

Complaints and Feedback about the General Optical Council

Status of document:	Final
Version:	2
Approved by:	Council
Date of approval:	June 2021
Effective from:	January 2017
Owner:	Head of Secretariat
Author:	Governance and Compliance Manager
Relevant legislation:	Equality Act 2010
Linked policies:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acceptable Behaviour when communicating with the GOC • Internal Investigations • Speaking Up in the GOC • Grievance
Superseded policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complaints about the GOC (2010) • Complaints against Council Members (2010) • Member recruitment complaints procedure (2013) • Procedure for Handling Complaints about Programmes and Qualifications Approved by the General Optical Council (2012)
Impact Assessment completion:	August 2016
Impact Assessment review:	August 2018
Next policy review date:	March 2023
Location - Website:	https://www.optical.org/en/about_us/our-governance/index.cfm https://www.optical.org/en/Investigating_complaints/index.cfm#GOC

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1. Policy Statement

- 1.1 We are committed to responding to complaints about our service in a timely and open manner, ensuring that we look at the matters raised impartially, consistently and quickly.
- 1.2 We view complaints as an important and useful source of feedback about how we have performed and how we can improve in future. When things go wrong we will acknowledge our mistakes and try to put things right. We promise that we will not treat you unfairly because you have raised a complaint with us.
- 1.3 We also welcome your feedback about things that have gone well, which we use to develop our processes and practices to continually improve.
- 1.4 Most people who contact us are responsible and display acceptable behaviour, however on rare occasions this is not the case. We accept that when contacting us to raise an issue, individuals may be distressed, frustrated or angry however we expect to be treated as we would treat others. We will:
 - 1.4.1 be impartial and non-adversarial;
 - 1.4.2 treat you politely, respectfully and considerately;
 - 1.4.3 respect your dignity and privacy;
 - 1.4.4 listen and respect your views;
 - 1.4.5 always try to provide information in a way that can be understood;
 - 1.4.6 where possible, make reasonable adjustments to our service to help you have your opinion heard; and
 - 1.4.7 consider how your complaint or feedback can improve the GOC processes.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 This policy outlines how you can raise a complaint or provide feedback about our policies, processes, employees, members, workers or others working for us. You can also use this policy to let us know how an Optical Education or CET course provider or the OCCS (Optical Consumer Complaints Service) have handled a complaint you have raised with them.
- 2.2 This policy explains how we will handle your complaint and what to expect during the process.

3. Scope

- 3.1 Anyone who comes into contact with our service and is unhappy or dissatisfied can complain to us.
4. The difference between a concern and a complaint is defined as:

- 4.1 A concern is “an expression of worry or doubt over an issue considered to be important for which reassurances are sought”. Concerns will be resolved through day-to-day communication as far as possible.
- 4.2 A complaint is defined as “an expression of dissatisfaction however made, about actions taken or a lack of action”.

Both of these are important to us.

- 4.3 This policy is for raising complaints or giving feedback about:
 - 4.3.1 something that we may have done, or should have done;
 - 4.3.2 our policies or processes (including those linked to our statutory functions and recruitment); and
 - 4.3.3 how well our employees, members, workers or others working on our behalf have treated you.
- 4.4 This policy is not for complaints about:
 - 4.4.1 registrants or optical businesses¹;
 - 4.4.2 your glasses, contact lenses or refunds²;
 - 4.4.3 changes to the law, government standards or guidance for which we have no direct control over; or
 - 4.4.4 outcomes of FTP hearings or other legal decisions³.
- 4.5 If your complaint is about an Education provider, a CET course or CET provider, or the OCCS (Optical Consumer Complaints Service) you should firstly raise the matter with them before raising it to us, unless there is a reason that you cannot do this.
- 4.6 If you are not sure which policy to use, please tell us your concern and we will either direct you to the most appropriate team or let you know which organisations are better placed to look into your complaint. You can also speak to the Secretariat Team about this.
- 4.7 If we consider your complaint to be of a very serious nature⁴, we may decide to open an Internal Investigation in accordance with our Investigations policy.
- 4.8 This policy is not for employees or members to raise their concerns - they should use the grievance or speaking up policies.

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https://www.optical.org/en/Investigating_complaints/How_to_make_a_complaint/index.cfm

² https://www.optical.org/en/Investigating_complaints/index.cfm

³ https://www.optical.org/en/Investigating_complaints/fitness-to-practise-guidance/index.cfm

⁴ As defined within our Investigations policy, ‘serious nature’ normally includes, but is not limited to: allegations of misconduct; allegations of bullying or harassment; employee or member grievances; employee or member capability or on-going performance matters.

5. How do I complain and who do I complain to?

- 5.1 You can raise your complaint to us verbally or in writing, in English or in Welsh. We may be able to accept your complaint in a different language, please contact us to use our Interpretation and Translation service.
- 5.2 The person you are in contact with or the relevant department will always try to resolve your complaint. This is often the quickest way to resolve your complaint.
- 5.3 We encourage you to raise your complaint to us as soon as possible from the incident occurring or from when you were aware of the problem. If there is a long delay between when you are aware of the problem and when you choose to raise it, we will consider investigating it if there is good reason for the delay and it is still possible to complete a fair and effective investigation into the matter.
- 5.4 If your complaint is about our member recruitment processes, it must be submitted within 48 hours of the outcome of the application being issued so it can be investigated prior to the appointment being finalised. Please refer to annex 3 for more details.
- 5.5 The GOC will aim to give you the opportunity to complete the complaints procedure in full. To support this, we will ensure we publicise the existence of this policy and make it available on the GOC website.
- 5.6 At any stage, you can send your complaint to us, by one of the following:
- 5.6.1 letter: to Corporate Complaints, General Optical Council, 10 Old Bailey, London EC4M 7NG;
 - 5.6.2 e-mail: corporatecomplaints@optical.org
 - 5.6.3 phone: 020 7307 3451
- 5.7 Our office opening hours are: Monday-Thursday 09:00-17:00 (9:00am-5:00pm) and Friday 09:00-16:45 (9:00am-4:45pm).
- 5.8 When you submit your complaint it is important that you give as much detail as possible, to help with the investigation. This can include:
- 5.8.1 dates of relevant events;
 - 5.8.2 any relevant background information which may help us understand and investigate your complaint (such as names of people you have been in contact with);
 - 5.8.3 what you think has gone wrong; and
 - 5.8.4 what you think we should do to put things right.
- 5.9 If you need any help to make a complaint, please see annex 2 for a list of advocacy and support services.
- 5.10 If a complaint is made anonymously, we will consider if we are able to investigate based on the information available and will try to respond where possible.

5.11 If you have already submitted the same or similar complaint and exhausted all of our processes, we will not reconsider it without substantial new information being provided.

6. How we will manage your complaint

6.1 We have a three-stage process for managing complaints about us:

6.1.1 Stage one – the person or department you are already in contact with;

6.1.2 Stage two – the relevant manager or member; and

6.1.3 Stage three – if you still disagree (appeal).

6.2 At all stages, we will acknowledge your complaint within three working days.

6.3 Your complaint will be allocated to the most appropriate person to investigate by the Secretariat Team.

6.4 We may need to ask you for more information before we can look into it further. If you have a preference with how you are contacted, please let us know.

6.5 All our responses to complaints will explain what has happened, what has been or is being done to address the matter and when the matter should be fully resolved.

6.6 If you are unhappy with the response you receive at any stage, you have the option of taking your complaint to the next stage. You must raise your complaint to the next stage within 20 working days of the response.

6.7 If at any point we cannot meet the time scales we have set out in this policy, we will:

6.7.1 Set new time limits with you

6.7.2 Send you details of the new deadline and explain the delay

6.8 Our Secretariat Team, who oversee the process, can provide more information – you can contact them in any of the ways listed in paragraph 4.5. Alternatively, please see annex 1 for a flowchart of this process. We will always try to resolve concerns or complaints by informal means wherever possible. Where this is not always possible, formal procedures will be followed.

7. Stage one – Try to resolve with the person/department you are in contact with

7.1 When you raise your complaint to the person or department you are in contact with, our employees will see whether they can resolve your complaint. If they can, they will respond within five working days of acknowledgment.

- 7.2 If they are unable to resolve your complaint over the phone, you will be sent an overview of the complaint in writing to check we have noted all the points of complaint, whilst they are looking into the matters you have raised.
- 7.3 The employee may decide that it is more appropriate to refer your complaint to stage two and may escalate your complaint to our Secretariat Team who will allocate it to an appropriate manager. They will let you know if they do this.

8. Stage two – Try to resolve with the relevant manager

- 8.1 Your complaint may have already been referred to this stage by the person you are in contact with. If not, you can ask for your complaint to be looked at by a more senior manager.
- 8.2 Complaints addressed directly to a senior manager will be allocated by our Secretariat Team to the most appropriate manager at this stage.
- 8.3 Complaints about our members will always be referred to this stage and will be considered by a Committee Chair or Council member, as appropriate.
- 8.4 The relevant manager or member will complete an investigation. They will aim to respond to your complaint within 20 working days from referral to this stage and will keep you updated if there will be a delay.
- 8.5 If the complaint is very serious (see paragraph 3.6), the manager or member may refer it for investigation under our Internal Investigations policy.

9. Stage three – If you still disagree (appeal)

- 9.1 Stage three is the final step of our complaints procedure. If you are dissatisfied with a stage two response, you can appeal and ask for it to be reviewed by a senior manager (or Senior Council member or Chair of Council for complaints about members). This must be submitted within 20 working days after the date of the stage two response.
- 9.2 You will receive a final response within 10 working days from the day after receipt of your appeal.
- 9.3 There is no further internal appeal mechanism after this stage.
- 9.4 If you disagree with the final response, you can raise your concerns with the Professional Standards Authority (PSA) who regulate our activity. Alternatively, you should seek independent legal advice.

10. What can the outcome of my complaint be?

- 10.1 Once we have looked into your complaint, we will write to you to explain the findings and outcomes at all stages. We will let you know what happened and if

we found mistakes we will acknowledge them, let you know how the situation has been or will be addressed and the likely timescale, where appropriate.

The outcome

10.2 Outcomes of a complaint could be:

10.2.1 upholding the complaint, in whole or in part;

10.2.2 dismiss the complaint, in whole or in part;

10.2.3 if the complaint is upheld a decision will be made on the appropriate action to resolve the complaint;

10.2.4 where appropriate, recommend changes to the GOC's systems or procedures to prevent similar issues in the future.

10.3 The GOC will inform those involved of the decision in writing within five working days.

11. Can I complain on behalf of someone else?

11.1 We are happy to receive comments and complaints through someone acting on your behalf. We will ask you to confirm in writing that you are happy for that person to act for you and we will deal with them directly until we have completed the investigation into your complaint.

11.2 You can tell us at any stage if you no longer want the person to represent you.

11.3 If we need to obtain information held by a third party relating to your complaint, we will ask you for your written permission.

12. Lessons Learnt and Compliance

12.1 We take concerns and complaints seriously and try to learn from any mistakes that we have made. Where there is a need for change or improvement, we will develop an action plan setting out what we will do and by when. We include lessons learnt in our training for employees.

12.2 Every quarter we report on our complaints to the Senior Management Team, the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee and Council. We monitor timescales, outcomes, lessons learnt and action updates.

13. Positive Experiences

13.1 Whilst it is important to learn from mistakes, we also learn from when things go well and recognise the contributions of our employees and members to deliver a high quality service.

13.2 If you have had a good experience of our service, our employees or our members, we would be very grateful to hear your feedback. We use this to give recognition to individuals and also to share best practice internally to further improve our services.

13.3 Please send any positive feedback via any of the channels listed in section 4.5 and we will ensure that it is passed to the appropriate manager(s).

14. Reasonable Adjustments

14.1 Should you require any reasonable adjustments to use this policy, please contact the Secretariat Team to further discuss your requirements. You can contact the team via:

- 14.1.1 phone: 020 7307 8851
- 14.1.2 email: edi@optical.org
- 14.1.3 post: SecretariatTeam
General Optical Council
10 Old Bailey
London, EC4M 7NG

14.2 Information will be provided in the requested format, where possible, which can include different languages.

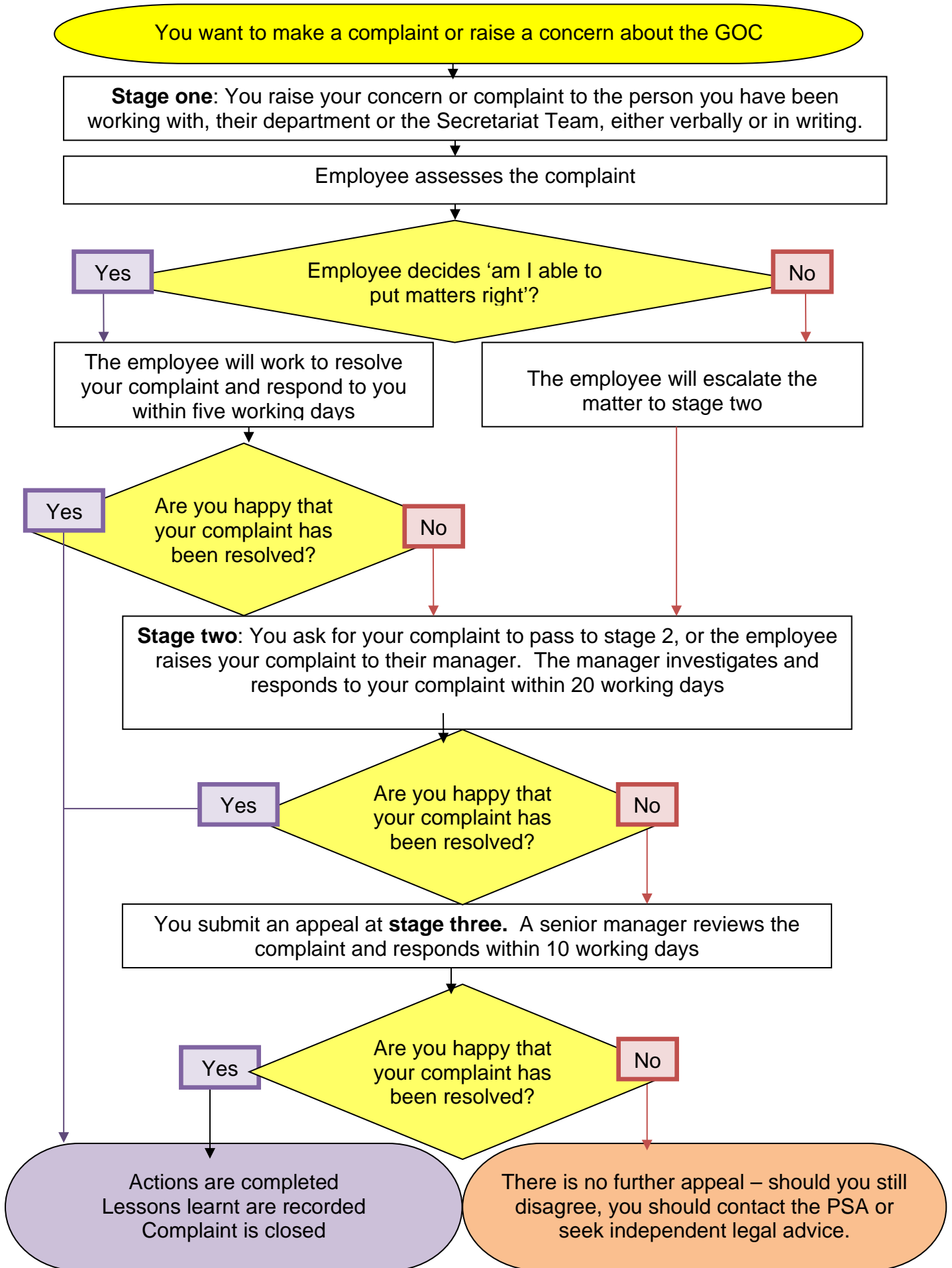
14.3 Special consideration will be given for those requesting information in a more accessible form (for example, large print or Braille).

15. Transparency

15.1 All of your complaint correspondence and supporting documents will be scanned and saved securely on our computer system.

15.2 Your complaint file will be retained in accordance with our retention schedule, after which it will be confidentially destroyed. Should you wish for your personal information related to the complaint to be deleted prior to this, please contact foi@optical.org

Annex 1: Complaints Process Flowchart



Annex 2: Advocacy and Support Services

Advocacy Services

For further information about advocacy services available in the UK please see:
<http://www.nhs.uk/Conditions/social-care-and-support-guide/Pages/advocacy-services.aspx>

Civil Legal Aid

(a free, confidential and impartial advice service paid for by legal aid - for information on where to find your local face-to-face legal advice provider)

Telephone: 0845 345 4 345

Minicom: 0345 609 6677

Citizen's Advice Bureau

(a free, confidential and impartial advice service with lots of online information as well as a face-to-face service)

<https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk>

Samaritans

The Samaritans provide a free and confidential listening service, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. They **do not** provide advice nor do they report your concerns onwards, but sometimes just having someone to talk to that isn't family or friends can be a tremendous help. For more information of what to expect when you contact the Samaritans, visit:

<http://www.samaritans.org/how-we-can-help-you/what-happens-when-you-contact-us>

Contact the Samaritans on: jo@samaritans.org

Phone: 116 123 (UK)

Our Regulator

Professional Standards Authority (PSA)

The body responsible for overseeing nine health and care regulators (including the GOC) who regulate health and care professionals to make sure they are protecting patients and service users properly.

<http://www.professionalstandards.org.uk/regulators/overseeing-regulators/concernsabout-regulators>

Annex 3: Complaints about member recruitment

1. We work hard to ensure that our member recruitment processes are fair, transparent and based on merit. However, if you are concerned about the process used in our recruitment campaigns, you can submit a complaint **within 48 hours** of receiving an outcome notification.
2. Complaints about member recruitment must be processed quickly in order to confirm the appointment.
3. Complaints about our recruitment processes are managed only at stage two of this policy.
4. Your complaint will be investigated by a senior member who is independent from the specific recruitment campaign.
5. You will receive a response within five working days from the date after receipt of your complaint.
6. There is no stage three appeal process for recruitment complaints. If you disagree with the stage two response, you should seek independent legal advice.
7. The appointment(s) will be officially approved only after the complaint process is completed, in case there were any findings which mean that the appointment process needs to be re-done.