

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a white lab coat, is seated at a desk in a laboratory. She is looking directly at the camera with a slight smile. To her right is a large, professional-grade microscope. The desk is covered with various laboratory instruments, including a pair of forceps and a petri dish. The entire scene is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue filter.

General Optical Council

Business Plan

2023/24

Foreword

Leonie Milliner

Chief Executive and Registrar

This, our 2023-24 financial year, marks the fourth year of our five-year strategic plan 'Fit for the Future'. Within this business plan, we highlight some of the key work programmes we aim to deliver to achieve our vision of being recognised for delivering world-class regulation and excellent customer service.

This includes the work we do to protect the public and uphold public confidence in the professions and businesses we regulate, with a renewed focus on offering high quality services to our registrants, and supporting eye-care professionals to contribute to their full professional capability in the best interests of patients. It also sets out how we are preparing for regulatory reform and investing in our organisation so it is fit for the future.

We will continue to put GOC values and our public duty to progress equality, diversity and inclusion at the heart of all we do. I look forward to working with all our stakeholders to deliver this ambitious programme of work for the year ahead.

Our Business Plan for 2023/24

We are the UK-wide regulator for optometrists and dispensing opticians, student optometrists and dispensing opticians, and optical businesses. We protect the public and uphold high standards in the optical professions by:

- setting standards for the performance and conduct of our registrants
- maintaining a register of individuals who are fit to practise or train as optometrists or dispensing opticians, and bodies corporate who are fit to carry on business as optometrists or dispensing opticians
- approving qualifications leading to registration
- investigating and acting where registrants' fitness to practise, train or carry on business may be impaired.

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.

In April 2020, we launched 'Fit for the Future', a new five-year strategic plan spanning 2020-25, outlining how we would achieve our vision and mission. The plan has three key priorities:

- world-class regulatory practice
- transforming customer service
- continuous improvement.

This business plan for 2023/24 demonstrates how we will protect the public and ensure registrants can contribute to their full professional capabilities across each part of the UK.

Protecting the Public

A man in a white lab coat and red tie is looking through a microscope in a laboratory setting. The image is overlaid with a blue tint.

The public must have confidence in our ability to protect them, and our registrants must consider that we are fair, proportionate, and focused on public protection.

We will do this by maintaining a register of individuals who are fit to practise or train, and bodies corporate who are fit to carry on business. This includes managing our annual registrant and student renewal processes. We will also review the way we manage the assessment of applications from optical professionals who have qualified outside the UK and Switzerland who wish to register in the UK.

We will maintain fair, proportionate, and efficient processes for investigating fitness to practise concerns, including:

- continuing to embed improvements in our triage and casework processes to speed up investigations and improve the number of hearings that conclude first time
- delivering a new, effective, electronic case management system to support the robust management of our end-to-end casework process
- sharing learning from FTP outcomes with registrants through our FTP bulletin to embed good practice.



Supporting our registrants to uphold high standards

Our focus will be on offering high quality services to our registrants, supporting them to maximise their professional capability in the best interests of patients. We will make improvements to the MyGOC and MyCPD online platforms and implement a new customer care strategy, working towards the Customer Service Excellence Standard, to ensure we are supporting registrants effectively.

We will continue to administer our new, more flexible CPD scheme, which gives registrants more control over their learning and development and the ability to tailor their own personal scope of practice to develop and diversify their skills throughout their career, maximising their professional capability. We will also support CPD providers by implementing a new audit system and hosting opportunities for engagement.

Following the introduction of our new education and training requirements (ETR), providers of GOC-approved qualifications will be submitting their plans to meet our new requirements, which we will review and note. Whilst providers are adapting their qualifications to meet our new requirements, we will continue to quality assure GOC-approved qualifications and prepare for the introduction of our new Quality Assurance and Enhancement Method.

We have commissioned the Sector Partnership for Optical Knowledge and Education (SPOKE) to run a knowledge hub for the sector to support the introduction of the ETR for dispensing, optometry and qualifications leading to specialist entry to the GOC register.

We will also progress plans for longitudinal research, which will measure the effectiveness of our new outcomes and standards on registrants' competence, confidence and capability.

We will continue to engage with professionals and professional bodies to ensure we deepen our understanding of the optical sector, including further developing the GOC's collective understanding of optical care provision through visiting different practices and settings around the UK.

Reforming our Regulation



We will work to ensure our legislation and associated policies are fit for purpose to deliver world class regulation.

We will review and consult on our Standards of Practice to ensure they are up to date, maintain best practice and respond to developments in the professions and wider healthcare sector. This will involve extensive stakeholder engagement on key topics such as social media and online conduct, maintaining professional boundaries, leadership, delegation and supervision, technology, AI and digital literacy.

Last year we launched a call for evidence to inform the development of a potential business case for future change to the Opticians Act, as well as any changes to our associated policies. Following Council's decision in March 2023 to approve our response to the evidence received, we will continue to make progress on designing a blueprint for legislative reform and updating our policies. This will include developing a draft framework for business regulation and updating our 2013 statement on the testing of sight.

In addition, we will continue to engage with and influence the healthcare regulatory legislative reform programme led by the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC).



Fit for the Future

We will continue work to make our organisation fit for the future, including delivering a new electronic case management system to improve how we share information, investing in our staff with a new people plan and installing new audio-visual facilities in our hearings and meetings rooms to better facilitate remote and hybrid engagement in our work by stakeholders.

We will continue to maintain strong governance procedures, including implementing the recommendations from our Governance review, undertaking all member appointments and supporting the work of our Council and committees to ensure they inform decision-making and identify and manage any risk appropriately.

We will implement a new communications strategy which will enhance our customer service and demonstrate to our stakeholders how we protect the public and uphold high standards.

We will also begin work on developing our next five-year corporate strategy, including undertaking research around the current state of the optical sector in order to identify key priorities for the future.

We will continue our public duty and commitment to progress equality, diversity, and inclusion, which underpins all our work, including delivering our EDI strategy and annual report about how EDI is embedded across the organisation.



Keeping Accountable

In aspiring to be world-class we should be rated highly by the Professional Standards Authority, aiming to meet all their standards. We should also retain the confidence of the optical professions and for the first time will be surveying business registrants.

Public confidence in the professions we regulate is already strong and we expect this to be maintained if we are to uphold high standards. By protecting the public, we are also protecting the reputation of the optical professions. We will continue to run our annual survey measuring public perceptions of the professions and experience using optical services.

We will measure and track success on a business-as-usual basis quarterly reporting to our leadership team and Council.

Our Budget 23/24

The majority of our income comes from fees set for our registrants, which we use to deliver our core functions, strategic objectives and mission.

Our focus for our 2023/24 budget is to continue to deliver value in our business-as-usual (BAU) operations, planning for for a better than break-even position for BAU and achieving a surplus before reserve expenditure.

We plan to only use our strategic or other reserves to achieve the successful completion of strategic projects and other Council-approved designated operations. We will invest effectively and appropriately in achieving our strategic aims while ensuring we maintain reserve levels within our Reserves Policy limits.

Budget 2023/24	000 (thousands)
Income	£11,012
Expenditure (business as usual)	£10,952
Surplus / (Deficit) before reserve expenditure	£60
Reserve expenditure	£1,814
Surplus / (Deficit) after reserve expenditure	(£1,754)
Unrealised investment gains	£275
Surplus / (Deficit)	(1,479)

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You can get this plan in Welsh by visiting www.optical.org

The GOC is a charity registered in England and Wales (1150137)

