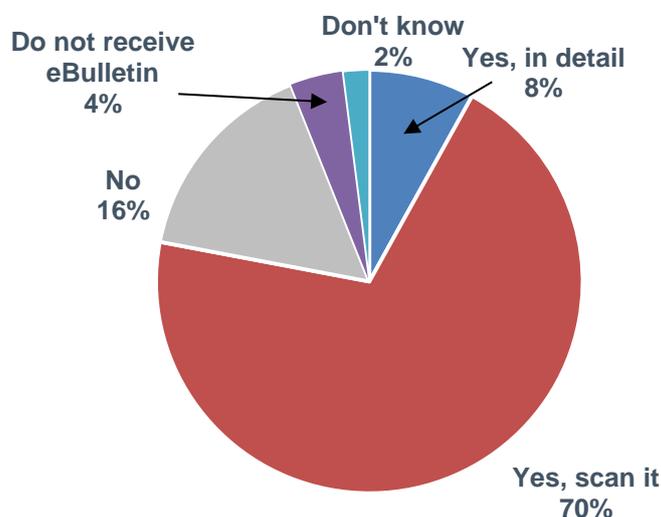
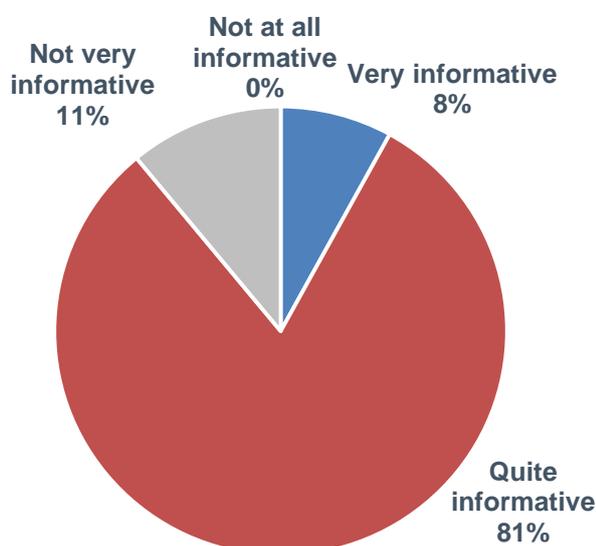


Figure 19 – How informative do you find the GOC eBulletin?

Base: Those who read the GOC eBulletin (3,293)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to say that they **read the GOC eBulletin** either in detail or by scanning it (78% overall) included those who:

- Were optometrists (82%) and dispensing opticians (81%) compared to student optometrists (57%) and student dispensing opticians (72%)
- Were aged 35-54 (84%) and 55 and above (87%) compared to 16-34 year olds (69%)
- Had been registered with the GOC for 21 years or more (86%) or for 6-20 years (82%), particularly compared to those who had been on the register for less than five years (66%)
- Worked for an independent business (83%) compared to respondents who worked for a chain (76%)

Subgroups more likely to say that they found the **GOC eBulletin ‘very’ or ‘fairly’ informative** (89%) included those who:

- Were student optometrists (97%) and student dispensing opticians (95%) compared to optometrists (88%) and dispensing opticians (88%)
- Were female (92%) compared to male (85%)
- Were aged 16-34 (92%) compared to 35-54 year olds (88%) and those aged 55 and above (87%)
- Had been registered with the GOC for less than five years (94%) compared to those who had been on the register for 6-20 years (88%) and for more than 21 years (87%)
- Were from England (90%), Scotland (92%) and Northern Ireland (91%) compared to Wales (82%)
- Worked for a chain (91%) compared to respondents who worked for an independent business (86%)

9. GOC Customer Service

Key findings

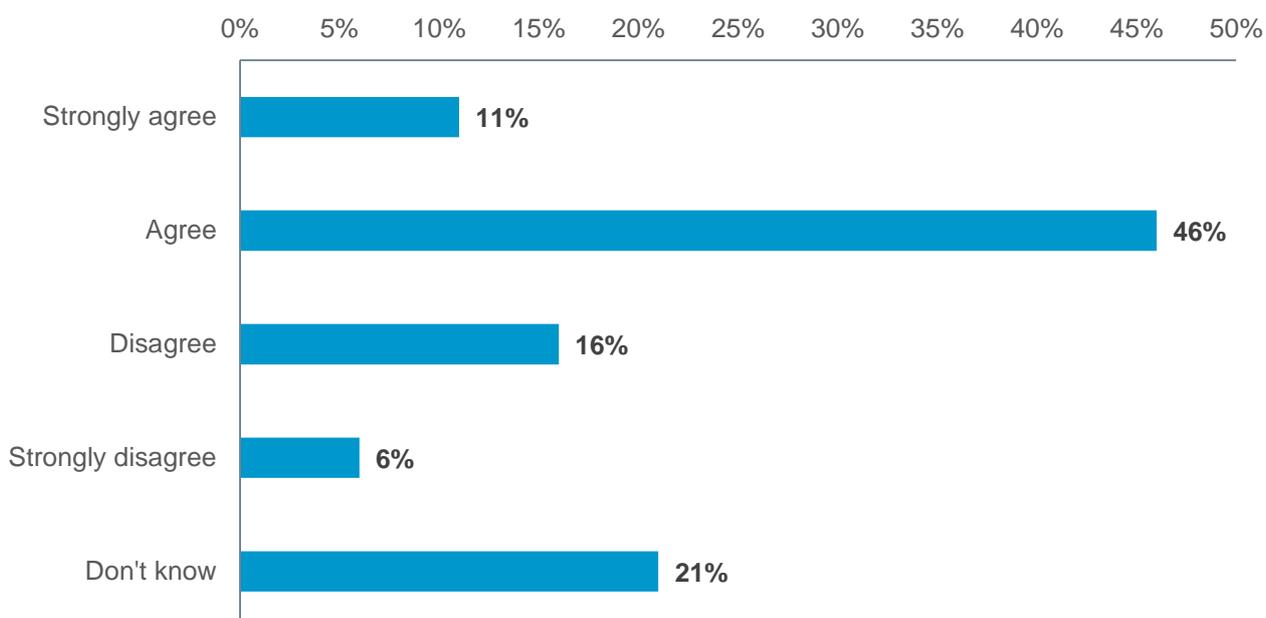
- Overall, almost six in ten (57%) survey respondents agreed that the GOC provides good customer service to its registrants
- A fifth (21%) said they did not know if the GOC provided good customer service to registrants
- Student optometrists (73%) and student dispensing opticians (75%) were more likely to agree that the GOC provides good customer service than dispensing opticians (58%) and optometrists (51%)
- Less than a fifth (18%) of survey respondents had contacted the GOC for information or a query in the last 12 months
- The majority (80%) of those who had contacted the GOC had their query or their request 'definitely' resolved (49%) or 'to some extent' (31%)
- The majority (82%) of those who had contacted the GOC had their query or their request 'definitely' dealt with promptly (48%) or resolved 'to some extent' (34%)

9.1 Customer service provision

Overall, almost six in ten (57%) of survey respondents agreed that the GOC provides good customer service to registrants (11% strongly agreed and 46% agreed). A fifth (21%) disagreed (16% disagreed and 6% strongly disagreed). However, it should be noted that a further fifth (21%) said they did not know, which indicates that some registrants may not have regular enough contact with the GOC to be able to answer the question.

Figure 20 – To what extent do you agree that the GOC provides good customer service to its registrants?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



Subgroup analysis

Subgroups more likely to agree that the GOC provides good customer service to registrants (57% overall) included those who:

- Were student dispensing opticians (75%) and student optometrists (73%), compared to optometrists (51%) and dispensing opticians (58%)
- Had been on the register for less than five years (68%) compared to those who had been on it for more than 21 years (50%)
- Worked for a chain (60%). By comparison 52% of those who worked for an independent business agreed

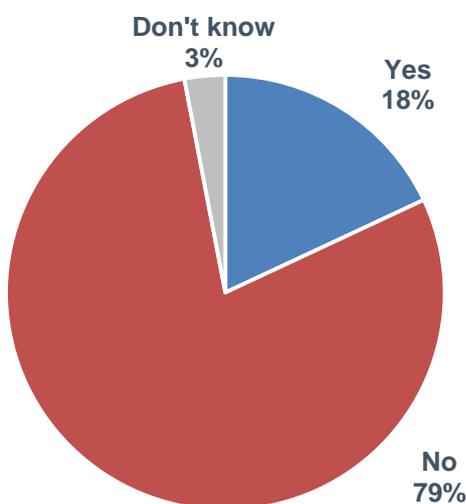
9.2 Contacting the GOC to request information or to make a query

The GOC was keen to understand what proportion of registrants contacted the organisation to request information or to make a query and to find out whether registrants felt their queries and requests were resolved satisfactorily and promptly.

Just under a fifth (18%) of respondents said that they had contacted the GOC in the last 12 months to request information or to make a query, leaving eight in ten respondents who did not make any contact (79%).

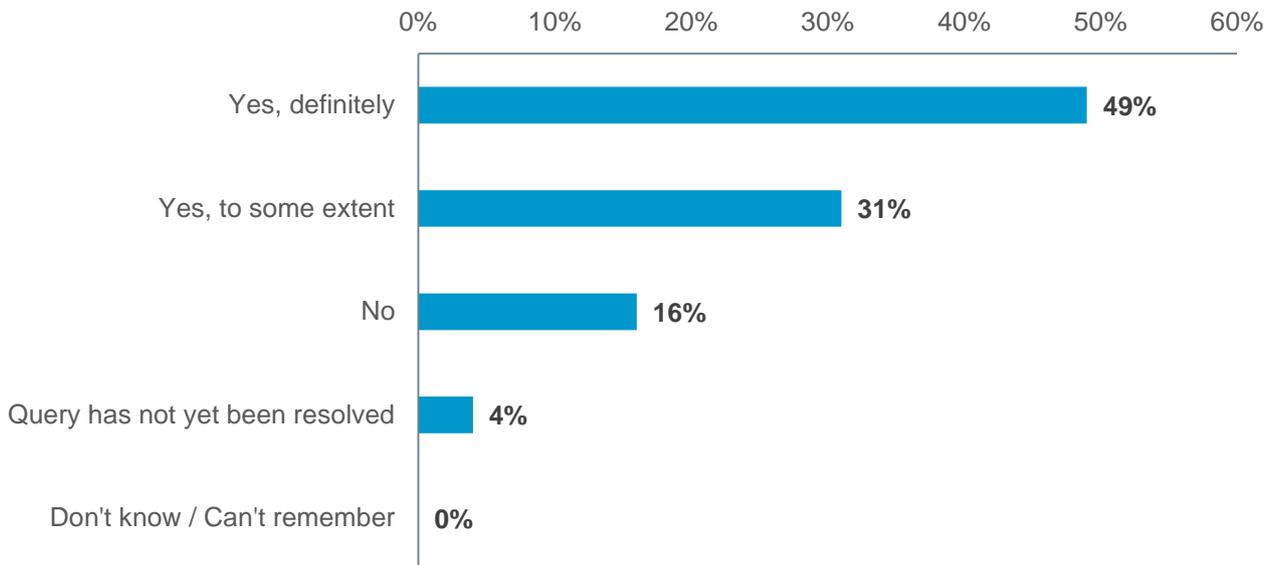
Figure 21 – Have you contacted the GOC to request information or make a query in the last 12 months?

Base: All respondents (4,139)



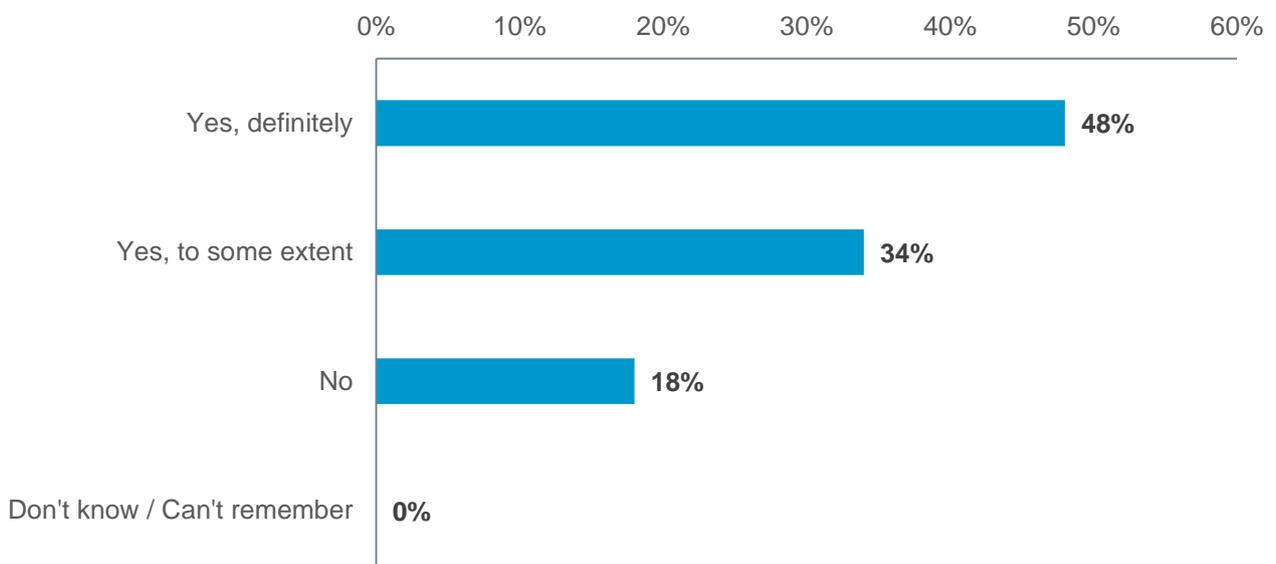
Of those who had contacted the GOC, eight in ten (80%) said their query had been resolved or they had received the information they needed either ‘definitely’ (49%) or ‘to some extent’ (31%). One in six (16%), however, said the query had not been resolved or they had not been given the information they needed, or they were still waiting (4%).

Figure 22 – Did you get the information you needed or was your query resolved?
Base: Those who had requested information or made a query in the last 12 months (747)



Just under half (48%) of respondents who had requested information or made a query said that it had been ‘definitely’ dealt with promptly and a further third (34%) said it had been ‘to some extent’. Just under a fifth (18%) said that a response had not been provided or a query resolved promptly.

Figure 23 – Was your query or request for information dealt with promptly by the GOC?
Base: Those who had had a request for information or query unresolved (717)



10. Key findings

Perceptions of the GOC's role

The majority of survey respondents agreed that the GOC's role was to protect patients and the public, discipline optical professionals who fail to meet the standards of the profession and to drive high standards of patient care. This was corroborated by focus group and interview participants. A smaller, but still substantial proportion of survey respondents agreed that the GOC's role was to represent the optical professions. Opinion was split amongst focus group and interview participants with some feeling that if it represented the profession this would lead to a conflict of interest in terms of fulfilling its other roles and others thinking that it needed to represent the optical professions in order to be effective in its role of protecting patients and the public.

Perceptions of how well the GOC is carrying out its role

The majority of survey respondents agreed that the GOC sets fair standards for the profession and a large proportion agreed that the organisation enables registrants to develop their roles for the benefits of patients. There was less agreement that the GOC listens to the views of registrants and is fair when taking action through the fitness to practise process. However, a large proportion of respondents did not know if the GOC was fair, indicating that many registrants do not have much experience of this process and how it works.

Focus group and interview participants who had experience of the fitness to practise process felt the GOC could do more to support registrants about whom a concern had been raised, given the effect it has on individuals.

Views on the GOC registration fee

Just over half of registrants agreed that the GOC charges reasonable registration fees. Many focus group and interview participants, however, disagreed with this as they struggled to see the value for money that the fee provides. Many suggested that the GOC could provide more information about how the fees are set and how the money is spent.

The GOC's Standards of Practice

Overall the majority of survey respondents were confident in their ability to meet the new standards and rated their understanding as 'excellent', 'very good' or 'good'. However, less respondents, around a fifth, said they had made changes to their practice following the introduction of the new standards. Focus group and interview participants explained this result by saying that although they were mostly confident in their understanding of the new standards, they had not needed to make changes to their practice as the standards reflected their everyday practice anyway. A few participants, however, provided examples of how their practice had changed, for example, introducing a requirement to have an optometrist on site when dispensing lenses and frames, and the new standards regarding social media and record keeping.

Registrants' experience of the Continuing Education and Training (CET) scheme

Overall there was a fairly even split as to whether respondents found the CET scheme challenging or not and this was reflected in the focus group and interview findings. There was a suggestion amongst participants that those working for large chains found it easy to achieve points as they were given many opportunities to do so by their employer, whilst those working for independents or as self-employed locums struggled more to find the time and opportunities.

The majority of survey respondents felt that their practice had improved as a result of undertaking CET in the last cycle. Focus group and interview participants felt there were many benefits to undertaking CET such as keeping up-to-date with current good practice, learning new skills and plugging gaps in knowledge.

In terms of the process for submitting CET points, the survey findings were positive as the majority said they found it easy to submit and manage their CET records using the My CET area of the GOC website. Focus group and interview participants confirmed these findings saying it was easy to use, but some suggested the administrative side of recording and logging CET points could be improved as it can be time consuming and onerous.

Some focus group and interview participants also felt that the GOC could do more to regulate the quality of CET on offer so that all courses, exercises and lectures that provide registrants with points are relevant, useful and insightful. A number of participants also said they found interactive CET particularly useful and thought that CET could focus more on the interactive elements.

Views about the GOC's registration process

Overall survey respondents were very positive about the registration process, with a very large proportion of respondents rating their experience of using the 'MyGOC' area of the website and the annual retention process highly.

The majority of respondents seemed to be clear about what should be declared and when to the GOC in regards to health problems, disciplinary matters and criminal convictions. Respondents suggested that in order to make it clearer the GOC could develop a handbook or dedicated webpage, provide a list of Frequently Asked Questions or case studies.

Although nine in ten had assessed the online public register at least once in the past, the majority had used it only 'sometimes' or 'rarely'. Usage of the online register seemed lower in Northern Ireland than in other countries, particularly compared to England.

How the GOC communicates with its registrants

The majority of survey respondents felt that the frequency of communication from the GOC was about right, but one in ten felt it was not frequent enough.

When asked if they read the GOC eBulletin (a regular e-newsletter sent to all registrants), the majority of respondents said they read it and found it informative.

Registrants' views on the GOC's customer service

Almost six in ten respondents agreed that the GOC provided good customer service to registrants. Of those who had contacted the GOC in the previous 12 months for a query or information request, eight in ten said that this had been resolved and that it had been done so promptly.